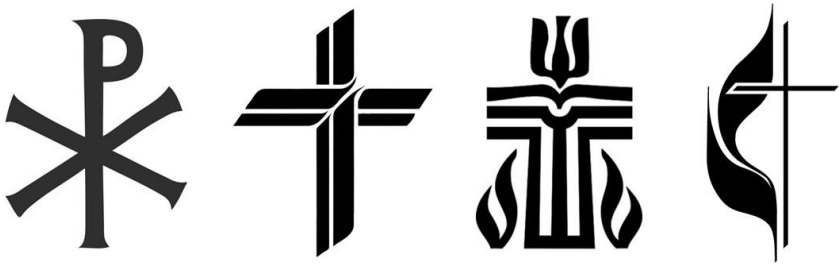


Christian Theology and Denominational Variations



Richard E. Brown

ISBN: XXX

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Cover designed by Richard E. Brown, PhD, M.Th. From left to right, the symbols are the Chi Rho (symbol of the Roman Catholic Church), the Lutheran Cross, the Presbyterian Seal, and the Methodist Cross and Flame.

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Preface

I was born and raised Roman Catholic and remained so until my mid-20s. I then met my wife, who was raised Lutheran. We attended Lutheran services for several years and were married in her family's Lutheran church that she grew up attending. We joined a Methodist church after starting a family and continued attending for more than a decade. A move across the country forced us to find a new church, which turned out to be Presbyterian.

As luck would have it, these four denominations represent the four major schools of Christian theology: Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Arminian/Wesleyanism (Methodist), and Reformed/Calvinist (Presbyterian). I have also been involved in various ministries with non-denominational evangelical churches and, to a lesser extent, dispensational churches. This variety of theological exposure in a personal context makes me particularly respectful of Christians with differing theological beliefs.

Most denominations and independent churches have their beliefs clearly stated in a confession, statement of faith, catechism, or something similar. Sometimes these are many hundreds of pages, such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the *Westminster Confession* (Presbyterian), and the *Book of Discipline* of the United Methodist Church. Sometimes these are much less extensive, such as a statement of faith of an independent church that is typically only a few pages. These documents include both dogma and doctrine.

Although the terms dogma and doctrine are often used synonymously, there is a theological distinction. Dogma represents the essential beliefs of a religion that are required to be held by those having good status within the faith community. Dogma provides the basis for doctrine, which interprets and expands upon dogmatic assumptions, resulting in the generally held beliefs of a religion that are not necessarily essential for a person to have good status within the faith community. Dogma is an entrance and membership requirement with little flexibility. Doctrine is a safe belief with much more flexibility. But how is one to assess which dogma and

doctrine best reflect the teachings of the Bible? And which beliefs best explain your Christian experiences personally and in your Christian community? Ultimately, how can you decide which dogma and doctrine best rings true to you and is worthy of your informed faith? These questions are most appropriately answered through theological examination, which is the study of God and of all things as they relate to God.

The approach of this book is somewhat different than typical academic books on theology. Its goal is to objectively present Scripture-based theology both in general in its most popular “flavors” without taking sides. To be sure, the strengths and weaknesses of various theological arguments will be discussed. But the reader will not find suggestions that any theological system represents a “better Christianity” than others. Having attended a variety of denominational churches, I can say that good and honest and informed Christians disagree on many dogmatic and doctrinal issues, some being significant. I myself do not ascribe to any one major system in its entirety. All make good arguments for their system and good arguments as to the weaknesses of other systems. Because of this, theological positions can often be pragmatic. Sometimes you will not feel strongly about which dogmatic position best represents God’s truth and will be comfortable knowing that there are several viable possibilities. Other times, you may recognize that good arguments can be made for several dogmatic positions but find that a particular one works best in your Christian life. Still other times you may simply choose to accept the theologically-defendable dogma and doctrine of your community of faith, hopefully without taking an “I am right and everyone else is wrong” attitude.

The reader is forewarned that this book is distilled and dense, with very little “fluff.” Often, a subject that is summarized in a paragraph can only be thoroughly covered in an entire textbook or more. I do not pretend to have expert-level knowledge in everything that is addressed but do try my best to present what is most important theologically. For example, I present a single paragraph on the First Crusade. A typical textbook on this subject will be many hundreds of pages. But the key theological takeaway is the concept of participation in a Holy War as a form of penance. Much else about the First Crusade is fascinating, but this is (in my opinion) the important theological point.

The reader must also be prepared for an extensive vocabulary lesson. Theology, like every academic discipline, uses large amounts of technical jargon and specialized terms that have precise meanings when used in a theological context. For many, this will initially seem to be an insurmountable obstacle to the serious study of theology. Before you become familiar with some basic theological terms, certain sentences might as well be

written in a foreign language. But as with a foreign language, most of the words do not involve difficult concepts and simply must be associated with their English equivalent. *Buenos dias* means nothing to someone without any exposure to Spanish but poses no difficulty when explained that it simply means good day. Similarly, the theological term Eutychianism will mean nothing to most people but can simply be understood as the belief by some that Christ has a single nature that is a mixture of human nature and divine nature, and that this belief is incompatible with most forms of Christian theology. As such, a critical part of learning theology is learning theological language. An extensive glossary of theological terms is included at the end of this book to aid the reader in this pursuit.

This book is best read sequentially. But each topic is attempted to be presented in a mostly self-contained way. This allows the reader to skip around to subjects of particular interest. This said, the book starts with the foundational topics of divine revelation (Chapter 2) and biblical interpretation (Chapter 3). It then presents the theological aspects of church history in terms of major events, major theologians, and major heresies (Chapters 4 and 5). Systematic theology is then presented in Chapters 6-11, organized into the doctrines of God, man in relation to God, Christ, salvation, the church, and last things. After the five chapters on systematic theology, the book continues with a chapter on Christian ethics, a chapter on Christian apologetics, and a chapter on other major denominations and their corresponding theologies. The book concludes with some brief thoughts on the elegance, or lack thereof, of Christian theology as has been presented over the course of the book.

Richard E. Brown, Ph.D., M.Th.

Bible Book Abbreviations

| New Testament | | Old Testament | |
|---------------|----------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Abbrev. | Book | Abbrev. | Book |
| Acts | Acts of the Apostles | Am | Amos |
| Col | Colossians | 1 Chr | 1 Chronicles |
| 1 Cor | 1 Corinthians | 2 Chr | 2 Chronicles |
| 2 Cor | 2 Corinthians | Dn | Daniel |
| Eph | Ephesians | Dt | Deuteronomy |
| Gal | Galatians | Eccl | Ecclesiastes |
| Heb | Hebrews | Est | Esther |
| Jas | James | Ex | Exodus |
| Jn | John (Gospel) | Ez | Ezekiel |
| 1 Jn | 1 John (Epistle) | Ezr | Ezra |
| 2 Jn | 2 John (Epistle) | Gn | Genesis |
| 3 Jn | 3 John (Epistle) | Hb | Habakkuk |
| Jude | Jude | Hg | Haggai |
| Lk | Luke | Hos | Hosea |
| Mk | Mark | Is | Isaiah |
| Mt | Matthew | Jer | Jeremiah |
| 1 Pt | 1 Peter | Jb | Job |
| 2 Pt | 2 Peter | Jl | Joel |
| Phil | Philippians | Jon | Jonah |
| Phlm | Philemon | Jo | Joshua |
| Rv | Revelation | Jgs | Judges |
| Rom | Romans | 1 Kgs | 1 Kings |
| 1 Thes | 1 Thessalonians | 2 Kgs | 2 Kings |
| 2 Thes | 2 Thessalonians | Lam | Lamentations |
| 1 Tm | 1 Timothy | Lv | Leviticus |
| 2 Tm | 2 Timothy | Mal | Malachi |
| Ti | Titus | Mi | Micah |
| | | Na | Nahum |
| | | Neh | Nehemiah |
| | | Nm | Numbers |
| | | Ob | Obadiah |
| | | Prv | Proverbs |
| | | Ps (pl. Pss) | Psalms |
| | | Ru | Ruth |
| | | 1 Sm | 1 Samuel |
| | | 2 Sm | 2 Samuel |
| | | Sg | Song of Solomon |
| | | Zec | Zechariah |
| | | Zep | Zephaniah |

Greek Letters

| Greek Letter | | Name | Sound |
|--------------|------|---------|------------------|
| A | α | Alpha | a as in father |
| B | β | Beta | b as in bell |
| Γ | γ | Gamma | g as in get |
| Δ | δ | Delta | d as in dog |
| E | ε | Epsilon | e as in met |
| Z | ζ | Zeta | z as in zebra |
| H | η | Eta | ee as in see |
| Θ | θ | Theta | th as in thin |
| I | ι | Iota | i as in hit |
| K | κ | Kappa | k as in kill |
| Λ | λ | Lambda | l as in land |
| M | μ | Mu | m as in mother |
| N | ν | Nu | n as in now |
| Ξ | ξ | Xi | x as in wax |
| O | ο | Omicron | o as in not |
| Π | π | Pi | p as in pet |
| P | ρ | Rho | r as in red |
| Σ | σ, ς | Sigma | s as in sit |
| T | τ | Tau | t as in tell |
| Υ | υ | Upsilon | u as in up |
| Φ | φ | Phi | ph as in graphic |
| X | χ | Chi | k as in kite |
| Ψ | ψ | Psi | ps as in lips |
| Ω | ω | Omega | o as in obey |

1. Introduction

This book begins with a sincere request related to the apostle Paul's instructions regarding Christian stumbling blocks, "Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not to have quarrels over opinions ... Therefore let's not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this: not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's or sister's way" (Rom 14:1-13). This book is intended to be a blessing, not a stumbling block. Nevertheless, it presents a variety of theological opinions over which theologians have quarreled for the last two thousand years and continue to do so today. To be sure, all of the different positions presented in this book are held by honest Christian theologians who believe that the Bible infallibly contains the Word of God. But sometimes the presentation of competing theological opinions can be uncomfortable in a person's faith journey. I therefore ask the reader to use discernment and introspection when reading this book. If you begin to feel anything other than joy and edification due to an increase in theological knowledge, please take a break from reading for a time and only continue after prayerful consideration.

Theology is the study of God and all things in relation to God. Christian theology is therefore the study of the Christian God as revealed through His creation and through the Bible. All Christians think about God and try to learn about God. In this sense, all Christians practice theology. The question is whether one practices good theology or bad theology. This book is an attempt to provide Christians a comprehensive introduction to the academic treatment of theology so that their inevitable practice of theology might improve, perhaps substantially so.

There are two basic approaches to theology that can be thought of as "outsider theology" and "insider theology." Outsider theology is the study of Christian beliefs independent of faith. Although this type of theology can be (and typically is) practiced by believing Christians, all inquiries and investigations are made independent of personal faith. Arguments made by outsider theology can be followed equally by believers and non-believers. Outsider theology is useful for demonstrating the reasonableness of Christian beliefs to non-Christians, and for believing Christians to have an increased intellectual understanding of the reasonableness of their beliefs.

But faith is central to all aspects of Christianity and so outsider theology is typically not best for believing Christians trying to better understand their faith.

Insider theology is commonly referred to as “faith seeking understanding.”¹ With this approach, a Christian with faith seeks to strengthen this faith by better understanding God and God’s creation. This is done by engaging the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit to supplement pure academic study. Ultimately, God reveals aspects of Himself directly to individuals. Insider theology therefore utilizes faith and prayer to better understand what God wants to teach us through Scripture and many other sources such as the created world, reason, and Christian tradition.

This book takes the insider approach to theology. It assumes by faith that the Bible is authoritative on spiritual matters, is consistent on spiritual matters, and is a mechanism through which believing Christians can directly experience the presence of God through the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit. It also assumes by faith that Jesus Christ is fully God, came to earth to suffer and die for the sins of humanity, was resurrected from the dead, and ascended into Heaven. These aspects of faith serve as the starting point for insider theological understanding.

The practical implications for this book of an insider approach to theology are twofold. First, there will be a strong emphasis on theological systems and arguments that agree with the above-listed faith assumptions. These are termed orthodox theologies. As such, theological systems and arguments that do not agree with these faith assumptions will not be given comprehensive treatment. Examples include liberal theologies that view Jesus as simply a man, theologies that deny the Jesus’s resurrection from the dead, theologies that view the Bible as a purely human product, and “quests for the historical Jesus.” Second, this book assumes that the reader understands the scriptural verses that serve as the basis of theological arguments as divinely inspired, at least in some sense. That is, these verses do not just present human subjective understandings about theological topics, but also present God’s objective understanding about theological topics. To be sure, many verses must be understood in historical and situational contexts, but an insider approach to theology assumes that God has provided Christians the Bible so that we can better understand Him, his relationship to us, and his relationship to all other aspects of His creation.

The relationship between faith and understanding has opposing views. Some think that a faith that requires understanding is not true faith at all. Others think that faith without understanding is an immature faith. A middle view is that faith and understanding are mutually supportive. A typical Christian begins with a little bit of faith and a little bit of understanding. A little bit more understanding through Bible study or church attendance

can lead to an increase in faith. Similarly, an increase in faith through prayer or worship can lead to greater understanding. Increases in faith and understanding can therefore result in a virtuous cycle as a Christian matures and grows.

It is important to understand that faith is required for all knowledge, including scientific and historical knowledge. When we read about an event in a history book, it can never be known with certainty that the event occurred precisely as the historian describes it or that the event occurred at all. The strength of our belief depends upon our faith that the author's account is accurate, and there are a host of further investigations that can increase this faith, decrease this faith, or modify this faith. Science is similar, except instead of describing historical events, scientific theories attempt to describe what has been observed and to use these theories to make prediction about the future. It takes faith to believe that these scientific theories have predictive power. When a scientific theory makes a correct prediction, our faith in it increases. And when a scientific theory makes an incorrect prediction, our faith in it decreases.

Theology is similar. When a theological proposition seems to agree with what we read in the Bible our faith in it increases. When a theological proposition seems to disagree with what we read in the Bible our faith in it decreases. The same is true in an existential sense. When a theological proposition seems to agree with reality as we experience it our faith in it increases. When a theological proposition seems to disagree with reality as we experience it our faith in it decreases. In this sense, the goal of theology is to identify truth statements that are consistent with one another, that agree with what the Bible as a whole teaches on the subject, and generally is in accordance with our experiences as spiritual beings living in God's creation.

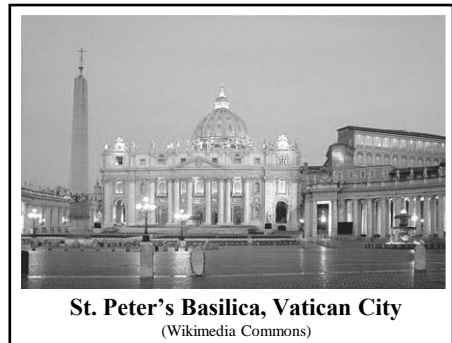
Theology is typically divided into four fields of study: systematic theology, biblical theology, historical theology, and practical theology. The purpose of systematic theology is to create a system of beliefs with a two-fold goal. First, systematic theology seeks to understand what the Bible as a whole teaches about specific topics. Second, systematic theology seeks to categorize, arrange, and adjust topics such that the understanding of each separate topic is not in conflict with any other topic. Biblical theology seeks to understand the theology of a specific book, author, or subset of the Bible, such as the theology of Paul, the theology of James, or the theology of the Old Testament. Biblical theology also often follows the development and progression of a theological topic throughout of the Bible, such as how the idea of God progresses from the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation. Historical theology traces the historical developments of a particular theological topic from the days of the early Church to

present day. And practical theology seeks to apply the learnings from other branches of theology to the actual experiences and needs of Christian communities. This book primarily focuses on systematic theology but will sometimes discuss both historical and biblical theology, as they can often lead to a clearer understanding of systematic treatment. Practical theology will also sometimes be discussed to demonstrate how different doctrines can impact Christian lives in different ways.

Many theologians throughout history have developed their own systematic theologies. It is beyond the scope of this book to give fair treatment to all of these, but the reader should be aware that this book only attempts to objectively present some of the more common and representative systems. This said, systematic theology can generally be divided into Roman Catholic systems and Protestant systems. Protestant systems can be further divided into orthodox, neoorthodox, and liberal. Orthodox systems are based primarily on Scripture and tend to interpret the Bible quite literally. Liberal systems are based primarily on personal religious experiences and tend to interpret the Bible much less literally. Neoorthodox systems fall somewhere in the middle. Brief summaries of the major theological systems are now provided.

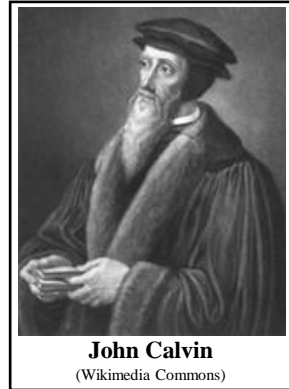
Roman Catholic Theology. Roman Catholic theology is fundamentally different from Protestant theology because it teaches that God's revelation to man occurs through the Roman Catholic church in addition to Scripture and creation. Therefore, there is much to Roman Catholic theology that is not directly linked to Scripture, but rather to church tradition. For example, Roman Catholic theology treats topics such as the sacraments and the afterlife in ways that do not resemble the Protestant approach. Roman Catholic theology is also heavily influenced by the work of Thomas Aquinas, who used the philosophical framework of Aristotle as a model for his theological system, often called Thomistic philosophy, Thomistic theology, or simply Thomism.²

Lutheran Theology. The orthodox theology of Lutheranism was developed by Martin Luther after he was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic church in what was the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Several of the theological differences of Lutheranism as compared to Roman Catholicism include (1) Scripture as the only authoritative source for Christian knowledge (i.e., Roman Catholic church tradition is not a valid



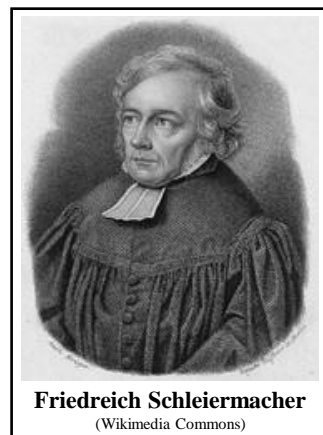
source of authority); (2) salvation through faith alone (i.e., not faith plus good works); and (3) the ability of everyone to read and interpret the Bible for themselves (i.e., valid interpretation is not limited to Roman Catholic clergy).

Reformed Theology. This is a conservative orthodox Protestant system often called Calvinism and is strongly associated with the doctrine of predestination. Reformed theology teaches that, before creation, God predestined a certain number of people (the elect) to be saved with the remainder predestined not to be saved (the reprobate). Reformed theology is the preferred label since it can be argued that John Calvin would not agree with certain elements of Reformed theology in either importance or substance. Reformed theology is based solely on a strict literal interpretation Scripture, is a highly developed and logical system, and is a good place to start when studying systematic theology. Reformed theology is closely associated with the Presbyterian denomination.



Arminian Theology. Arminian theology is named for its founder, Jacobus Arminius. It is an orthodox system and is similar to Reformed theology except it denies the predestination of the elect. Rather, Arminianism believes that everyone has the opportunity and free will to believe in the Gospel message and therefore be saved. Arminian theology is closely associated with the Methodist denomination and is sometimes called Wesleyan-Arminianism, after John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, who made several modifications.³

Liberal Theology. Friedreich Schleiermacher is often called the father of liberal theology. He maintains that all religion is ultimately a personal experience. Therefore, one's personal religious experiences take precedent over every other source including Scripture. The religious goal of Schleiermacher is to have a feeling of ultimate dependence on God, which has been criticized as being subjective. Schleiermacher also believes in universal salvation, including the possibility of salvation after death. In his view, it would be impossible for anyone to experience eternal blessed-



ness in Heaven while knowing that certain loved ones are suffering for all of eternity in Hell. Today, liberal theologies tend to view knowledge and experience as having a higher authority than Scripture when forming doctrine. The Bible is therefore treated as a historical work of humans without divine authority, and that living a Christ-like life is more important than doctrine.

Neoorthodox Theology. The theology of Karl Barth was the first neoorthodox system and has been highly influential. He developed it in reaction against the increasingly liberal theologies of the 19th and 20th centuries. Neoorthodox theologies use many of the same terms as orthodox theologies (e.g., the Trinity, Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the Kingdom of God). They do not, however believe in a Bible that is literally true and inerrant. Neoorthodox theologies also tend to emphasize the ineffability of God, and that God's infinite nature precludes us from describing him in precise and logical ways. Rather, neoorthodox theologies use a dialectical method where seemingly contradictory or paradoxical metaphysical teachings of the Bible are discussed together and do not necessarily need to be reconciled. Other prominent neoorthodox theologians include Rudolf Bultmann, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Eastern Orthodox Theology. Eastern Orthodox theology is a general term referring to the theological approach of the Eastern Orthodox denominations such as Greek, Russian, and Ukrainian. It is primarily based on the theology of the patristic age to the end of the Byzantine empire. Eastern Orthodox theology is also heavily influenced by Greek Platonic thought, which is seen to be a philosophical improvement over a strict Bible-based theology. Therefore, early Eastern Orthodox theology is commonly called Byzantine theology, and later Eastern Orthodox theology is commonly called Greek theology. Its primary doctrinal bases are the first seven ecumenical councils, starting with the first council of Nicaea in 325 and ending with the second council of Nicaea in 787. As opposed to typical Western theological systems, Eastern Orthodoxy focuses on apophatic theology (i.e., the theology of negation), sees God as primarily a mystery, and emphasizes the transformation of believers into a stronger union with God (i.e., deification). Worship and preaching therefore focus on images (i.e., icons) rather than exclusively on doctrine. Eastern Orthodox theology sees the Bible as existing within church tradition and is therefore not



understood as the highest authority for doctrine. Because Eastern Orthodox churches do not place a strong emphasis on systematic theology, Eastern Orthodox theology will generally not be discussed in the chapters addressing related topics (Ch. 6-11).⁴ But more detailed treatment of Eastern Orthodox theology can be found in the Chapter on denominations (see p. 364).

The remainder of this book will primarily focus on the four major systems of theology that are based on the infallibility of the Bible: Roman Catholicism, and the orthodox Protestant systems of Lutheranism, Reformed, and Arminianism. Other views will sometimes be discussed, but a basic understanding of these four systems is the most important and will serve as a solid foundation for virtually any other theological examination. A brief history of the relationships of these theologies is now provided.

From the time of Emperor Constantine, there was essentially one global Christian church that determined official church doctrine. This changed when the East/West Schism resulted in two churches: the Roman Catholic Church led by the Bishop of Rome and the Eastern Orthodox Church led by the Bishop of Constantinople. The Reformation then led to a Protestant split from Roman Catholicism. The movement led by Martin Luther resulted in Lutheranism and the movement led by John Calvin led to Reformed theology. Many viewed Reformed theology as overly severe, resulting in Jacobus Arminius developing the theology of Arminianism. There are innumerable variations of these theologies in addition to innumerable theologies that are not widely held. But these four, Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Reformed, and Arminianism, are by far the most important Biblically-based theologies and are the focus of this book.

I end this introduction with a statement that will find strong disagreement among many theologians and pastors. There is not one theological system that is objectively better or worse than others. Most theologians are convinced that their preferred theological system is superior and will therefore disagree. Most clergy will object to anything contrary to the prescribed doctrine of their denomination or church organization and will therefore also disagree. But all distinctions between these four major theological systems have been rigorously challenged with many compelling arguments. Furthermore, there are numerous Christians that sincerely believe in each of these theologies. There are about 1.3 billion Roman Catholics, 80 million Lutherans, 75 million Reformers/Presbyterian, and about 80 million Arminian/Methodist. Christian love and humility should caution one who might be inclined to dismiss any of these people's faith as either bad Christianity or ineffective for salvation. This is not to say that a Christian cannot prefer one theology over another, believe that certain dogma and doctrine are true, and believe that certain dogma and doctrine

are false. In fact, I suspect that most will do so after reading this book. But hopefully we all can consider ourselves brothers and sisters in Christ first and use our theological differences in a way that best glorifies God.

1.1 Further Reading

Those interested in a more detailed introduction to theology from the perspective of “faith seeking understanding” are encouraged to read the book *Faith Thinking* by Kevin Hart. Those interested in a more detailed treatment of theological methods and theological systems are encouraged to read *Introducing the Theological Method*, by Mary Veeneman. Those that find this book difficult are encouraged to first read Alister McGrath’s excellent textbook *Christian Theology: An Introduction*.⁵

1.2 Study Questions

1. What is the definition of theology and why is it important for mature Christians to study theology?
2. What is meant by the phrase “faith seeking understanding” and how does this relate to other ways of studying theology?
3. Describe the relationship of faith and truth and how this applies to historical truth, scientific truth, and theological truth.
4. What are some different positions on the relationship between Christian faith and theological understanding?
5. What are the four primary academic areas of theology and what is the primary purpose of each?
6. What is the fundamental difference between Roman Catholic theology and Protestant theology, not in terms of doctrine but in terms of the authoritative basis for doctrine?
7. What is the difference between orthodox theology and liberal theology, not in terms of doctrine but in terms of the authoritative basis for doctrine?
8. Describe the general characteristics of neoorthodox theology and some of the more prominent neoorthodox theologians.
9. What is the primary doctrinal difference between Reformed theology and Arminian theology?
10. What was the East/West Schism and what was its result?

2. Revelation, the Bible, and Canon Formation

Revelation is a translation of the Greek work *apokalupsis* (ἀποκάλυψις). It literally means an uncovering and typically refers to the revealing of something that was previously unknown. God is inherently unknowable but has revealed aspects of Himself to mankind, referred to as divine revelation. The theological term for the unknowability of God is ineffable. We can only know things about God to the extent that He wants us to know things about Him. God therefore reveals aspects of Himself in two ways: through general revelation and through special revelation. General revelation is how God reveals aspects of Himself through the physical universe and through human nature. Theological systems based on general revelation are termed natural theologies. Special revelation is how God reveals additional aspects of Himself to specific individuals such as prophets and apostles. These special revelations are recorded in the Bible.

2.1 General Revelation through Physics and Biology

The universe as we understand it strongly points to an intelligent creator. On a galactic scale this is evidenced by the “fine tuning” of many physical parameters where the slightest change would have prevented life from ever occurring. Examples include the strength of gravity, the strength of the strong nuclear force, the strength of the weak nuclear force, the relative masses of quarks, and global cosmic energy density. It can be argued that the probability of these parameters being such that life exists is essentially zero without an intelligent creator (see p. 302 for a more extensive discussion on fine tuning).

Darwin’s theory of evolution is often used to explain how life on earth began and ultimately resulted in humankind through random physical processes. But this view is highly oversimplified and often amounts to a faith-based secular religion rather than established science. A close examination reveals that it is highly improbable that life as we know it developed

through random genetic mutations and natural selection. First, the fossil record (though incomplete) shows that the development of new species has not been gradual as Darwin suggested would be the case. Rather, species have historically emerged in spurts, referred to as punctuated equilibrium. Second, there are biological phenomena that require components that could not have evolved independently. This is referred to as irreducible complexity, and strongly points to an intelligent designer. General revelation from biological phenomena, as for cosmic phenomena, also points to an intelligent creator (see p. 305 for a more extensive discussion on biological “irreducible complexity”).

2.2 General Revelation through Human Nature

General revelation through human nature begins with the question, “Do people have free will?” Everyone, of course, has a sensation of free will. You feel that you choose what to eat for breakfast, what clothes to wear for the day, and whether to make a selfish or an altruistic choice. This sensation of free will could either be due to actual free will or the illusion of free will. All Christian theological systems believe that people have actual free will, as free will is necessary for moral accountability. Opposed to this is the belief in determinism, which can be based on both philosophical and scientific arguments. Determinism argues that people cannot have true free will since all of our choices are predetermined by the state of the universe and its physical laws.

Determinism is the logical implication of materialism, which is the view that the material universe is the only reality. If the material universe is the only thing that exists, everything that happens must be exclusively determined from the state of matter and energy and the physical laws that govern them. Things that seem to be a free choice could not have been otherwise. Determinism and materialism are incompatible with free will and free choices.

For free will to exist, there must be something that transcends the physical universe and/or its physical laws. That is, there must be something that is “extramundane.” This leaves two logical choices with regards to free will. You can either (1) believe in a deterministic universe and no free will; or (2) believe in free will and an extramundane source of this free will. General revelation therefore reveals that our free will, if it is not illusory, points to an extramundane reality.

In addition to free will, humans also have an innate sense of morality. If you believe that some moral choices are better than other moral choices, you must also believe that there is an ultimate moral standard to which

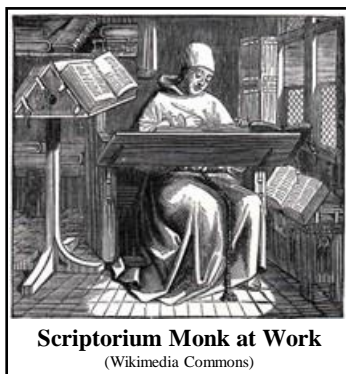
moral choices can be compared. This moral standard cannot be inherent in a deterministic universe because moral choices are impossible in a deterministic universe. Therefore, the source of this moral standard must be extramundane. General revelation from our moral awareness, as with free will, requires the existence of something extramundane that determines moral standards. Something that determines moral standards and makes us aware of these moral standards also presumably cares about the moral decisions that we make. Therefore, this extramundane source of moral standards must be something like a person.

In summary, general revelation strongly suggests a reality that exists beyond the physical universe, a powerful intelligence that created the universe, an intelligence that sets moral standards, an intelligence that gives us an awareness of moral standards, and a personal intelligence that cares about our moral behavior. All of these general revelatory conclusions are compatible with Christianity, but special revelation is required to know more about the Christian God.

2.3 Special Revelation and the Bible

The Bible clearly states that Jesus Christ is the Word of God (*Logos* in Greek; see Jn 1:1). In this sense, the Bible is not the Word of God itself but the apostolic and prophetic witness to the Word of God. Certain people in Biblical times received special revelation from God, which was eventually recorded either by the person receiving the special revelation or by somebody else familiar with the special revelation.

Many people believe that the Bible is completely without error, even down to each word. These people describe the Bible as “inerrant.” However, the Bible as we have it does contain some inconsistencies. Although these inconsistencies do not impact theology in any significant manner, they do pose a problem for the assumption of inerrancy. These inconsistencies are typically explained (by the inerrant camp) with the claim that the inconsistencies did not appear in the original manuscripts but were a result of transcription errors. None of the original manuscripts are known to exist, making this claim untestable (the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is further discussed starting on p. 384).



Many other people believe that the Bible is completely without error in all spiritual matters. These people typically refer to the Bible as “infallible.” The infallible camp does not see the Bible as a history or science textbook, but a theological textbook. There may be scientific or historical misrepresentations, but these misrepresentations do not in any way impact the validity of the spiritual message. The infallibility position also maintains that the Bible never contradicts itself on theological issues.



Although most conservative Christians today view the Bible as inerrant in a literal sense, it should be noted that this is a relatively recent viewpoint. Alister McGrath writes, “The idea of ‘biblical infallibility’ or ‘inerrancy’ was a later development within Protestantism and can be traced to the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century.”⁶

Others, typically liberal theologians, view the Bible as a fallible book written by well-intentioned but fallible authors. They believe that the Bible is useful for understanding what these authors were trying to communicate to their intended audience, but not for much more. Those that see the Bible in this way tend to dismiss all miraculous accounts, as they assume at the outset that miracles are not possible.

Since historical and scientific details rarely have any impact on theological arguments, the reasoning followed in this book is compatible with both the inerrant and infallible views of the Bible. It assumes that the spiritual content of the Bible was guided by the Holy Spirit to result in an authoritative work that contains everything that God wants us to know about Him and his relation to creation. Furthermore, this book assumes that revelation in the Bible is typically progressive. The spiritual message of the Bible is always reliable, but more about God is revealed in parts that were written later. For example, theological content in the New Testament will be consistent with the Old Testament, but will typically provide additional understanding, sometimes significantly more.

In summary, the spiritual content of the Bible is the record of God’s special revelation to individuals. The Bible describes these special revelations occurring in a variety of ways such as through God speaking directly to people, through visions, and through dreams. Since these special

revelations are recorded in the Bible, the Bible serves as the witness to God's special revelation. God wants us to know more about Himself than is possible through general revelation. He has therefore given us the Bible through which we can gain a much deeper understanding of Him and His relationship to creation. As this book takes the approach of faith seeking understanding, it is assumed by faith that the spiritual content of the Bible is reliable and authoritative and is God's primary tool for Christians gaining theological insights based on special revelation.

2.4 The Incarnation as Revelation

Although divine revelation is traditionally divided into general and special, it can be argued that the incarnation of Jesus Christ is a distinct form of divine special revelation. In terms of inspired content, the in-person teachings of Jesus are equivalent to God revealing divine truths through dreams or visions. But there is something extraordinary in a revelatory sense about the Word of God assuming human flesh.

In terms of an historical event, the Incarnation represents perfection in divine revelation, as it encompasses both the physical presence of God and the direct teachings of God. But the historical event must not be confused with the scriptural account of the event. John Webster writes, "But the Word made flesh and the scriptural word are in no way equivalent realities."⁷ Therefore, it is best to understand Jesus's teachings as a specific form of special revelation of which the NT is a sanctified witness.

Karl Barth takes this approach and extends it with an additional step. First there is the historical occurrence of divine special revelation. Next there is the witness to special divine revelation in Scripture. Last, there is proclamation of divine revelation through the sharing of Scripture and teachings based on Scripture. The *Oxford Handbook of Karl Barth* writes:

Barth develops his theology of revelation and Scripture in the form of an exposition of the threefold form of the Word of God (revelation, Scripture, proclamation) and in close association with other doctrines, especially the doctrine of the Trinity, Christology, and pneumatology. Barth characterizes revelation as the noetic corollary of God's presence and activity, and Scripture as a witness to this presence and activity, which is engendered by revelation itself.⁸

With regards to the Incarnation, Barth would understand Jesus's teachings as the historical revelatory event, the recording of Jesus's teachings in Scripture as a witness to the historical revelatory event, and proclamation of these scriptural teachings as the proper use of the historical revelatory event.

It is tempting to equate the hypostatic union of the divine and human nature of Jesus with a corresponding view of the Bible. As Jesus was a human that perfectly embodies divine truth, so the Bible is a human creation that perfectly embodies divine truth. But this superficial analogy is to be avoided due to theological complications. Webster explains that viewing Scripture in this way “can be Christologically disastrous, in that it may threaten the uniqueness of the Word becoming flesh by making ‘incarnation’ a general principle or characteristic of divine action in, through or under creaturely reality. But the Word made flesh and the scriptural word are in no way equivalent realities.”⁹

And so the best way to view Scripture in the context of theology is the inspired witness to divine revelation. Or equivalently, Scripture can be viewed as prophetic and apostolic testimony. The testimony is not the thing in itself but points to a reality beyond itself (in this case divine revelatory events in history).

2.5 God Communicating in Human Terms

In many areas it often seems that a plain reading of Scripture in one place contradicts a plain reading of Scripture in another place. Sometimes the only way to theologically reconcile these issues is to examine the predominant message across a variety of verses and simply understand that some verses are there to communicate a specific spiritual message but in doing so may be in seeming tension with other verses. This situation is typically understood by those viewing the Bible as infallible as the limitation of communicating divine truths in human terms. That is, divine concepts are too rich to be fully communicated in human language.

In his essay “Transposition,” C.S. Lewis presents the concept of richer mediums expressing themselves in poorer mediums. He writes, “If the richer system is to be represented in the poorer at all, this can only be by giving each element in the poorer system more than one meaning. The transposition of the richer into the poorer must, so to speak, be algebraical, not arithmetical.”¹⁰ In this statement, Lewis is expressing something similar to a mathematical concept: a system of higher order cannot be represented in a system of lower order without the loss of information. For example, a mathematical shape in three dimensions cannot be perfectly represented in two dimensions. The best one can mathematically achieve is to “project” the three-dimensional shape onto a two-dimensional surface, resulting in a “shadow” of the original information and a loss of information. Furthermore, this shadow could have resulted from an infinite

number of three-dimensional objects (as well as higher dimensional objects).

An example of the loss of information through projection is a three-dimensional cylinder projecting a shadow onto a two-dimensional surface. The two-dimensional shadow can give a sense of the three-dimensional object but cannot fully describe it. Furthermore, the shadow from a specific object can be a range of shapes, such as both a circle and a rectangle (see Figure 2-1). In a similar manner, God's truth can be thought of as having three (or more) dimensions. This higher-dimensional truth can take different forms when transposed into human language, which can be thought of as having only two dimensions. In this way, different parts of scripture can seem to be in tension, such as a spiritual truth being both a circle and a square. But it is possible for the higher truth to be both a circle and a square when communicated in human terms.

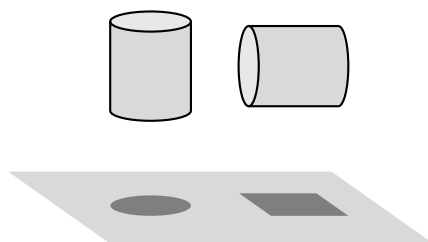


Figure 2-1. Two-Dimensional Projections of a Three-Dimensional Object

In this sense, divine truth is a Platonic ideal that cannot be perfectly represented in human terms since human understanding has a “lower dimension” than divine understanding. Paul Brazier describes Lewis’s theory of transposition as follows, “[H]ere Lewis’s Platonism wields in: any revelation from on high given to fallen humanity in these shadowlands will be a diminution, will be in effect watered-down, changed: this we will see is at the heart of transposition.”¹¹

Since the Logos is the divine Word of God, communication of the Logos in earthly terms is necessarily a transposition. Brazier continues, “Transposition is therefore at its most profound, at its most complete and highest in the Incarnation ... What is revealed is therefore mediated through Jesus Christ—but not everything of God is communicated in Jesus Christ. In the Incarnation we have a transposition into human flesh of the second person of the Trinity: God divested God’s-self of some of his attributes. Jesus of Nazareth was not all-powerful, all knowing or

simultaneously everywhere because he was human.”¹² Just as Christ physically transposed from divine to human, so too did his teachings.

It is important to keep the concept of transposition in mind when studying theology. There are many cases where the Bible seems to be saying one thing in one verse and something different in another verse. If the Bible is infallible, which is the position of this book, these contradictory verses can oftentimes best be understood as a limitation of human language. God’s truth is in three dimensions whereas our understanding is in two dimensions. In certain circumstances, God shines the light on his three-dimensional truth in one direction, resulting in a two-dimensional shadow for us to understand. In other circumstances, God shines the light from a different direction, resulting in a different shadow. God’s truth is the same, but our understanding of it takes different forms that seem different to us but are not different to God. Neoorthodoxy actually uses this concept as a theological method, where seemingly contradictory Biblical teachings are intentionally discussed together with the assumption that both are representative of God’s truth (the dialectical method).

A related but somewhat different view of God communicating in human terms is called accommodation. In transposition, God communicates projections (or transpositions) of divine truth. In accommodation, God uses human language to communicate divine ideas to people in a way that they can be commonly understood, if only in a limited sense. In other words, God “dumbs down” His message based on the ability of His audience to understand. For example, many descriptions of natural phenomena in the Bible are not necessarily scientific but could be understood in the manner presented by typical people of the time. Similarly, metaphysical truths may not be presented in a fully theologically rigorous manner but in a manner that could be understood by typical people of the time. Transposition and accommodation are not exclusive concepts and could both apply in a given situation.

2.6 Canon Formation

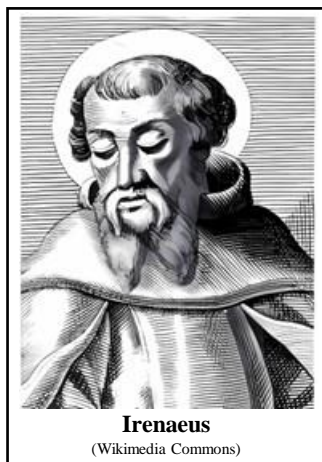
Canon formation refers to the historical process that resulted in the selection and ordering of the specific books that now constitute the Bible. This can be further divided into Old Testament (OT) canon formation and New Testament (NT) canon formation.

The OT is also referred to as the Hebrew Bible. The books contained in the Hebrew Bible are, of course, written in Hebrew (mostly, as Daniel and Ezra were originally written in Aramaic). However, many Jews in the time of Jesus did not speak Hebrew. The local spoken language was

primarily Aramaic, and written material was primarily in Greek. The Greek version of the Hebrew Bible is called the Septuagint, which is the version most often quoted in the NT.¹³ In addition to the OT books that now constitute the protestant Bible, the Septuagint contained several additional books that were not found in the Hebrew Bible. These books are called the Apocrypha and are also sometimes referred to as deuterocanonical. The Apocrypha are typically not included in Protestant Bible versions but are found in Bibles used by the Roman Catholic church.¹⁴ That is, the Protestant OT canon is based on the books contained in the Hebrew Bible whereas the Roman Catholic OT canon is based on the books in the Septuagint.

NT canon formation was somewhat different. There was not a strong written tradition in the first few decades after Jesus's death, which most likely occurred in 33. The earliest estimated authorship dates of the first-written NT books are James (44), Galatians (49), and Mark (50). Instead of written texts, the early Church used oral tradition to pass down the stories and teachings of Jesus. As written documents became available, Churches discovered the ones that were in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, and those that were not. This led to mini compilations that were widely distributed such as the four Gospels and the epistles of Paul. Gradually and over time, the NT books that were used for preaching and instruction became mostly standardized.

In the mid-second century, Marcion of Sinope created a heretical church that taught that the God of the OT was not the same as the God of the NT. Marcion created the first semblance of a NT, which consisted of a modified gospel of Luke and the ten non-pastoral epistles of Paul. At this time, churches had sets of books that they used for preaching, but there was no formalized list of approved NT books. Gabriel Andrade writes, "Up to Marcion's time, the many texts that were in circulation would later make up the Christian Bible, but there were also apocryphal books in circulation ... there was no consensus about which ones were divinely inspired."¹⁵ The orthodox Church found itself in need to assemble its own canon to counter that of Marcion. Justo González explains, "Since there was no approved list, different Gospels were read in different churches, and the same was true of other books. But Marcion's challenge required a



response; and thus the Church at large began to compile a list of sacred Christian writings.”¹⁶

The first known proto-NT list is from Irenaeus in 180. This contains all of the current NT books except Philemon, Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 3 John, and Jude. It also contains the Shepherd of Hermas, which is not in the present NT. The next list was from Tertullian in 200. This was similar to Irenaeus’s list, but without 2 John and with the additions of Philemon and the Epistle of Barnabas (also not in the present NT). The next list was from Origen in 250. Origen’s list is identical to Tertullian’s list but without the Shepherd of Hermas and the Epistle of Barnabas.



The earliest known Bible that contains all of the present NT is the *Codex Sinaiticus*, estimated to have been written in the middle of the fourth century. It also contains both the Shepherd of Hermas and the Epistle of Barnabas. The earliest list of NT books that is identical to the Bible today is from Athanasius in 367. This list was then recognized by the church as official canon at the Council of Carthage in 397. This list was later affirmed by the Roman Catholic church at the Council of Trent (1545–1563). Neither of the councils declared this list as the official canon. Rather, both simply recognized officially what was already the NT canon as intended by God. A summary of the various NT lists is shown in Figure 2-1.¹⁷

The current Protestant Bible consists of 66 books: 37 in the OT and 27 in the NT. These books are commonly referred to in the following groupings:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Pentateuch: | Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. |
| OT History: | Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel, I & II Kings, I & II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther. |
| Poetic Books: | Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon. |
| Major Prophets: | Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel. |
| Minor Prophets: | Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. |
| Gospels: | Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. |
| NT History: | Acts. |
| Pauline Epistles: | Romans, I & II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I & II Thessalonians, Philemon. |

Pastoral Epistles: I & II Timothy, Titus.
General Epistles: Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, I, II, & III John, Jude.
Prophesy: Revelation.

The contents of the Bible have been stable for over 1600 years. Does this mean that the contents of the Bible can never change? The position that the present contents of the Bible can never change is called closed canon, and is the majority opinion among theologians. But what if, for instance, another letter written by Paul was discovered? It is known that Paul wrote additional letters, and so this is a real possibility. Would it be appropriate for this newly discovered letter to be added to the canon? Those who believe that the canon could hypothetically expand hold the view known as open canon.

| Book | Marcion | Irenaeus | Tertullian | Origen | Codex Sinaiticus | Athanasius | Council of Carthage |
|---------------------|---------|----------|------------|--------|------------------|------------|---------------------|
| Year | 140 | 180 | 200 | 250 | 325 | 367 | 397 |
| Matthew | | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Mark | | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Luke | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| John | | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Acts | | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Romans | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 1 Corinthians | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 2 Corinthians | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Galatians | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Ephesians | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Philippians | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Colossians | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 1 Thessalonians | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 2 Thessalonians | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 1 Timothy | | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 2 Timothy | | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Titus | | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Philemon | X | | X | X | X | X | X |
| Hebrews | | | | | X | X | X |
| James | | | | | X | X | X |
| 1 Peter | | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 2 Peter | | | | | X | X | X |
| 1 John | | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 2 John | | X | | | X | X | X |
| 3 John | | | | | X | X | X |
| Jude | | | | | X | X | X |
| Revelation | | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Shepherd of Hermas | | X | X | | X | | |
| Epistle of Barnabas | | | X | | X | | |

Figure 2-1. Early New Testament Lists

Those believing in a closed canon recognize that the current canon is the basis for the development of doctrine and serves as a common and normative reference for all Christians. Eric Barreto writes, “Scripture links us to that great cloud of witnesses that went before us. When Augustine, Luther, Sor Juana, King, or Gutiérrez turned to Scripture, they shared a common core canon. To change the bounds of our canon might sever this common link to the traditions of our faith.”¹⁸ However, critical text Bible translations (see p. 24) have made significant changes to Scripture based on newly discovered manuscripts. Although new books have not been added, modifications to existing books have been made. These modifications could be viewed as changes to canon.

Those believing in an open canon typically understand the canon formation process as partially human and therefore subject to the possibility of error. Karl Barth viewed the canon as open for precisely this reason. He writes:

But the human hearing of this answer, whether that of the Church of our own today, is a human hearing, and therefore not outside the possibility of error, or incapable of being improved. This is true of our answers to the question of faith and order; it is also true of our answers to the question of the Canon.¹⁹

Fortunately for the study of theology, the issue of whether the canon is open or closed is of little importance. At present, the theological basis for dogma remains the same regardless of which Bible version is used. Furthermore, there are no known candidate books that might be possible additions to the NT. At least for now, this issue is only of theoretical interest.

2.7 Further Reading

Those interested in a more detailed treatment of canon formation are encouraged to read *Five Views on the New Testament Canon*, by Stanley Porter and Benjamin Laird. Those interested in a more detailed treatment of the Bible as witness to special revelation are encouraged to read *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch*, by John Webster. Those interested in a more detailed treatment of cosmological fine tuning are encouraged to read *Cosmological Fine-Tuning Arguments*, by Jason Waller. Those interested in a more detailed treatment of irreducible complexity are encouraged to read *Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, by Michael Behe.

2.8 Study Questions

1. What is meant by divine revelation? What is the difference between general revelation and special revelation?
2. What can be inferred about God through general revelation, and why is special revelation needed for a full Christian understanding of God?
3. What is the typical understanding of what it means for Scripture to be inerrant versus Scripture being infallible?
4. Explain why divine truths cannot be fully communicated in human language, and why divine truths communicated in human language can sometimes seem incompatible.
5. What is the difference between *textus receptus* translations of the Bible and critical text translations of the Bible? Give several translation examples of each.
6. What is the Septuagint and why is it called this?
7. What in general terms is the Apocrypha and what are some examples of what is contained in the Apocrypha?
8. Explain the difference between the Word of God and the apostolic and prophetic witness to the Word of God.
9. Who recorded the earliest list of NT books that is the same as our current NT and in what year?
10. What are thought to be the earliest written NT books and what are the approximate years that these books are thought to have been written?

3. Biblical Interpretation

Everybody interprets the Bible when reading or studying it. Like theology, the only question is whether this interpretation is performed well or is performed poorly. At the most basic level, a person unfamiliar with the Bible may simply start reading it and attempt to understand what it is saying just based on the written words. Other people may hear a sermon about a passage and later read the passage to determine the extent to which they agree with the sermon. Still others may employ study Bibles, books, scholarly papers, small group discussions, and many other resources in order to better interpret the Bible.²⁰ In the most rigorous cases, scholars employ specific interpretive rules and guidelines to understand what the Bible is trying to say in an attempt to be as objective as possible. A specific approach to biblical interpretation is called a hermeneutic. Interpreting the Bible based on a hermeneutic is called exegesis. A person who performs an exegesis is called an exegete.

A goal of every Christian should be to improve in their ability to perform good Bible interpretation. This typically involves a transition away from the tendency to read what you want into the text rather than objectively determining what the text is actually trying to communicate. The practice of projecting your own presuppositions, biases, and/or agendas into the meaning of the text is called eisegesis. Christians should therefore try to increasingly move away from eisegesis and towards exegesis when reading and interpreting the Bible. Exegesis is good biblical interpretation. Eisegesis is bad biblical interpretation.

3.1 Bible Versions

The first NT Bible translation based solely on Greek manuscripts was the Latin Vulgate. The translations were done by the scholar Jerome, who was commissioned to do so in 382 by Pope Damasus I. This happened shortly after the Council of Trent in 382, which affirmed the specific books that made up the canon. Jerome's translations included the OT canonical books

from Hebrew, the OT apocryphal books from Hebrew, and the NT books from Greek. Jerome had only a handful of Greek manuscripts available when making his NT translation. The Latin Vulgate was translated into English one thousand years later by John Wycliffe in 1382.

The first scholarly Greek rendition of the NT based on multiple manuscripts was undertaken by Erasmus. It was called *Novum Instrumentum Omne* (later called *Novum Testamentum Omne*) and also included an update to the Latin Vulgate. Five editions were published between 1516 and 1536. These editions were based on eight Greek manuscripts. This means that the Latin Vulgate was effectively the only Bible in use for about 1200 years.



Erasmus's Bible and those based on it are referred to as *textus receptus*, which is Latin for "received text". All *textus receptus* translations are therefore based on the same eight Greek manuscript used by Erasmus. Examples of *textus receptus* translations include the Tyndale Bible (1525), Coverdale Bible (1537), Great Bible (1539), Geneva Bible (1560), King James Version (KJV, 1611), and New King James Version (NKJV, 1982).

As compared to the eight Greek manuscripts available for Erasmus in creating his NT Bible, there are currently more than five thousand. Translations based on all of the available manuscripts and that use critical scholarly techniques to infer what the original manuscripts most likely said (none of the original manuscripts exist) are referred to as critical text. *Textus receptus* translations have a small number of additional verses when compared to critical text translations.²¹ This is presumably due to scribes adding these verses during the transcription process. Examples of popular critical text translations include the New American Bible (NAB), New American Standard Bible (NASB), English Standard Version (ESV), Revised Standard Version (RSV), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), New International Version (NIV), and New Living Translation (NLT). A simplified chart showing the primary relationships of various Bible translations is shown in Figure 3-1.

In addition to *textus receptus* versus critical text, Bible translations can also be classified based on the extent to which they try to be a word-for-word translation or a thought-for-thought translation. At the extreme end of word-for-word is an interlinear Bible. An interlinear Bible has the untranslated Greek paired with the translation, which can be one word for one word, several Greek words for one translated word, or one Greek word

for several translated words. Greek sentence structure is significantly different from English, and so the translated words in an interlinear Bible are not intended to be read. The readable translation that is generally considered the most word-for-word is the NASB. This is followed by the ESV, KJV, NKJV, and the NRSV. A popular thought-for-thought translation is the NLT. The NIV strikes a balance between word-for-word and thought for thought.

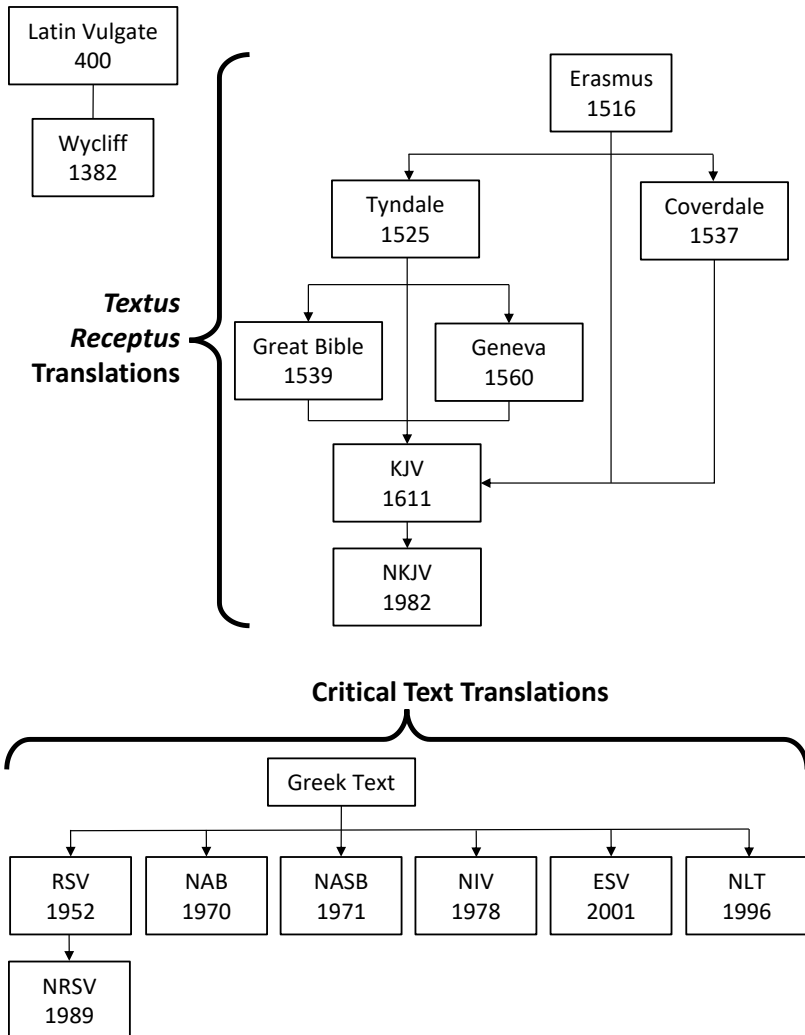


Figure 3-1. Bible Translations

The best Bible translation for you is the one that you read. This said, there are advantages to using a word-for-word translation when undertaking serious biblical and theological studies. This is because Greek words do not always have perfect English translations. For example, there are four commonly used Greek words for different kinds of love: *storge* for affection, *philia* for friendship, *eros* for attraction, and *agapé* for charity. These will all typically be translated into “love,” losing information about the particular kind of love that is indicated. A word-for-word translation allows the corresponding Greek word to be easily identified so that the original Greek meaning can be better understood. As such, all of the Bible quotations used in this book are from the NASB unless otherwise noted.²² This will hopefully be helpful to the reader when Hebrew and Greek words are examined, as is often necessary for rigorous theology.

3.2 Hermeneutics and Exegesis

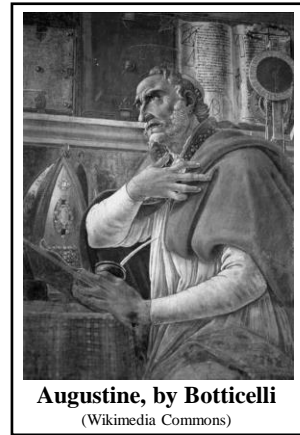
The earliest hermeneutic, which was used by most of the early Church patricians, is to read the Bible in the context of the Rule of Faith. The Rule of Faith specifies belief in the triune God and in the redemptive effect of Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection. The triune God refers to the One God consisting of three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The redemptive effect of Christ’s work allows the broken relationship between mankind and God due to sin to be healed. Irenaeus, a Greek bishop in the early second century, defines the Rule of Faith as follows:

This then is the order of the rule of our faith: God, the Father, not made, not material, invisible; one God, the creator of all things: this is the first point of our faith. The second point is: The Word of God, Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, who was manifested to the prophets according to the form of their prophesying and according to the method of the dispensation of the Father through whom all things were made; who also at the end of the times, to complete and gather up all things, was made man among men, visible and tangible, in order to abolish death and show forth life and produce a community of union between God and man. And the third point is: The Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied, and the fathers learned the things of God, and the righteous were led forth into the way of righteousness; and who in the end of the times was poured out in a new way upon mankind in all the earth, renewing man unto God.²³

When using the Rule of Faith hermeneutic, all biblical interpretation must assume that God the Father is the creator of all things, the OT prophesies were fulfilled in Christ, that Christ’s work allows sinful mankind to

be reconciled with God, and that the Holy Spirit can renew each man and lead them in a life of righteousness.

Another early hermeneutic was developed by Saint Augustine. His method was to interpret all verses in the Bible in the context the greatest commandment, to love God, and its corollary, to love one's neighbors. Augustine writes, "Anyone who thinks he has understood the divine scriptures or any part of them, but cannot by his understanding build up this double love of God and neighbor, has not succeeded in understanding them."²⁴ When employing this hermeneutic, each verse must assume that God always acts with perfect love, is instructing us to love God unconditionally, and that we must always think and act towards others out of selfless love.



Augustine, by Botticelli
(Wikimedia Commons)

A more modern way to view hermeneutics is through levels of meaning. This typically includes interpretation using a literal sense and one-or-more spiritual senses. Many conservative Christians maintain that the only proper interpretation is literal, which is the intended meaning of authors to their original audiences. Others believe that the Holy Spirit can teach divine things through certain passages of Scripture that go beyond the literal interpretation. For example, the Bible says that "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Lk 5:16). The literal interpretation of this verse is a straightforward description of an event. But a possible deeper interpretation is that it is important for people to regularly pray to God while alone and free from distractions.

A popular way to undertake biblical interpretation is to look for a literal interpretation and three possible spiritual interpretations: allegorical, tropological, and anagogical. This fourfold interpretation technique is referred to as the Quadriga. The literal meaning of Quadriga is a chariot drawn by four horses abreast, commonly used for chariot racing until the late middle ages. Not all passages will have all four meanings, but some will. The tropological meaning relates to moral behavior and instructs Christians how they should live and behave. The allegorical meaning relates to literal aspects



A Roman Quadriga
(Wikimedia Commons)

of a story representing something non-literal, oftentimes to connect OT events with NT events. Allegorical interpretation can also be used instead of literal interpretation, such as the early church fathers who typically interpreted the creation stories of Genesis allegorically rather than literally. The anagogical interpretation relates to eschatological issues such as prophecies, heaven, hell, and the last judgment.

In summary, the literal meaning of a scriptural passage is what the text clearly expresses. The allegorical meaning relates to what we are taught to believe concerning divinity and humanity. The tropological meaning relates to how we are taught to live. The anagogical meaning relates to how we are taught to keep close to God. Allegorical interpretation seeks dogma. Tropological interpretation seeks morality. Anagogical interpretation seeks to understand the mystical.

3.3 Exegesis Example: John's Prologue

An introduction to the concepts of hermeneutics and exegesis can seem abstract to many. In fact, their proper application can reveal many new insights into the meaning of scriptural verses that may have already been read dozens of times. To demonstrate, this section will perform a detailed exegesis of the very familiar passage called John's Prologue (John 1:1-18) using the Quadriga hermeneutic. Casual biblical interpretation need not be this detailed, but this section will hopefully demonstrate the value of proper exegesis.

Introduction to John's Prologue

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Virtually every Christian is familiar with these words of Scripture from Jn 1:1-18, which are commonly referred to as the Prologue of John's Gospel.

The Prologue is one of the most interpreted passages in Scripture since the early church fathers. This includes many of the most respected names in theology such as Origen, Augustine, and Chrysostom in the early Church era, Aquinas and Bonaventure in the middle ages, Luther and Calvin during the Protestant reformation, and Barth and Bultmann in the Modern era.

Certain interpretations of the Prologue are based on structural assumptions. The most common are the *Logos* hymn, salvation history, and chiasmic exposition.

According to the *Logos* hymn theory, the Prologue was based on a pre-existing Mandaean hymn that referred to John the Baptist as the *logos* and the last and highest prophet. The Mandaeans were an early Gnostic sect who believed that John the Baptist was the final and most important prophet.

In the original Greek, the Prologue is written lyrically except for the verses about John the Baptist. It is therefore assumed that the Prologue (1) clarifies that Jesus is the *Logos* and not John the Baptist, and (2) that the author inserted the non-lyrical verses into the original Mandaean hymn to specifically identify John the Baptist as a witness to Jesus.²⁵



The Apostle John, by Reubens
(Wikimedia Commons)

According to the salvation of history theory, each section of the Prologue tells of an epoch: vv. 1-5, the “word” as a mediator of creation and as a Revealer; vv. 6-8, John as God’s messenger and witness of the Revealer; vv. 9-11, the Revealer and his rejection by Gentiles and Jews; vv. 12-13, the OT children of God; vv. 14-17, the incarnation of the Word with John as a witness to His pre-existence; and v. 18, Jesus as the only announcer of God.²⁶

According to the chiasmic exposition theory, verses of the Prologue correspond to each other in a pattern of ABCCBA. Verses 1-2 and vv. 14-18 address the *Logos* and God before creation, and the Epiphany with the coming of Jesus; v. 3 and vv. 10-13 address the *Logos* which creates in primordial time, and which claims its possession by the coming of Jesus; vv. 4-5 and vv. 6-9 address the Light and nightfall in primordial time, and the coming of Light with Jesus’s coming, with the Baptist as a witness.²⁷

The Prologue is primarily to be understood in the literal sense. Bonaventure, who is famous for multiple interpretations based on the *Quadrigena*, only wrote a literal interpretation of John 1:1-18. Therefore, a detailed verse-based literal interpretation is first performed.

Literal Interpretation

Thomas Aquinas, renowned for his literal interpretations of Scripture, developed an extensive lecture series on the Gospel of John, of which the first eleven lectures address the Prologue.²⁸ This section is primarily a

summary of Aquinas, organized by verse groupings corresponding to their relation to the history of salvation.

Verses 1-5: ¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being. ⁴In Him was life, and the life was the Light of mankind. ⁵And the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not grasp it.

These verses introduce the Word as a mediator of creation and revealer of divine truth. The use of “Word” (*Logos*) is not explained. Its meaning would therefore have been apparent to contemporary readers. To Greek readers, *Logos* referred to the philosophical concept of universal divine reason. To Hebrew readers, *Logos* is God’s creative spoken word. “God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Gn 1:3). The Prologue also associates *Logos* with the salvific message of God. Karl Barth describes the *Logos* as the “principle of revelation.”²⁹ *Logos* is also associated with the source of life and the source of divine truth. Barth explains, “By life ... redemption is meant, and by light revelation.”³⁰ Rudolph Bultmann expands upon this thought. “Thus, φως [Greek *phôs*, “light”] comes to mean revelation. And where one speaks of a Revealer, one can describe him as the ‘Light’ or as the Giver of light.”³¹

The Book of Genesis is invoked with “In the Beginning was the Word,” a clear reference to Gn 1:1. These verses therefore affirm Christ as fully divine (the Word was God), a person (use of the pronouns “He” and “Him”), *homoousios* with the Father (the Word was with God), and co-eternal with the Father (He was in the beginning with God).

There are many interpretations of Verse 5, but most relate to divine truth being available to all but not received by all. Augustine attributes this to the foolishness of irreligious people: “So every foolish man, every unjust man, every irreligious man, is blind in heart. Wisdom is present; but ... is absent from his eyes.”³² John Chrysostom attributes this to people’s wickedness: “[T]heir darkness arises not from the *nature* of the Light, but from their own *wickedness*, who willfully deprive themselves of the gift.”³³ And Martin Luther simply recognizes that some people remain blind to God’s truth: “Light shines upon the darkness, and yet the darkness remains; just as the sun shines upon the blind, and yet they perceive it not.”³⁴

Verses 6-8: ⁶A man came, *one* sent from God, *and* his name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the Light, but *he came* to testify about the Light.

These verses introduce John the Baptist as God's messenger and witness of the Revealer. They make it clear that the Baptist is not the *Logos*, as the Mandeian sect of the time maintained. It also specifically identifies John as a man, refuting the heretical opinion of some that the Baptist was angelic in nature.³⁵

Verses 9-11: ⁹This was the true Light that, coming into the world, enlightens every person. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through Him, and yet the world did not know Him. ¹¹He came to His own, and His own people did not accept Him.

These verses speak to the universal accessibility of divine general revelation to all. Thomas Aquinas writes, "If anyone is not enlightened, it is due to himself, because he turns from the light that enlightens."³⁶ But the world was generally not open to divine truth, and so God more specifically came and revealed Himself to the Jews, who continually fell away from the full acceptance of divine truth.

Verses 12-13: ¹²But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name, ¹³who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God.

These verses describe the method of salvation for the Jews in the OT. There are several translation factors of importance. "Right" is a translation of *exousia* (ἐξουσία), which means the power and freedom to act. "Believe" is a translation of *pisteuō* (πιστεύω), which means to trust and have confidence in something. The mechanism of salvation in the OT was therefore the same as in the NT. God offers the gift of grace to all, and those who have trust in God and His gift of grace are adopted into God's family. All were first born carnally (of the will of the flesh), but those who put their trust in God's grace are spiritually reborn.

Verses 14-17: ¹⁴And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we saw His glory, glory as of the only *Son* from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵John testified about Him and called out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who is coming after me has proved to be my superior, because He existed before me.'" ¹⁶For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

These verses address the incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ, the Baptist as a witness to His pre-existence, the superiority of Christ to the Baptist, and the superiority of Christ to Moses. "The Word became flesh" refutes the Docetist notion that Christ did not have a physical body. The word "dwelt" is from the Greek *skénoō* (σκηνοῶ), which means to pitch

and dwell in a tabernacle (tent). In the wilderness, God's presence was in the physical tabernacle. With Christ incarnate, God's presence is with us through Christ. Mankind first received grace by the Law, and then received "grace upon grace" through Christ incarnate.

Verses 18: ¹⁸No one has seen God at any time; God the only *Son*, who is in the arms of the Father, He has explained *Him*.

This verse concludes the Prologue by proclaiming Jesus as the only announcer of God. No one has seen and understood God the Father fully except for the Son, who is intimately close and in a personal loving relationship with the Father. In this verse, "arms" is from the Greek *kolpos* (κόλπος), which means the front of the body between the arms, or the piece of a garment at this location.³⁷ In the OT, the *Logos* revealed knowledge to the prophets, who could then share this knowledge. Thomas Aquinas summarizes this point by writing, "But now the Only Begotten Son has made him known to the faithful."³⁸

Allegorical Interpretation

Allegorical interpretations relate to what we are taught to believe concerning divinity and humanity; allegory is the sense of dogma. One of the foundations of Christian dogma is the triune God, of which John's Prologue (and the Gospel of John more generally) addresses.

Origen makes the following observation: if all things were made through the *Logos*, then the Spirit was either created through the *Logos* or was uncreated.³⁹ He further observes that a stark distinction is made between the Son and the Spirit in other parts of Scripture (e.g., Mt 12:32). The Prologue is clear that Word is God but does not directly address the Spirit. This requires interpretation of the Prologue in the context of the rest of John's Gospel.

Verse 1:13 talks of spiritual rebirth as being born "of God." Later, John explains this concept in more detail. "Truly, truly I say to you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which has been born of the flesh is flesh, and that which has been born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again'" (Jn 3:5-7). The Prologue specifically identifies the Father as God and the Son and God. It also refers to the process of spiritual rebirth through God, which is later clarified to be the specific action of the Spirit, who is therefore also God. The Prologue is clear that there is one triune God consisting of three persons.

The Prologue also speaks to the loving nature of the triune God. The Son is described as being in the “arms” or “bosom” of the Father. Later in John this symbol of love is made explicit.⁴⁰ “[A]nd I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (Jn 17:26). Jesus commands us to love God and neighbor. This is because love is inherent within the triune God Himself.

Tropological Interpretation

Tropological interpretations instruct us how to behave in a moral sense. The Prologue does not address specific moral topics but does introduce the foundation of Christian morality. This includes: (1) everyone has an inherent moral sense of right and wrong; and (2) adoption into God’s spiritual family is a divine gift of grace.

Paul teaches that Gentiles unschooled in the Law are still accountable to God for their moral choices since morality is “written in their hearts, their conscience testifying and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them” (Rom 2:15). This agrees with the Prologue, which states that Christ is the “Light of mankind” that “enlightens every person.” All are aware of good and evil and are expected by God to choose good over evil.

Are we to legalistically follow moral rules in an attempt to earn eternal salvation? Not at all. The Prologue states that by receiving Christ we become children of God. We should therefore obey God’s moral code because he is our Heavenly Father who has perfect love for us. This allows us to transcend the Law that was given through Moses and live according to the grace and truth that are realized through Christ. John Calvin summarizes this important Reformation issue by writing, “[I]n the Law there was nothing more than a shadowy image of spiritual blessings, but that they are actually found in Christ.”⁴¹

Anagogical Interpretation

Anagogical interpretations find meaning beyond the literal, allegorical, and moral senses. It is the spiritual/mystical sense that can bring us closer God and give us hope for the future. In the Prologue, this is found in the message of redemption.

The Prologue describes the taking in of Christ’s message of redemption as receiving the Light. Later, Jesus describes this same process, “The

one who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (Jn 6:54). Therefore, the Prologue teaches that the reception of the divine salvific message results in eternal life. Calvin describes this aspect of the Prologue as follows: “He begins now to preach about the office of Christ, that it contains within it an abundance of all blessings, so that no part of salvation must be sought anywhere else.”⁴²

The Prologue also sets the story of Christ within the epic divine story of creation, fall, and redemption. Jeannine Brown writes, “By evoking this context, John signals that the Jesus story will illuminate the ongoing story of God’s creation and provide its culmination.”⁴³ This not only promises participation in the future Kingdom, but current participation. Since God’s is eternal and transcends time, our spiritual status of being God’s children also transcends time. Alexander Garton neatly summarizes the anagogical aspect of the Prologue by writing, “[T]he believer perceives that, since their future eschatological life will consist of participation in the eternal existence of God, this life is an eternally present reality and thus a present possession.”⁴⁴

Conclusion

A simple reading of the Prologue is powerful in itself. A fourfold interpretation of the Prologue shows that there is an endless wellspring of meaning in these eighteen verses. In the words of Rudolph Bultmann, the Prologue “is far more a mystery itself, and is fully comprehensible only to the man who knows the whole Gospel ... only when the reader has been led back out of the temporal sphere into the eternal, that he can judge conclusively in what sense the Prologue leads out of the eternal into the temporal.”⁴⁵

3.4 Further Reading

Those interested in a more detailed treatment of the history of the books of the Bible and Bible translations are encouraged to read *A History of the Bible*, by Fred Gladstone Bratton. Those interested in a more detailed treatment of scriptural interpretation are encouraged to read *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, by Daniel Treier. More advanced treatment in the spirit of “faith seeking understanding” can be found in *Participatory Biblical Exegesis*, by Matthew Levering.

3.5 Study Questions

1. List several Bible versions that take a “word-for-word” translation approach, a Bible version that takes a “thought for thought” translation approach, and a Bible version that strikes a balance between these two approaches.
2. What is meant by a hermeneutic? How might different hermeneutics result in a different understanding of a Bible passage?
3. What is the Rule of Faith and what was its hermeneutic function in the early Church?
4. What was the hermeneutic used by Augustine and how might it affect how one understands God’s wrathful actions in the OT?
5. What are the four hermeneutical components of the Quadriga?
6. What is the literal interpretation of the verse “After [Jesus] had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone” (Mt 14:23)? Is there any spiritual message or lesson based on this literal interpretation?
7. What is an allegorical interpretation of Mt 14:23? That is, what might it teach us about divinity and humanity?
8. What is a tropological interpretation of Mt 14:23? That is, what might it teach us about how we should live?
9. What is an anagogical interpretation of Mt 14:23? That is, what might it teach us about issues such as prophecies, heaven, hell, and the last judgment?
10. What is the difference between exegesis and eisegesis?

4. Church History: Early Church through the Reformation

A thorough academic study of history is tedious for most but is generally unnecessary for the theologian. With regards to theology, early church history is most important in terms of (1) the general development of first century Christianity; (2) major events that impacted the development of the church, (3) major theologians, and (4) heresies that impacted the development of doctrine. This chapter tries to cover these issues as succinctly as possible with the understanding that innumerable volumes have been written about each. The purpose is to bring awareness and to provide a basic context with regards to theology. Detailed treatment of each topic is easily accessible for the interested reader (see the Further Reading section at the end of the chapter). Material is organized by events, theologians, and heresies with the understanding that there is considerable overlap in much of the material.

4.1 First Century Christianity

Outside of Scripture, there is very little direct historical evidence describing first century Christianity, especially with regards to specific events at specific times. Therefore, the best that historians can do is to identify the few events that are known, and to infer where other events take place in relationship to these fixed events. N.T. Wright identifies the following fixed historical points that are based on non-Christian sources and involve non-Christian action (these events are further described in the Events section below):⁴⁶

| | |
|-------|--|
| 33 | Jesus's Crucifixion; |
| 49 | Claudius's expulsion of Christians from Rome; |
| 49-51 | Paul resides first in Corinth and then in Ephesus; |
| 62 | James, brother of Jesus, is martyred in Jerusalem; |
| 64 | Nero persecutes Christians after the fire in Rome; |
| 70 | Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed; |

- c.90 Domitian investigates Jesus's relatives;
- c.110–114 Pliny's persecution of Christians in Bithynia;
- c.110–117 Ignatius writes his letters and is then martyred; and
- 155–156 Polycarp is martyred.

At the time of Jesus's crucifixion, neither Christianity nor the Christian church existed. Rather, Jesus taught to Jewish communities with Jewish worldviews. Although there were many variants of Judaism during the time of Jesus, they can generally be characterized by (1) a strong Jewish ethnic identity; (2) obedience to the Torah; (3) worship in the Temple; and (4) belief and hope in a future restoration of the Promised Land to Israel, the descendants of Abraham and Jacob.

At this time, Palestine was part of the pagan Roman empire. The people of the Jewish worldview as described above were therefore intermixed with people of the pagan worldview. The pagan worldview generally consisted of the worship of many gods, the offering of incense to Caesar, belief in oracles, and participation in public entertainment such as gladiatorial events.

In the first century, Jews embracing Christianity would have to give up their identity, reinterpret the Torah as messianic prophesy, view Christ rather than the Temple as how one has access to God, and view Christ as the culmination of the Jewish story rather than a future restoration of Israel. This would be seen by many Jews as being a traitor to the Jewish race. Pagans embracing Christianity would require a dramatic change in worldview concerning monotheism, sexual morality, infanticide, and a wide range of other ethical issues. In either case, conversion was a difficult choice, and in certain periods converts would risk torture and death.

And yet the spread of Christianity was rapid and widespread in the decades following the crucifixion of Jesus. What can explain this, given that Jesus (from an earthly view) was merely a poor carpenter, born out of wedlock, was executed by the Roman government, and only led a religious movement for about three years? The providence of God is the Christian answer. But this providence involved a strong focus by early Christians on spreading the Gospel as extensively as possible. Key NT passages include the following:

- And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:18-29);
- And [Jesus] said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mk 16:15);

- So Jesus said to them again, “Peace be to you; just as the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (Jn 20:21); and
- But [Jesus] said to them, “... you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth.”

The book of Acts describes the early missionary activities of the Apostles and Paul. These are but a small sample of what must have occurred when it is understood that part of early Christianity was sharing one’s faith with non-believers. Wright describes this as follows:

Why then did early Christianity spread? Because early Christians believed that what they had found to be true was true for the whole world. The impetus to mission sprang from the very heart of early Christian conviction. If we know anything about early Christian praxis, at a non- or sub-literary level, it is that the early Christians engaged in mission, both to Jews and Gentiles.⁴⁷

Initially, Christianity was viewed as a sect within Judaism. But as the percentage of Gentile Christians increased, it gradually became clear that Christianity was distinct, not only from Judaism but from Greek and barbarian religions as well. Unlike all of these (and every known religion up to this point), Christianity did not offer animal sacrifices, as Christ eliminated this need by being a perfect sacrifice. In addition, Christians had a strong focus on worshipping the One God of Abraham which, confusing to many, included the worship of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, both being separate persons but part of the One God. Due to this new understanding as to the nature of God and His redemptive work, theology was an inevitable part of early Christianity. Wright explains, “If everyone agrees about the gods, or about their particular god, there is no need for theology ... The place and status of theology within developing Christianity, not as an abstract philosophy or whimsical scholarship, but a part of the inner life of the church, was assured from the first.”⁴⁸

It is with this introduction of first-century Christianity and its central role in theology that we now continue with the major events that are important to theological developments that occurred up until the Reformation.

4.2 Events

Since this section covers events from the first century to the sixteenth century, it necessarily has to be extremely selective in what it covers. Events have therefore been selected to give a sense of the arc of history with

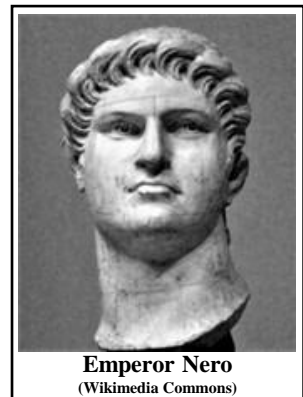
regards to Christianity and Christian theology while avoiding details, often important historical details, that are not necessary for this function.

Crucifixion of Jesus (33). The crucifixion of Jesus is a historical fact referenced in more than a dozen references in non-Christian Jewish, Greek, and Roman sources in the earliest centuries including the Jewish historian Josephus (c.37–c.100) and the Roman historian Tacitus (c.56–c.120). Christianity began to grow quickly soon after the crucifixion of Jesus. The year 33 is believed to most likely by a majority of historians but a case can also be made for the crucifixion having occurred in year 30.

Reign of Claudius (41–54). During the reign of Emperor Claudius, there was a large Jewish population in Rome including both Christian Jews and non-Christian Jews. Clashes between these groups were causing public disturbances, and Claudius therefore expelled all Jews from Rome in 49. This event is referenced in Acts 18:1-2, allowing the dates of Paul's residences in Corinth and Ephesus to be known with some precision. This banishment persisted for five years until Claudius's death in 54. The Christian churches of Rome were therefore being solely led and attended by gentile Christians for these five years. Difficulties in the church arose upon the return of Jewish Christians, which is the situation that Paul addresses in his Epistle to the Romans.

Martyrdom of James the Just (62). James, brother of Jesus, was the leader of Christian Church in Jerusalem and was also known as James the Just. According to the Jewish historian Josephus (c.37–c.100), James was ordered to be stoned to death by the High Priest Hanan ben Hanan. This occurred just before the death of the procurator Porcius Festus but before Lucceius Albinus had assumed office. The high priest was only able to order the stoning due to the lack of judicial oversight. Josephus writes that the killing was widely considered an act of unjust murder.

Reign of Nero (54–68). Nero was emperor of the Roman empire when the great fire of Rome occurred in 64. The fire destroyed three of Rome's fourteen districts and severely damaged seven more. Many suspected that Nero was behind the fire. To remove suspicion from himself, Nero accused Christians of starting the fire, and many Christians were arrested and cruelly executed. This was the beginning of Christian persecution by the Roman Empire. "Nero Caesar" in Aramaic corresponds to the number 666 when applying Hebrew



Emperor Nero
(Wikimedia Commons)

numerology. Many therefore believe that the Antichrist in the Book of Revelation refers to Nero.

Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (70). The First Jewish–Roman War (66–73) started after the appointment of prefect Gessius Florus and his demand to tax Temple funds, resulting in a Jewish revolt. Nero appointed the general Vespasian to crush the uprising, resulting in the siege of Jerusalem in 70, led by Vespasian’s son Titus. Titus set fire to the temple, thereby destroying it. The city was also burned to the ground. From this point forward, Judaism would no longer be focused on Jerusalem and the temple.

Reign of Domitian (81–96). Upon becoming emperor, Domitian effectively eliminated the political power of the senate and governed the Roman Empire as a divine monarchy, assuming absolute political power. Domitian was a firm believer in the traditional Roman religion and in the divinity of the imperial family. Around the year 90, Domitian investigated several people thought to be blood relatives of Jesus. Domitian seemed to think that they were part of a potentially subversive dynasty, but ended the investigation when it was discovered that their kingdom was not of this world and would not come to exist until the end of the age. Church tradition has commonly held that, toward the end of Domitian’s reign, there was widespread persecution of Christians. This view has resulted in many believing that the Book of Revelation was written in the time of Domitian, as it describes widespread Christian persecution. But historians today dismiss the possibility of widespread Christian persecution under Domitian as there is “only the slightest evidence for saying so, and nothing very sure can be built on this foundation.”⁴⁹

Use of Ichthys (c.100–present). *Ichthys* is a Greek word meaning fish (ΙΧΘΥΣ). During times of persecution, Christians used a simple fish symbol to secretly identify Christian churches and other Christians. The symbol consists of an upward swooping arc and a downward swooping arc that connect to look like a fish (see Figure 4-1). For example, a Christian when encountering a stranger could discretely trace one of the arcs on the ground. The stranger could then complete the ichthys to indicate he is a Christian. The ichthys is also known as the Jesus fish (for an explanation of ΙΧΘΥΣ as an acronym, see p. 449).



Figure 4-1. The Ichthys Symbol

Pliny's Persecution Christians in Bithynia (c.110–114). Pliny the Younger was a Roman magistrate and the author of hundreds of letters, many of which have survived. He was appointed imperial governor of the province of Bithynia around 110 and soon wrote a letter to Emperor Trajan asking for guidance on how to deal with the Christian community. Pliny describes Christians being anonymously reported, likely for their refusal to worship Roman gods. Pliny reports to Trajan that he gives Christians three chances to assert their innocence and then they are executed if they refuse. This is true despite Pliny finding that he has only found Christians guilty of excessive superstition. It seems, therefore, that Pliny was concerned with rapid spread of Christianity and possible future rebellion. In any case, Pliny's letter shows that, at the time, there was no widespread and systematic persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire. Rather, it seems that Christian persecution was sporadic and local, similar to the time of Claudius and of Nero.

Reign of Diocletian (284–305). Diocletian oversaw the Great Persecution of Christianity. In 303, he issued an edict calling for the destruction of all Christian scriptures and places of worship across the empire and prohibited Christians from assembling for worship. A further edict called for the arrest of Christian clergy and the requirement of all Christians to offer sacrifices. Clergy that offered sacrifices and/or surrendered scriptures but later repented were at the center of the Donatist controversy (see below).

Reign of Constantine (306–337). Constantine the Great was the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity. While preparing for battle against the superior forces of the rebel Maxentius, Constantine saw a vision of the Chi Rho symbol (see Figure 4-2) and heard a voice say, "In this sign thou shalt conquer." After defeating Maxentius's forces, Constantine converted to Christianity, legalized the practice of Christianity, and stopped Christian persecution. Constantine also supported the Church financially by building basilicas, appointing Christians to high governmental positions, and returning previously confiscated church property.

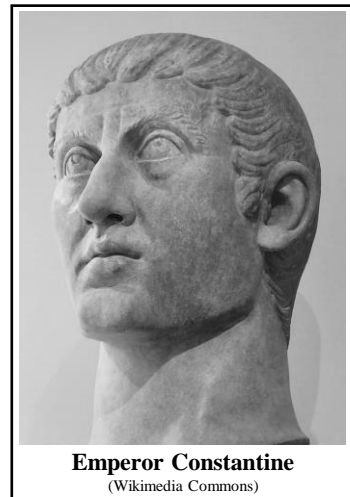




Figure 4-2. The Chi Rho Symbol⁵⁰

Donatist Controversy (311). Donatism was a Christian movement that started in North Africa and was named after the Christian bishop Donatus Magnus. It held that the administration of sacraments was only valid if performed by faultless clergy. This belief was directed at clergy who, in the Great Persecution under Diocletian, had surrendered scriptures or renounced their faith to avoid execution. The Donatists did not recognize the spiritual authority of these clergymen. The Donatist position was contrary to the official church position that spiritual authority could be restored by penance. The Donatism controversy resulted in much unrest and rioting, forcing Constantine to call the first Council of Arles (314), which ruled against the Donatists. The Donatist, however, failed to comply and Constantine was forced to issue an edict calling for the confiscation of all Donatist church property. Augustine famously argued against Donatism by describing the power of sacraments as coming from God rather than from the performing clergy, and Donatism gradually lost its influence.

Edict of Milan (313). This was a proclamation that every person in the Roman Empire could practice whatever religion that they wished, thereby legalizing Christianity, ending Christian persecution, and removing the prohibition of organizing Christian churches. It also called for the prompt return of confiscated church property.

Council of Nicaea (325). The Council of Nicaea was convened by Emperor Constantine primarily to end the disputes over Arianism (see Heresies below). The Council ended up condemning Arianism and affirmed that the Father and the Son were of one substance (*homoousios*) rather than of two similar substances (*homoiousios*). This council drafted the original version of the Nicene Creed, which emphasizes that Christ is the same substance as the Father and is co-eternal rather than a separate created being. The original



**Council of Nicaea,
Fresco in Salone Sistino, Vatican**
(Wikimedia Commons)

version of the Nicene Creed from this council mentions the Holy Spirit, but not the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and Son.

Founding of Constantinople (330). After the reunification of the eastern and western Roman Empires in 324, Constantine selected the site of Byzantium to become the new capital city and renamed it New Rome. After six years of construction, it was renamed again to Constantinople (330). After the East/West Schism in 1054 (see below), Constantinople became the center of Eastern Orthodoxy just as Rome was the center of Roman Catholicism.

Council of Constantinople (381). Although the Council of Nicaea intended to do away with the Arian controversy through the original version of the Nicene Creed, it instead resulted in much confusion. Many people had questions with regards to whether Jesus was a complete and genuine human being in addition to being completely divine. This resulted in a reworking of the original version of the Nicene Creed into the second version (technically called the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed). This version also states that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. Still later, this was modified by some in the Latin churches to read “proceeds from the Father and the Son,” with “and the son” being known as the *filioque* clause. The addition of this clause was the primary reason for the East/West Schism (see below).

Council of Ephesus (431). The Council of Ephesus was convened by the Roman Emperor Theodosius II, and condemned Nestorianism as heretical. The Patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius, held that Christ consisted of two separate persons, one divine and one human. The Virgin Mary should therefore be called the *Christotokos* (Christ-bearer) but not the *Theotokos* (God-bearer). Nestorius developed the belief that a union between the human and divine was impossible in Antioch, where he taught this without controversy. He was surprised at the resistance to this teaching in Constantinople. Nestorius himself appealed to the Emperor to convene a council so that his teaching could be affirmed, but the opposite occurred.

Council of Chalcedon (451). This council was convened by Emperor Marcian to reaffirm the ruling against Nestorianism but also to assess the opposite but equally extreme teachings of Eutyches. Whereas Nestorius held that Christ consisted of human and divine natures in separate persons, Eutyches held that Christ’s nature was a fusion of divine and human natures within a single person. That is, Christ has neither a pure divine nature nor a pure human nature. This view, called Eutychianism, was deemed heretical at the council along with the affirmation that Nestorianism was also heretical.

Muslims Conquer Jerusalem (636). At this point in history, Muslims were undertaking an aggressive campaign of conquest called the Ridda

Wars. The siege of the city was mostly bloodless, as the Muslims simply blockaded the entry of supplies for four months, forcing the city to surrender. At the time of the siege, Jerusalem was under Byzantine control, which prevented Jews from worshipping on the Temple Mount and at the Wailing Wall. The surrender resulted in the Treaty of Umar, which allowed these Jewish worship practices to continue. The motivation to capture Jerusalem was primarily strategic rather than religious.

Reign of Charlemagne (768–814).

Charles the Great (Charlemagne) was King of the Franks starting in 768 and was crowned emperor in Rome by Pope Leo III in 800. This resulted in Charlemagne being the first emperor over all of Western Europe in over 300 years. The result was a western empire ruled by Rome and an eastern empire ruled by Constantinople. Many maintain that Charlemagne ruled the Carolingian Empire, which is distinct from the later Holy Roman Empire as established under Otto I in 962. But effectively Charlemagne was the first Holy Roman Emperor. Charlemagne was also involved in the *filioque* controversy. Charlemagne convened a council in 809 that defended the inclusion of *filioque* in the Nicene Creed, as was practiced by the Franks. This word indicates that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son rather than the Father only. The Pope reviewed the decision and ruled that the Franks could maintain their tradition but also maintained that the canonical creed did not include *filioque*.



**Charlemagne, Cornacchini,
St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican**
(Wikimedia Commons)

The East/West Schism (1054). Christianity in the 11th century was divided into the Eastern Churches and the Western Churches. The Eastern Churches (sometimes called Byzantine churches) were Greek and centered on Constantinople. The Western Churches were Latin and centered on Rome. There was growing tension between the East and the West from as early as the fifth century. This largely stemmed from the East having its traditions rooted in Greek philosophy and the West having its traditions rooted in Roman law, and ultimately an irreconcilable disagreement in the use of the *filioque* clause in the Nicene Creed. The western churches believed that it was theologically justified to say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. The western churches insisted that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone. This schism still exists, but the relationship saw an improvement after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) recognized the validity of the sacraments in the Eastern churches.

First Crusade (1095–1102). The First Crusade was a military campaign initiated by Pope Urban II with the objective of recapturing the city of Jerusalem from Muslim control. The primary reasons for the first crusade were the Muslim expansion towards Byzantium (with an increasing threat to Constantinople) and Christian pilgrims increasingly being harassed by Muslims when journeying to Jerusalem. People were encouraged to join the crusade by being told that participation in a Holy War served as a form of penance. This resulted in about 60,000 soldiers and about 30,000 non-combatants participating. The first crusade was a military success and Jerusalem was recaptured. Unfortunately, crusades were then seen as a way to increase the prestige of the Pope in Rome. Over the next several hundred years there were seven additional Crusades, most ending in failure.⁵¹

Mendicant Religious Orders (1209). A mendicant is a holy person who takes a vow of poverty and obtains support for mission work solely through charitable contributions. The earliest and most important mendicant religious orders were the Dominicans, founded by St. Dominic (c.1170–1221), and the Franciscans, founded by St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226). The Dominicans have a centralized organization and emphasize scholarship. The Franciscans, in contrast, are typically wanderers who stay at local churches and preach in the streets.

Inquisition (1233–1826). The Inquisition refers to the judicial body of the Roman Catholic church charged with investigating cases of heresy and apostasy. The Inquisition started in France in the fourteenth century, and later expanded to other European countries such as Spain and Portugal. The Inquisition was known to sometimes use torture and threats of torture to extract confessions. Most of the sentences of the Inquisition involved penances, but unrepentant heresies were referred to secular courts, which could result in death sentences or life imprisonment. The Inquisition persisted for about 600 years, but the last execution resulting from the Inquisition was in 1826.

4.3 Theologians

Early theologians that strongly influenced church doctrine are commonly called the Early Church Fathers or simply the Church Fathers. The time of their influence is generally considered to span from the first century to the eight century, referred to as the Patristic Era. The Church Fathers can also be grouped into the Apostolic Fathers, whose knowledge was closely connected to the twelve apostles, the Greek Fathers, who wrote in Greek, and the Latin Fathers, who wrote in Latin.

Polycarp of Smyrna (69–155). Polycarp is considered one of three chief Apostolic Fathers, along with Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch. He was a disciple of John the Apostle, resulting in first-hand knowledge of the Gospel message and the ministry of Jesus. Polycarp was the Bishop of Smyrna and authored the *Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians*. Polycarp lived in the period just after all of the apostles had died. He therefore played an important role in ensuring that the teachings of churches were true to the teachings of the apostles, which he learned directly from John. After reaching an old age, Polycarp was martyred by being burned at the stake and then pierced by a spear. This was done because Polycarp refused to burn incense to the Roman Emperor. Polycarp's last words were, "I bless you, Father, for judging me worthy of this hour, so that in the company of the martyrs I may share the cup of Christ."

Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130–202). Irenaeus was an early church Father who played an important role both in the spread of Christian churches and in the establishment of orthodox doctrine. He is the author of *Against Heresies*, which is a refutation of Gnosticism. He taught that true doctrine is supported by three pillars: Scripture, apostolic tradition, and teachings that can be traced back directly to the apostles. Irenaeus is the first known person to assert the essential importance of all four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Clement of Alexandria (c.150–215). Clement was born to pagan parents, converted to Christianity, and later taught philosophy and theology at the Catechetical School of Alexandria. He was well educated in Greek philosophy and literature. Clement's three major works have survived in full: *Protrepticus*, *Paedagogus*, and *Stromata*. *Protrepticus* is an apologetic work directed at pagans and explaining why they should become Christians. *Paedagogus* is a practical guide for proper Christian living and draws from Plato's framework of character, actions, and passions. *Stromata* consists of six books on six different topics, but with significant content related to Greek philosophy and the differing roles of faith and philosophy for Christians. Clement is viewed as the first Christian scholar and the first systematic teacher of Christian doctrine.

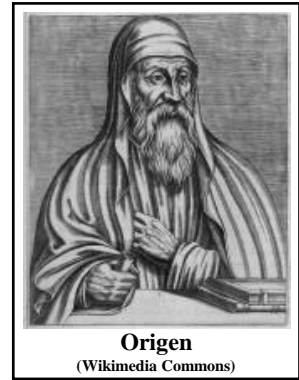
Tertullian (c.155–220). Tertullian was a prominent Christian theologian from Carthage and the first Christian to produce a large amount of writing in Latin. He is often referred to as the Father of Latin Christianity and as the Founder of Western Theology. His writings are the first to use the word "trinity."



Tertullian
(Wikimedia Commons)

Although a prolific author of dogmatics and apologetics, Tertullian's most famous work is probably *Against Marcion*, which consists of five books. *Against Marcion* refutes Marcion's dualism, shows that Jesus is the Messiah of the OT, and attacks Marcion's versions of Luke's Gospel and Pauline letters, which Tertullian describes as having been mutilated. Since none of Marcion's writings survive, much of what is known about Marcionism is from Tertullian's writings. Tertullian is also well known for his rejection of the incorporation of Greek philosophy into Christian theology, famously writing, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"⁵²

Origen of Alexandria (c.185–253). Origen of Alexandria was an early Christian scholar and theologian who wrote thousands of treatises covering textual criticism, biblical exegesis, hermeneutics, homiletics, and spirituality. Some of the more notable contributions of Origen to theology include: the ransom-to-Satan theory of atonement; an early advocate of libertarian free will and the corresponding rejection of predestined election; the pre-existence of souls (later condemned as heretical); a threefold interpretive method of Scripture (later expanded into the Quadriga); and an early defender of the Holy Spirit being part of the Godhead.



Athanasius of Alexandria (c.296–373). Athanasius was a Christian theologian and bishop of Alexandria. He had an extremely colorful career that spanned 45 years and included five exiles. Athanasius is best known for his stand against Arianism and his insistence that the Father and Son are of the same essence (*homoousios*). His most impactful writings were probably his two-part work: *Against the Heathen* and *The Incarnation of the Word of God*. These were the first complete works of developed orthodox theology. As such, Athanasius is sometimes referred to as the Father of Orthodoxy. It should be noted that the Athanasian Creed is named after Athanasius but was almost certainly not written by him. Rather, it was likely written sometime in the fifth century.

Gregory of Nazianzus (c.329–390). Also known as Gregory the Theologian and Gregory the Nazianzen, Gregory was the Archbishop of Constantinople and a theologian. He is widely considered the most accomplished rhetorical stylist of the patristic age. As a classically trained orator and philosopher, he brought many aspects of Greek tradition into the early church. Gregory made a significant impact on trinitarian theology among both Greek and Latin-speaking theologians. He is often referred to as the Trinitarian Theologian.

Ambrose of Milan (c.339–397). St. Ambrose was a theologian who served as Bishop of Milan (374–397). He played a prominent role in the fights against both Arianism and paganism. Theologically, Ambrose taught the importance of high ethical behavior, liturgical flexibility, generosity to the poor, and the importance of the role of the virgin Mary as the Mother of God. St. Augustine, before his conversion, famously listened to the lectures of St. Ambrose and found their content more compelling than the Manichean rhetorician Faustus.

John Chrysostom (c.347–407). John Chrysostom served as Archbishop of Constantinople and was among the most prolific authors in the early Christian Church. He was renowned for his eloquent oratory skills and was referred to as the golden mouthed. Hundreds of his exegetical sermons have survived and serve as a primary resource for an understanding of how the early church fathers interpreted and preached Scripture. His Paschal Homily (*Hieratikon*) is still read at the midnight Orthros in the Eastern Orthodox Church (the first service of *Pashcal*/Easter). Chrysostom contributed theologically through his work *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*. This was directed against the Anomoeans, who taught a radical form of Arianism where Jesus was taught to be of a completely different substance than God the Father. Chrysostom also argues that God is unknowable except as He reveals himself.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430). Saint Augustine was bishop of Hippo from 396 to 430. He was one of the Latin Fathers of the Church and is considered the most significant Christian thinker after St. Paul. He was born to a pagan father and Christian mother, and eventually converted to Christianity after living hedonistically early in life and then practicing Manicheism for several years. Although more than 100 of Augustine's works have survived, his most influential have been *City of God* and *Confessions*. It is hard to overstate the influence of Augustine in nearly all aspects of theology, but some notable contributions include original sin, the unity of soul and body, an allegorical interpretation of many OT stories, the visible and invisible church, salvation through grace, predestination of the elect, and just war theory. Augustine also thought that it is appropriate to incorporate the best of philosophy into Christian theology, comparing this to the Israelites plundering the riches of Egypt before departing through the exodus led by Moses.

Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109). St. Anselm was an Italian Benedictine monk, philosopher, theologian, and the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 to 1109. Anselm developed his theology with a strictly rational and philosophical approach. As such, he is generally recognized as the founder of scholasticism. He is most famous for the development of the ontological argument for the existence of God, which is further discussed

in the apologetics chapter (see p. 297). He was also the originator for the satisfaction theory of atonement, where Christ's death restored God's honor that was impugned by mankind's sins.

Peter Lombard (c.1096–1160). Lombard was a French scholastic theologian and the Bishop of Paris from 1159 until his death shortly thereafter. He is best known for authoring the *Four Books of Sentences* (Latin: *Libri Quatuor Sententiarum*), which became the standard textbook of theology at the medieval universities. A commentary on the *Sentences* was part of the examination system and was a requirement for every Master of Theology student. Theologically, Lombard is most famous for his controversial identification of charity with the Holy Spirit, which taught that when a Christian loves God and neighbor he becomes in a certain sense divine.

Bonaventure (1221–1274). Bonaventure was an Italian Franciscan bishop, cardinal, scholastic theologian, and philosopher. He viewed the core principles of theology to be exemplarism, emanationism, and consummation. These are strongly Platonic themes that Bonaventure applies theologically based on Christ. Christ is the prime exemplar through which creation emanates and through which created beings find consummation. Like all scholastics, Bonaventure has a strong focus on the relationship between reason and faith. He maintains that pure reason can apprehend some, but not all Christian truths. Truths not accessible through pure reason require divine illumination through prayer and meditation. Therefore, the goal of Christian life is to be absorbed as much as possible in God's love through contemplation.

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). Thomas was from the Italian town of Aquino and is typically referred to as Thomas Aquinas. He was a Dominican friar, priest, theologian, and philosopher. Thomas was a strong proponent of both natural theology and natural philosophy, where truths are identified through pure logic, through characteristics of the natural world, and through a combination of these two. Thomas also believed that many Christian beliefs could only be known through special revelation, but that these also must be reasonable. Thomas's approach was to take the philosophical framework of Aristotle and apply it to theology. This is referred to as Thomistic philosophy, Thomistic theology, or simply Thomism. He wrote extensively on nearly every theological topic. This includes ethics, where he defined the four cardinal virtues as prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude and the three theological virtues as faith, hope, and charity (see p. 268). The writings of Thomas have been extremely influential, and he is considered the greatest of the medieval philosopher-theologians. His best-known works are the unfinished *Summa Theologica*, and *Summa contra Gentiles*.

John Duns Scotus (c. 1265–1308). Duns Scotus was a Scottish Franciscan friar, university professor, philosopher, and theologian. He is theologically best known for his doctrine of the univocity of being. Whereas most theologians believe that a word used to describe God does not mean the same thing when applied to a person (e.g., God is good means something different than a person is good), Duns Scotus argued that words describing the properties of God mean the same thing as when they apply to people or things. He also developed an original argument for the existence of God and argued for the immaculate conception of Mary the Mother of Jesus. The theology developed by Duns Scotus is referred to as Scotism.

William of Occam (c.1287–1347). William of Occam (sometimes spelled Ockham) was an English Franciscan friar, theologian, and philosopher. He is best known for developing the test of “Occam’s Razor,” which states that the simplest explanation is the preferred explanation. This concept is also known as the principle of parsimony. Ontologically, Occam applied this principle to deny the Platonic concept of universals. For Occam, the simplest (and therefore best) way to understand ontological categories is to only assume two: substance and quality. Occam also rejected the concept of papal infallibility, advocated for the separation of church and state, and encouraged Christians to live a voluntary life of poverty.



William of Occam
(Wikimedia Commons)

4.4 Heresies

A heresy is a theological doctrine, system, or belief that is determined to be false and incompatible with official church dogma. The development of official church dogma has therefore been highly influenced by debates over which beliefs are heretical and which beliefs are not heretical. A close examination of Christian creeds reveals that much of their content exists to renounce specific heresies. Friedrich Schleiermacher believes that there are four natural heresies that all Christians should avoid: the Docetic, the Nazarean, the Manichean, and the Pelagian (explained below). However, there were many more heretical debates in the pre-Reformation era, the most important of which are now summarized. —

Nazarenes. (~40–300). The Nazarenes were a sect of Christianity that believed that Christ was the divine Messiah, but also insisted that strictly following all of the OT Law and ceremonies was necessary for salvation. Believers in this are also called Judaizers or Judaizing Christians. This was a major issue in the early church, as many maintained that converts to Christianity were required to be circumcised. Paul, who was evangelizing primarily to non-circumcised gentiles, convened the Council of Jerusalem to address the issue. The Council ruled that converts were free from most of the requirements of the Law (including circumcision) but did retain a few. “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from acts of sexual immorality” (Acts 15:28-29). The early heretical sect called the Nazarenes is not to be confused with the modern Church of the Nazarene, an American protestant denomination emerging out of the Wesleyan holiness movement.

Gnosticism (~100–200). Gnosticism is a dualistic belief system where spiritual things are good and material things are evil. Everyone has a spark of good within their evil material bodies and requires special knowledge from the spiritual world to be aware of this good. Gnosticism therefore emphasizes the need of special knowledge to obtain salvation (*gnosis*=knowledge). Not all Gnostics were Christian, but the Christian form of Gnosticism taught that Christ came to earth in human appearance to teach humanity how to reunite with God.

Adoptionism (~100–200). Adoptionism, also called Dynamic Monarchianism, is a heretical early Christian nontrinitarian theological doctrine which holds that Jesus was adopted as the Son of God at his baptism (or perhaps at His resurrection, or at His ascension). Adoptionism was most likely followed by Christians that only had access to the writings of Paul, who does not mention the virgin birth (nor does the Gospel of Mark). Acts 13:33 and Heb 5:5 have also been used to defend adoptionism. They both quote Ps 2:7, which reads, “You are My Son, Today I have fathered You.” Adoptionism was rejected as a heresy since it contradicts the orthodox doctrine that Christ is eternally divine and co-existent with the God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

Docetism (~100–325). Docetism is the heretical teaching that Jesus’s body was either an illusion or a phantom. It is a form of Gnosticism, which teaches that things in the spiritual world are good but things in the material world are evil. Christ, being all good, could therefore not assume a material body. A corollary of Docetism is that God cannot and did not suffer, as there was no material body to suffer and die. Docetism was ruled as

heretical at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 and again at the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

Ebionitism (~50–200). The Ebionites were an early Jewish sect that rejected the divinity and virgin birth of Jesus. They lived a voluntary life of poverty and focused on a life of obedience to both the Law of Moses and to the moral teachings of Jesus. They viewed Jesus as a normal human who perfectly fulfilled the Law of Moses and was therefore adopted by God as His Son, thereby fulfilling the messianic prophesies of the OT. The Ebionite movement gradually diminished after the failed Bar Kokhba revolt in 136 resulted in complete Jewish defeat.

Marcionism (~145–400). Sometime between 85 and 110, Marcion of Sinope was born as the son of a bishop. Marcion developed some unorthodox beliefs and was excommunicated by his father around 137. Marcion believed that the God of the OT was not the same God as the God of the NT. The former, referred to by Marcion as the Demiurge, was legalistic and vengeful while the latter was loving and forgiving. The Church of Rome condemned Marcion's teachings in 144. Undeterred, Marcion established his own church which spread quickly and rivaled the orthodox church for several hundred years. Marcion created the first semblance of a New Testament, which consisted of ten letters of Paul (excluding the Pastorals) and a modified version of Luke. Part of the orthodox church's motivation to develop their own NT canon was in response to Marcionism.

Montanism (~150–600). Montanism is named for its founder, Montanus. Montanus believed that he and his woman assistants, Prisca and Maximilla, were receiving new prophesies that went beyond the teachings of the Jesus and the Apostles. This movement spread widely and was referred to as the New Prophecy. Around 177, Apollinarius, Bishop of Hierapolis, presided over a synod which condemned the New Prophecy. Montanism was thereafter generally considered heretical by orthodox Christianity, but the movement persisted for many hundreds of years.

Monarchism/Modalism/Sabellianism (~100–325). Monarchism is the non-trinitarian belief that God is a single Person rather than three co-eternal Persons of the same substance. Modalism is a form of Monarchism where the single Person of God reveals himself through different modes such as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Some monarchists argue that since there is only one God, God the Father must have suffered on the cross. This was referred to as Patripassionism by the Latin Fathers (*Pa-ter*=Father; *passio*=suffering). It was similarly referred to as Sabellianism by the Greek Fathers, after Sabellius, who taught this in the third century. These beliefs were condemned as heretical at the First Council of Nicaea in 325, which affirmed the eternal triune nature of God.

Manichaeism (~250–350). Manichaeism is considered a Christian heresy but was also a stand-alone religion in Persia. It was founded by Mani in the third century, who viewed himself as the last in a line of prophets that included Adam, Buddha, Zoroaster, and Jesus. Manichaeism is a form of dualistic Gnosticism that believes the world is a fusion of spirit and matter, the original principles of good and evil. The fallen soul is trapped in the evil, material world and can reach the transcendent world only by way of the spirit. At death, the soul of a righteous person returns to Paradise. The soul of a person who persisted in things of the flesh is condemned to rebirth.

Arianism (~300–325). Arianism was one of the most impactful heresies in Christian history. It was first taught by Arius and held that Christ was created by the Father and is therefore not co-eternal with the Father (although this creative act occurred outside of time and before the heavens and the earth were created). Arianism argues that the Bible teaches that Christ was begotten by the Father



**Saint Nicholas of Myra slapping
Arius at the First Council of Nicaea**

(Wikimedia Commons)

and therefore cannot be co-eternal with the Father. The vigorous Arianism debate, famously fought by Athanasius of Alexandria, focused on whether Christ was *homousios* (of the same substance of the Father) or *homoiousios* (of the similar substance of the Father). Arianism was condemned as heretical at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 as it denies the eternal nature of the triune God. Although the Council of Nicaea was called by Emperor Constantine, Constantine remained sympathetic to Arianism. Many believe that Constantine was baptized just before his death by the Arian priest Eusebius of Nicomedia.

Apollinarianism (~350–81). Apollinarianism is the belief that Christ incarnate had a human body, a human soul, and a divine mind, but not a human mind. These beliefs were first developed and taught by Apollinaris of Laodicea after the Council of Nicaea in 325. Nicaea asserted both the full divinity and the full humanity of Christ but did not explain how a single entity can be both infinite and finite. Apollinaris's explanation was that this required Christ having a human body with human feelings but without a human mind. Apollinarianism was deemed heretical in 381 at the First Council of Constantinople, which concluded that Apollinarianism denies the full humanity of Christ.

Pelagianism (~390–418). This heresy was named after Pelagius, a British theologian. His teachings deny original sin and stress the essential goodness of human nature and the freedom of the human will. God commands us not to sin, and God would not command the impossible. Therefore, it must be possible to live a sin-free life. Pelagianism was vigorously attacked by Augustine, who believed that mankind was incapable of doing anything good unless enabled by God. Pelagianism was decisively condemned at the 418 Council of Carthage.

Monophysitism (~400–451). Monophysitism is the heretical doctrine that Christ Incarnate has a single divine nature and did not have a human nature. It is sometimes called Eutychianism, but Eutychianism typically refers to Christ incarnate having a single nature that is a mixture of human and divine. Monophysitism was vigorously opposed by Pope Leo I, and was declared heretical at the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

Nestorianism (~400–451). This heresy was named after Nestorius, who was a patriarch of Constantinople. It holds that Christ incarnate existed as two separate persons, the man Jesus and the divine Son of God. Nestorius was attacked for his teachings by many prominent church leaders including Cyril of Alexandria, who issued 12 anathemas against him. Nestorius and his teachings were eventually condemned as heretical at the Council of Ephesus in 431, and again at the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

4.5 Further Reading

Those interested in a more detailed treatment of early church history up to the Reformation are encouraged to read *The Story of Christianity, Volume I: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, by Justo González. This book reads much easier than typical history textbooks but lacks a certain amount of detail as a result. Those interested in a more typical academic history textbook for reading or reference are directed to *Church History, Volume I: From Christ to the Pre-Reformation*, by Everett Ferguson. Those interested in reading excerpts from a variety of early Christian theologians on a variety of topics are encouraged to read *The Christian Theology Reader*, edited by Alister McGrath.

4.6 Study Questions

1. What is the story behind Constantine's conversion to Christianity and what are some of the major actions that he took after his conversion?

2. What was the primary issue that finally led to the East/West Schism? Besides this specific issue, what were some differences between the Eastern Church and the Western Church?
3. What was the primary reason for the First Crusade? What was used by the Church as a motivator for people to participate in the Crusades?
4. What was the life of Augustine like before his conversion to Christianity? What are some of his most famous works and what are some of his theological contributions?
5. What was the major theological accomplishment of Thomas Aquinas, and what are some of his most famous works?
6. Describe the general belief of Gnosticism. How does this differ from orthodox Christianity? In what sense is Docetism a form of Gnosticism?
7. What is the name of the theologian who first took a scholastic approach to theology? Besides this, what are several other things for which this person is known?
8. What were some of the heretical beliefs of Marcion of Sinope and what were some of the impacts that he had on the orthodox church as a result of him forming his own church?
9. Describe the Arian controversy in terms of its teachings, the arguments put forward by its proponents, its most vigorous opponents, some of the related Latin terminology, and the council that deemed it a heretical belief.
10. Describe the Pelagian heresy in terms of its teachings, the arguments put forward by its proponents, the counter argument by Augustine, and the council that identified Pelagianism as a heresy.

5. Church History: Reformation through Modern Times

Church History is generally divided into the period before the Reformation and the period after the Reformation. The Reformation, of course, refers to the formation of Protestant denominations for the purpose of reforming what was considered corrupt practices of the Roman Catholic church. Early reform efforts are most closely associated with Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, and John Calvin. The approach of this chapter is the same as for the previous chapter on church history; long chronological narratives are avoided. Instead, separate sections are provided for theologically important historical events, theologians, and heresies. To provide context for these topics, a section on the pre-reformation state of Christianity is provided. Although this time period involves a number of theological issues, it was primarily about politics and church corruption. The reader interested purely in theology and not in church history can safely skip the following section.

5.1 Pre-Reformation State of Christianity

This history covered by this section begins several centuries before the Protestant Reformation. The events that occurred during this time set the stage for the Reformation to play out as it did. Certain specifics are elaborated in the Events section below, but this section presents an overall if simplified narrative of major historical trends that resulted in much of western Christendom being open to a split from the Roman Catholic church in the early sixteenth century.

The Black Death ravaged Europe from 1346 to 1353 with a bubonic plague pandemic that killed approximately 50 million people. Estimates are that this was about a third to a half of the European population at the time. Many Christians (most Europeans were Christian at the time) wondered if this tragedy and its associated economic devastation might be God exacting justice on a Church that seemed to have an increasing element of corruption.

The Roman Catholic church (Church) at the time had grown into a political and economic entity in addition to a religious entity. A combination of political and economic factors resulted in many religious positions being sold to the wealthy, a practice known as simony (after Simon Magus, see Acts 8:18). Simony resulted in less-than-pious people holding many high positions in churches and in monasteries. These people often flouted sexual promiscuity, placed their illegitimate children in monasteries, and led conspicuous and indulgent lifestyles.

In addition to the impious lifestyles of many Church leaders, the Church also increasingly emphasized the sale of indulgences, where monetary donations to the Church were said to result in the forgiveness of one's sins and even the forgiveness of deceased loved ones presumed to be in Purgatory. Salvation was therefore a strictly a Church-controlled process. Holy Communion was required for the forgiveness of minor sins (called venial). Confession to a priest and absolution from a priest was required for the forgiveness of major sins (called mortal). The payment of indulgences were optional but were the only way to reduce the duration of one's stay in the cleansing fires of Purgatory.

The combination of Church corruption, Church leader impiety, and a focus on rituals to address personal sin resulted in many Christians not experiencing spiritual fulfillment. This was especially true for Gerard Groote (1340–1384), a Dutch deacon and theologian. Groote started a religious movement called *Devotio Moderna* (Modern Devotion), which emphasized the importance of pious living including personal humility, obedience, simplicity of life, and community with others pursuing a Christlike life. Based on the principles of *Devotio Moderna*, Groote also founded the Brethren of the Common Life, a religious organization where men lived together communally, gave up their material possessions, and devoted every waking hour to prayer, preaching, the study of scripture, copying manuscripts, and performing work required to support the community. A female equivalent organization was also established called the Sisters of the Common Life.

The practical theology of *Devotio Moderna* was captured by Thomas à Kempis (c.1380–1471) in his book *The Imitation of Christ*. Kempis was a German-Dutch priest and had encountered the Brethren of the Common Life when attending a Latin school in Deventer from ages 12 to 18. After leaving school, Thomas went to the nearby city of Zwolle, where his brother Johan was the prior of the Monastery of Mount St. Agnes. This monastic community was founded by disciples of Groote and was the monastic equivalent of a Brethren community. Thomas joined St. Agnes in 1406, was eventually ordained a priest, and became subprior in 1429.

Kempis started writing what would become *The Imitation of Christ* in 1418. At this time, he had the responsibility of instructing novices. To aid in this task, Kempis wrote four booklets between 1418 and 1427. These booklets were later collected and named after the title of the first chapter of the first booklet. The four booklets that make up *Imitation* provide spiritual instruction on how to live a life in accordance with the principles of *Devotio Moderna*. They are titled “Helpful Counsels of the Spiritual Life,” “Directives for the Interior Life,” “On Interior Consolation,” and “On the Blessed Sacrament.”

Although *Imitation* was not overtly critical of Roman Catholicism, it was initially read in the context of *Devotio Moderna* and therefore highlighted the contrast between a Christlike life as compared to the impious lives of many priests, bishops, monks, friars, and oftentimes the Pope. It was widely read and was highly influential at the time. *Imitation* continues to be highly influential today. It has been translated from its original Latin into almost as many languages as the Bible and has been the most widely read Christian devotional book apart from the Bible. Specific major figures who say that they were impacted by *Imitation* include St. Ignatius of Loyola, Erasmus of Rotterdam, John Wesley, and Saint Thérèse of Lisieux.

The *Devotio Moderna* movement was focused on individuals pursuing a pious and Christlike life while still being a member of the Church in good standing. But there were also efforts to reform the Church itself. The Reformation proper is understood to have begun with Martin Luther, but there were several important “proto-reformers” that led up to Luther. The most significant of these were John Wycliffe (c.1330–1384) and Jan Hus (1370–1415).

John Wycliffe was an English theologian, Oxford professor, and priest. He wrote extensively, including on topics that challenged Church practices and certain aspects of Church theology. His biggest behavioral critique was the accumulation of excessive wealth by the Church, monks, and friars. He also condemned the related practices of simony and the selling of indulgences. Theologically, Wycliff believed that the doctrine of transubstantiation (see p. 193) was idolatrous and unscriptural. He also believed that the Bible should be read directly by all Christians and advanced this position by translating the Latin Vulgate



into English, resulting in the Wycliffe Bible. This translation was used in preaching by Wycliffe's followers, who were called Lollards.⁵³ Wycliffe is widely considered the first reformer and is commonly referred to as the Morningstar of the Reformation.

Jan Hus was a Czech theologian and priest. Hus was strongly influenced by Wycliffe and preached against many of the same Church practices such as simony, the sale of indulgences, and the doctrine of transubstantiation. Hus was excommunicated for his teaching by Pope Alexander V but was given the promise of safe conduct to defend himself at the Council of Constance in 1415. Hus refused to disavow his views and, in violation of the promise of safe conduct, was burned at the stake for heresy. Hus's execution resulted in his followers, called Hussites, initiating a series of civil wars between the Hussites and Roman Catholic forces.

These Bohemian civil wars, called the Hussite Wars, started in 1419 and lasted until 1434.

The Council of Constance was not called primarily to try Hus. Rather, it was called to address the issue of having three claimants to the papacy: Gregory XII at Rome, Benedict XIII at Avignon, and John XXIII. The period of multiple papal claimants is called the Great Schism (see below in Events). When none were willing to step down, the Council of Constance was called and declared that the rulings of an ecumenical council supersede the authority of the Pope (or popes). This allowed the Council of Constance to depose the existing papal claimants and to elect a single new Pope, Martin V.

The view that the authority of an ecumenical council is higher than the authority of the Pope is called conciliarism. Although the conciliar movement started primarily to address the Great Schism, it also involved the hope of Church reform. These conciliar reform concerns initially included both papal abuses of power and the doctrinal authority of council rulings versus papal decrees. But reform through conciliarism was not to be as clearly evidenced by the Council of Constance. As mentioned previously, this council burned Hus at the stake for his reform positions. In addition, the Council posthumously declared Wycliffe a heretic due to his reform positions, ordered all of his writings to be burned, and ordered that his remains be exhumed from holy ground, burned, and disposed (they were dispersed in the River Swift). Furthermore, subsequent Popes fought



Jan Hus

(Wikimedia Commons)

vigorously against conciliarism for about a century and eventually won the battle. Conciliarism was finally condemned at the Fifth Lateran Council (1512–1517).

Overt reform efforts did not occur for about another century, no doubt discouraged by the treatment of Wycliffe and Hus at Constance. But in the early sixteenth century, two figures arose who both aggressively pursued Church reforms. These two men are Erasmus of Rotterdam (c.1466–1536) and Martin Luther (1483–1546), whose reform efforts occurred at the same time but used very different approaches.

Desiderius Erasmus was born in Rotterdam around 1466 to a priest and the daughter of a physician. Although Erasmus's parents could not legally marry (priests could not marry), they still lived as a loving family and provided Erasmus with an excellent education starting at age six. At age nine, Erasmus and his older brother Peter were sent to Deventer to attend one of the best Latin schools in the Netherlands that was affiliated with St. Lebuin's Church. This was the same school that Thomas à Kempis had attended and where he was exposed to the teachings of the Brethren of the Common Life.

In 1483 when Erasmus was about 17, both of his parents died from the bubonic plague. Erasmus and his brother were then transferred to a less expensive school at 's-Hertogenbosch, which was run by the Brethren. It was here that Erasmus was further exposed to the Christian life of *Devotio Moderna* and to Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*. The Brethren and Kempis's focus on piety strongly influenced Erasmus, resulting in a lifelong focus on inner spirituality as opposed to outward religious ritual.

After a year at 's-Hertogenbosch, Erasmus started the process of becoming an Augustinian monk at the monastery in Stein. He took his vows about a year later and was eventually ordained as a priest. There is not room here to present the fascinating life of Erasmus from this point forward. But suffice to say that he became a leading figure in the western European humanist movement, which focused on educating people based on classical Latin, Greek, and patristic texts. In his humanist efforts, Erasmus taught himself Greek, translated many Greek classics into Latin, and became very well-known and respected.

In 1509, Erasmus travelled to Rome and became acquainted with many of the powerful associates of Pope Julius. This included Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici, who would later become Pope Leo X. During his time in Rome, Erasmus was exposed to the excesses and impious lifestyles of many high Church officials. Such excesses had been previously criticized in a scholastic manner by people such as Wycliffe and Hus, but Erasmus used a different and far more effective tactic: ridicule.

Soon after his stay in Rome, Erasmus began an essay that parodied what he observed in Rome. This satire was first published in 1511 and was called *In Praise of Folly*. Michael Massing describes its criticisms as follows:

Erasmus reproaches bishops for being too busy feeding themselves to think about caring for their sheep, cardinals for failing to understand that they are the stewards rather than the lords of spiritual affairs, and, finally and most fiercely, the popes. If the supreme pontiffs were to recall that they are Christ's representatives on earth, they would give up their wealth, honors, power won by victories, dispensations and indulgences, and horses, mules, and carts, and offer instead vigils, fasts, prayers, and sermons.⁵⁴

In Praise of Folly was hugely popular and greatly diminished the common people's respect for Church officials, including the Pope, throughout Europe. Many consider its publication the start of the Protestant Reformation, as the Reformation could not have happened without widespread dissatisfaction with the Church and the behavior of its leaders.

In studying Greek, Erasmus became aware of many grammatical issues in the Latin Vulgate. He therefore undertook the huge effort of creating a Greek NT from original manuscripts and a new Latin translation based on the original Greek (see p. 24). Erasmus also included copious translation notes discussing the original Greek and his choices for translation. Erasmus was highly critical of Church excesses but was always loyal to the papacy and wanted the Church to reform from within. However, his NT translation gave others theological ammunition. Examples include the following:

- In Mt 16:18, Christ says to Peter, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." Since Peter's name in Greek means rock (*Petros*), the Church maintained that Peter and the succeeding bishops of Rome were the Christ-ordained head of the Church. Erasmus explains that the original Greek indicates that the "rock" in this verse likely refers to faith in Christ. That is, the Church is built on faith in Christ, not Peter and his successors. This interpretation eliminates any scriptural foundation for the papacy.
- In the Vulgate, Mt 3:2 reads, "*Poenitentiam agitate: appropinquavit enim regnum caelorum.*" The English equivalent is, "Do penance: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Erasmus pointed out that the Greek work that Jerome translated into *poenitentian* is *metanoia* (μετάνοια), which means to repent and not to do penance. This

change eliminates any scriptural foundation for the sacrament of penance.

- Although not in Jerome's initial translation, some later versions of the Vulgate contained the following added words in 1 Jn 5:8 (added words in brackets): "*Quoniam tres sunt, qui testimonium dant [in caelo: Pater, Verbum, et Spiritus Sanctus: et hi tres unum sunt. Et tres sunt, qui testimonium dant in terra]: spiritus, et aqua, et sanguis: et hi tres unum sunt.*" The English equivalent of these added words are: "in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." This phrase, referred to as the Johannine Comma (Latin: *Comma Johanneum*), was the main scriptural basis for the doctrine of the trinity. Erasmus did not include these words in his first two NT editions since they did not appear in any of the earliest Greek manuscripts. However, Erasmus included them in his third edition after being accused of reviving the Arian heresy. Later, the Johannine Comma was commonly included in *textus receptus* Bible translations including the KJV and the NKJV.

And so, Erasmus was a respected scholar who pointed out Church excesses and diminished the status of Vatican officials, priests, monks, and friars. With this in mind, we now turn from Erasmus to Martin Luther, who was about 17 years his younger.

Luther was born in 1483 and was raised in the copper mining town of Mansfeld. He attended Latin schools in Mansfeld and then began attending schools run by the Brethren of the Common Life at age 13. At age 17, Luther enrolled at the University of Erfurt and received his master's degree in 1505. Per his father's wishes, Luther then enrolled in law school but soon quit and joined St. Augustine's Monastery.

Luther was ordained a priest in 1507 and began teaching theology at the University of Wittenberg the following year. He received a bachelor's degree in biblical studies in 1508, another bachelor's degree in Peter Lombard's *Sentences* in 1509, and his Doctor of Theology in 1512.

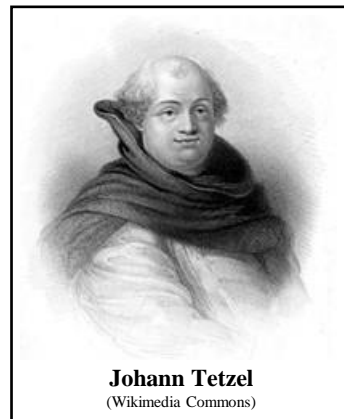
During this time, Luther was obsessed with his own sin and the need for extensive penance sessions to ensure the forgiveness of these sins. Between 1510 and 1520, Luther's lectured on Psalms, Hebrews, Romans, and Galatians. In developing these lectures, Luther gradually changed his understanding of mankind's sin and how to become righteous in the eyes of God. Instead of sin being forgiven through the work of penance, Luther realized that God grants the free gift of righteousness through faith by grace, with no involvement of the sinful person whatsoever. This understanding would later become a theological foundation of Protestantism.

But Luther's belief in justification by faith alone was not what initially caused friction between him and the Church.

In the time of Luther, the sale of indulgences was a major source of revenue for the Church. This practice had been criticized by the likes of Wycliffe and Hus, but its abuse had escalated even further. The pope at the time, Leo X, had depleted the Vatican's savings, largely due to the massive costs being incurred in the rebuilding of St. Peter's cathedral. To raise funds, he created hundreds of new Vatican positions that were sold for exorbitant prices. He also greatly expanded the sale of indulgences. Michael Massing writes:

These [new indulgences] came in many varieties. There were confessional letters that freed the penitent from having to confess to a local priest. There were dispensations that allowed the substitution of other good works for vows that had been made in haste and were difficult to keep. There were the ever popular "butter letters," which permitted the consumption of eggs, milk, and cheese during fast days. There were even indulgences that sanctioned the possession of illegally acquired goods if the rightful owners had died or could not be found.⁵⁵

Near Wittenberg, these indulgences were being aggressively sold by Johann Tetzel, a Dominican friar. Luther's new views on justification by faith alone made him question the value of indulgences, especially when purchased by people who could not afford them. Luther therefore proposed an academic debate on indulgences by drafting his "95 theses" and, as tradition understands it, posted them on the doors of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg. Although Luther's intent was simply to organize a debate on the issue of indulgences, his 95 theses were quickly printed and distributed widely throughout Germany and the rest of Europe. This started a pamphlet war between Luther and Tetzel, where one would write a pamphlet criticizing the other and the other would respond in kind. These pamphlet wars made Luther a household name and brought him to the attention of the Vatican.



Johann Tetzel
(Wikimedia Commons)

There is much to Luther's story that cannot be told here. Suffice to say that the Pope demanded from Luther a full and unconditional recanting of his writings and Luther categorically refused. Luther was therefore condemned at the Diet of Worms in 1521. Frederick the Wise of Saxony feared for Luther's safety and organized to have Luther kidnapped while he was travelling back to Wittenberg. Luther was secretly taken to

Wartburg Castle, where he remained for about 18 months. During this time, Luther created his German translation of the NT from Erasmus's Latin translation.

Luther's excommunication and condemnation by the Church set off a string of peasant revolts that ultimately resulted in self-governing cities and regions gradually declaring their religious independence from the Roman Catholic church. Erasmus, who had previously written Luther letters of encouragement, was petitioned for support from both sides, but tried his best to remain neutral.

And so, Luther completed what Wycliffe and Hus has started a century before, some say prophetically. In the Czech language, Hus literally means goose. While waiting to be burned at the stake, Hus prophesized, "Now they roast a goose, but in a hundred years they shall hear a swan singing, which they will not be able to do away with."⁵⁶ Luther was strongly influenced by Hus and believed that he himself was the fulfillment of this prophesy, as his condemnation at the Diet of Worms happened about 100 years after Hus was killed.

With this summary of the pre-Reformation state of Christianity complete, this chapter now continues with key theological events, starting about 200 years before Luther and Erasmus.

5.2 Events

The section includes the major events that led up to the actual Reformation in addition to the events that occurred afterwards. Just prior to the Reformation, the Roman Catholic church was experiencing many political difficulties including controversies regarding the papacy and the secession of the Eastern Orthodox church. Both of these issues set the stage for the Reformation by placing doubts about whether the church needs to be led by the Bishop of Rome (i.e., the Pope).

The Popes of Avignon (1309–1377). At the beginning of the 14th century, the seat of Roman Catholicism was Rome, and the Pope was Boniface VIII. Boniface became engaged in a power struggle with King Phillip IV of France. Philip ended up calling for Boniface to be deposed, resulting in Boniface excommunicating Phillip. Phillip supporters then broke into the papal summer palace at Anagni and physically assaulted Boniface, ultimately resulting in his death. This led to France asserting political control over the papacy, with the next seven popes residing at Avignon rather than Rome. During this time, the appointment of cardinals was almost exclusively French (112 out of 114 appointments). The time of the popes residing in Avignon is sometimes referred to as the Babylonian Captivity of the

Church. This is because this period lasted about 70 years, the same duration of the Babylonian captivity of the Jews as told in the OT (Jer 29:10). The French Pope Gregory XI ultimately decided to relocate back to Rome in 1377, but soon thereafter died in 1388. This precipitated the Great Schism.

The Great Schism (1378–1417). After Pope Gregory's death, the Roman people were worried about another French pope being elected. They were relieved with the selection of Urban VI, an Italian. However, Urban quickly alienated the French cardinals and showed signs of mental instability. The French cardinals relocated back to Avignon from Rome, decided that the election of Urban was invalid, and elected Clement VII, a Swiss. There were now two popes, and their remained two popes for almost forty years. This period is referred to as the Great Schism. At the end of the Schism, the pope in Avignon was Gregory XII and the pope in Rome was Benedict XIII. In 1414, the Council of Constance was assembled to address the Great Schism. This resulted in Gregory's resignation and Benedict being deposed. The Council then elected Martin V. There was a single pope again and the Great Schism was healed.

Iberian Colonialism (~1415–1850). Spain and Portugal colonized much of the Americas and Africa. The first African conquest was by Portugal in 1415. The first American conquest started with Christopher Columbus landing in the New World in 1492. Today, the number of Roman Catholics currently residing in regions colonized by Spain and Portugal is over 700 million.

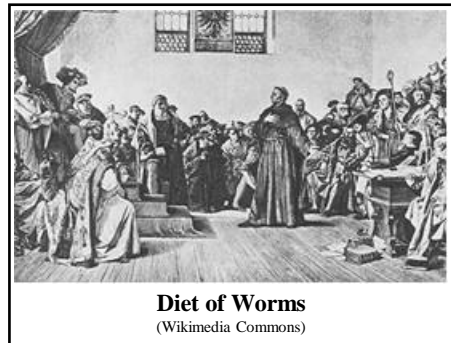
The Erasmus Bible Translation (1516). Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus was a Dutch scholar and theologian. He is most remembered for using a variety of Greek manuscripts to create a new and scholarly rendition of the NT. The Erasmus Bible has had a significant influence on many subsequent translations. For example, Martin Luther used the Erasmus Bible as the basis for his German translation, and William Tyndale used it as the basis for his English translation. It was also the primary source of the translation committee for the King James Version. Bible translations stemming from the Erasmus Bible are referred to as *textus receptus* (received text).

Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses (1517). Martin Luther's posting of his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the door of All Saints' Church and other churches in Wittenberg is largely seen as the start of the Protestant Reformation. At the time, Luther was professor of moral theology at the University of Wittenberg, and simply wanted to engage in a scholarly debate on the efficacy and practice of the sale of indulgences by the church. But it was not to be. In January of 1518, some friends of Luther translated the Ninety-five Theses from Latin into German and copies

spread quickly throughout Germany and later throughout France and England. Luther's Ninety-Five Theses were then forwarded to Rome to check for heretical content. The Pope eventually demanded that Luther retract a substantial portion of his writings. When Luther refused, he was excommunicated and subsequently founded the Lutheran church.

Line of Demarcation (1493). In 1493, Pope Alexander VI declared that the non-Christian world would be divided between Spain and Portugal with a line of demarcation running north-to-south though the Atlantic ocean. Spain had rights to land to the west of the line, which included most of the New World. Portugal had rights to the area that is now Brazil, along with Africa and India. This allocation had a large impact on the missionary spread of Christianity, with Spain focusing on the West and Portugal focusing on the East.

Martin Luther and the Diet of Worms (1521). Martin Luther's writings against the Roman Catholic sacramental system finally resulted in his excommunication by Leo X. The judicial system of the state therefore summoned Luther to trial at Worms. Luther had expected a fair trial but received a summary condemnation and an order to renounce his teachings. Luther famously replied, "I will not retract one iota, so Christ help me." Luther was declared a criminal but was then kidnapped by friendly forces. They took him in secret to Wartburg Castle in the Thuringian forest, likely saving his life. In his ten months at Wartburg, Luther completed his German translation of the NT from his own copy of the Erasmus Greek NT.



Diet of Worms
(Wikimedia Commons)

Swiss Reformation (1525–1536). In the 16th century, what is Switzerland today was organized as a confederation of thirteen independent political entities called cantons. The Zürich canton, under the leadership of Ulrich Zwingli, was the first canton to secede from Roman Catholicism. Zürich therefore became an early advocate of Protestantism and encouraged other cantons to also become Protestant. By 1529, three more cantons were Protestant with several more giving it serious consideration. The history of Geneva is more complex as it was not a canton at this time, but it ended up becoming a canton and then formally became Protestant in 1536.

English Reformation (1529). In 1527, King Henry VIII appealed to Pope Clement VII for an annulment of his dynastic marriage to Catherine of Aragon. The Pope refused, resulting in the English parliament passing

a series of laws starting in 1529 that abolished papal authority in England, established the Church of England, and made the king its head. All religious disputes within the Church of England would now be settled by the king. Liturgy was standardized through the *Book of Common Prayer*, first published in 1549. The Church of England was briefly dissolved when Queen Mary I (later known as Bloody Mary) returned England to papal authority in 1554. After her death and succession by the young Queen Elizabeth, the Church of England was restored in 1559, including a return to the *Book of Common Prayer*.

Society of Jesus (1540–present). St. Ignatius of Loyola is the founder of the Society of Jesus (popularly known as the Jesuits), which was approved by Pope Paul III in 1540. Ignatius had a strong focus on education. Only the most gifted candidates were recruited, who were required to spend two years as novices before undertaking 10 years of education and training. The Jesuits had a strong impact through their development of schools and universities throughout Europe, and through their global missionary activities. The Jesuits were also known for their efforts to stop the spread of Protestantism and to reverse it where possible. Today, the Jesuits have almost 200 universities globally and about 14,000 members.



Copernicus's Heliocentric Theory (1543). Nicolaus Copernicus developed a model of the solar system where the earth and planets orbit the sun rather than the sun and planets orbiting the earth. This model was convincingly presented in his work *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*, which was published just before his death in 1543. At the time, many people believed that a literal interpretation of the Bible taught an earth-centered solar system. The Copernican theory, later confirmed and refined by Kepler and Galileo, led many people to consider the possibility that the Bible is true in the sense that it describes how things appear, but does not always describe things in an accurate scientific manner. This position is reminiscent of Augustine's concept of "accommodation," where the Bible needs to sometimes use accommodating language due to limitations of the human mind.

Council of Trent (1545–1563). The council of Trent was called by the Roman Catholic Church in response to the Protestant Reformation. The council asserted the beliefs of the Roman Catholic church, but also specifically classified many Protestant beliefs as heretical. The council affirmed that the Roman Catholic church is the ultimate interpreter of Scripture, and

that church tradition has equally authoritative with the Bible. Excommunicable offences were identified as the denial of the efficacy of infant baptism, belief in justification by faith alone, denial of the seven sacraments, denial of transubstantiation of the Eucharistic elements, and many others.

Scottish Reformation (1560). The Scottish Reformation of 1560 resulted in a large number of churches seceding from the Roman Catholic church and forming the national Church of Scotland. The Reformation movement was led by John Knox, a Scot who had previously lived in Geneva at the same time as John Calvin and was thereby familiar with Reformed theology. Upon returning to Scotland, Knox led the Reformation and helped to write the Scots Confession of 1560. There were subsequently a number of large secessions from the Church of Scotland including the First Secession (1733), the Second Secession (1761), and the Disruption of 1843. The Church of Scotland required its clergy to strictly interpret and teach the contents of the confession (first the Scots Confession and later the Westminster Confession). Churches that seceded allowed for “loose subscription,” resulting in a certain amount of theological flexibility.



John Knox
(Wikimedia Commons)

Wars of Religion (1562–1598). In the wake of the Protestant reformation, there were growing tensions between Roman Catholics and Protestants, especially in France. The breaking point occurred when the Catholic Duke of Guise massacred Reformed worshipers at a church service at Vassy-sur-Blaise in 1562. This resulted in a series of civil wars between the Protestant House of Bourbon and the Catholic House of Guise, called the Wars of Religion. The wars came to an end with Edict of Nantes in 1598, which granted Protestants a measure of toleration. But this status was revoked with the Edict of Fontainebleau in 1685, which outlawed Protestantism in France.

Synod of Dort (1618–1619). The Synod of Dort was an assembly of European Reformed churches called by the Dutch Reformed church for the purpose of addressing Arminianism. The result was a complete condemnation of Arminian teachings including conditional election, unlimited atonement, resistible grace, and the possibility of lapse from grace. Many believe that the outcome of this Synod was determined in advance, and that Arminianism was not given a fair chance to defend itself.

Plymouth Colony (1620). Plymouth Colony was the third permanent English colony in America (after Newfoundland and Jamestown) and was the first permanent English Colony in New England. Its founding

members, commonly referred to as the Pilgrims, sailed across the Atlantic on the Mayflower to escape religious persecution. The Pilgrims started off in England where they set up an independent congregationalist church under the leadership of Robert Browne. Browne was arrested and, upon his release, relocated his followers to the Netherlands. After several years in the Netherlands, the Pilgrims set sail for the New World.

Massachusetts Bay Colony (1629). In 1629, John Winthrop obtained a royal charter to establish the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Winthrop was a member of the Puritans, a group that wanted to “purify” the Church of England of any remnants of Roman Catholic influence. The first group of colonists arrived in 1630 and numbered around 700. The English Civil War soon began, resulting in more than 21,000 Puritans relocating to New England in what is known as the Great Migration. The Puritans and the Pilgrims were different in that the Puritans remained part of the Church of England while the Pilgrims did not.



**John Winthrop of the
Massachusetts Bay Colony**
(Wikimedia Commons)

Establishment of Providence (1636). John Winthrop insisted that the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay Colony separate from the Church of England. They refused and had Winthrop expelled. Winthrop travelled to the tip of Narragansett Bay, purchased some land from the local native Americans, established the new settlement of Providence, and formed the first Baptist Church in 1638.

The Enlightenment (~1637–1800). The Enlightenment (also called the Age of Reason) was an intellectual and philosophical movement that occurred in Europe. Many date the start of the Enlightenment to the publication of René Descartes’ *Discourse on the Method* in 1637, with its famous quotation “I think therefore I am” (Latin: *cogito ergo sum*). The Enlightenment focused on rational thinking, empirical evidence, and the scientific method. It also valued personal liberty, societal progress, religious toleration, constitutional government, and separation of church and state. The Enlightenment led many to question the miraculous elements in the Bible and to focus on the practical moral aspects of religion. Many others became Deists, who believe in a greater God but rely strictly on reason when making moral decisions.

Peace of Westphalia (1648). This refers to two treaties that were signed to end the Thirty-Years War, a war that resulted in the death of eight million Europeans. On one side of the war were the Roman Catholic

Hapsburg rulers. On the other side were the Protestant powers plus France (although France was Catholic, it was strongly anti-Hapsburg). The Peace of Westphalia treaties allowed each imperial state to choose its own religion, Catholics and Lutherans were to be treated equally under the law, and Calvinism was given legal recognition as an official religion. The Pope at the time (Innocent X), predictably, was very unhappy with this outcome and declared the treaties empty of meaning and effect for all time.

The Communist Manifesto (1848). The Communist Manifesto was commissioned by the Communist League, was written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and was first published in London in 1848. It is a condemnation of capitalism, which it claims leads to exploitation of the working class (i.e., the proletariat). With regards to religion, the Manifesto states, “But Communism abolishes eternal truths, it abolishes all religion, and all morality, instead of constituting them on a new basis; it therefore acts in contradiction to all past historical experience.” All states that were to adopt communism were extremely hostile to organized religion, often banning its practice.

The Origin of Species (1859). This work by Charles Darwin has the complete title of *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. It presents his theory of natural selection, where new populations have variable characteristics and individuals with characteristics most suitable for the environment have a higher probability of surviving and passing on these characteristics to offspring. Over time, populations are thereby able to adapt to their environment. Darwin then theorized that over long periods of time this process could lead to the generation of new species. *The Origin of Species* was read widely and was received in different ways by the religious community. Fundamentalist rejected evolution as they felt it was not compatible with the creation stories in Genesis. Other Christians saw evolution as the manner in which God created animals, some believing that this included mankind and some not. But the biggest impact of this theory with regards to religion was its adoption as a secular substitute religion where the evolutionary process eliminates the need for God.

Vatican I (1869–1870). This council was convoked by Pope Pius IX and is most famous for its affirmation of the primacy of the Pope. It asserted that the teachings of the Pope are infallible when he is speaking in the discharge of his office (Latin: *ex cathedra*) on



Engraving of the First Vatican Council
(Wikimedia Commons)

topics concerning faith or morals that are directed to the entire Roman Catholic church. Although there are many Catholics who object to this doctrine, it has only been asserted twice. The first was when Pope Pius IX declared the immaculate conception of Mary in 1854, before the official decree of Vatican I. The second was when Pope Pius XII declared Mary's assumption in 1950.

Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901). The Boxer Rebellion was a hostile reaction of the Chinese to foreigners. Over 50,000 members of a secret Chinese society (called Boxers) and 70,000 imperial troops attacked institutions thought to be foreign or under foreign influence. Western missionaries were specifically targeted. Over 200 foreign missionaries and tens of thousands of Chinese Christians were slaughtered.

Russian Revolution (1905–1907). When the Russian Revolution began on Bloody Sunday (Jan. 22, 1905), the Russian Orthodox Church was the official state religion. The revolution resulted in greatly increased freedoms for the general populace, including new religious liberties. This resulted in the rapid growth of Christians not affiliated with the state church. The Bolsheviks then assumed power in 1917 and declared that the Russian Orthodox Church would no longer be the official state religion. The Soviets then assumed power in 1922, greatly constrained the practice of religion, and established a policy of state atheism with the goal of eradicating all religious practice.

Vatican II (1962–1965). Vatican II was called for by Pope John XXIII with the purpose of updating the church to better align with modern times. This council paved the way for better Catholic-Protestant relations by defining the Church as all people of God, recognizing that non-Catholic Christians are part of this Church, and recognizing the primacy of Scripture for Christian theology and living. It also allowed for Mass to be performed in local languages rather than exclusively in Latin.

Tiananmen Square (1989). This refers to a pro-democracy demonstration in Tiananmen Square in Beijing that was led by students and was brutally suppressed by the Chinese government. The massacre (rough estimates are 200 dead and 3000 injured) had the unintended effect of many Chinese losing faith in the communist party and turning to Christianity. The “house church movement” followed, where Christians secretly gather in homes to worship and study the Bible. It is



Tiananmen Square
(Wikimedia Commons)

estimated that the house church movement now consists of more than 100 million Chinese Christians.

5.3 Theologians

With the Reformation came a new era in theology. No longer was dogma and doctrine the sole responsibility of the Roman Catholic church. Theologians were now free to re-examine and interpret Scripture from scratch, reconsider the traditions of the church, and choose to include other sources of authority in their theology such as personal religious experience. As such, most of the theologians discussed below are Protestant. Catholic theology has certainly been active as well since the Reformation, but most of the significantly new theological concepts come from Protestant theologians.

Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556). St. Ignatius was a Roman Catholic priest and theologian who was also the founder of the religious order the Society of Jesus, whose members are referred to as Jesuits (see Society of Jesus above in Events above). As a theologian, St. Ignatius developed a set of spiritual formation exercises consisting of meditations and prayers, including the Examen Prayer (see p. 435). These exercises were developed for lay Christians seeking to deepen their Christian faith and were to be practiced over a month-long period under the supervision of a spiritual advisor.

Martin Luther (1483–1546). Martin Luther is considered the Father of Protestantism, and his theology is the basis for Lutheranism. (See Martin Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses in Events above). He was a priest, theologian, author, hymnwriter, and professor. As a theologian, his major breaks from the Catholic church were that salvation is by faith alone (*sola fide*, as opposed to faith plus good works), that the only authority is Scripture (*sola scriptura*, as opposed to Scripture plus church tradition), that each individual can read and interpret Scripture for themselves, and that clergy can marry. Luther is also known for his “theology of the cross,” where Christ’s death on the cross is the only source of understanding for how God saves fallen mankind. Luther kept worship services similar to the Roman Catholic Mass, believing that anything not forbidden in the Bible is potentially acceptable. This is opposed to many other Protestant denominations that only included worship elements specifically described in the Bible. Lutheranism became the state religion of numerous states of northern Germany, and then spread through much of Scandinavia, Estonia and Latvia, and Lithuania.

Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560). Philip Melanchthon was a professor and theologian and a close collaborator with Martin Luther in developing Lutheran theology. He recorded Lutheran doctrine in his systematic theology treatise *Loci Communes* (or *Loci Communes Rerum Theologicarum Seu Hypotyposes Theologicae*), of which Luther said that there is no better book than the Holy Bible. Luther's high opinion of *Loci Communes* is most likely why he did not write his own theological treatise. Melanchthon was also the main author of the *Augsburg Confession*, which is the primary confession of faith of the Lutheran Church and one of the most important documents of the Protestant Reformation. Key articles of the *Augsburg Confession* include salvation by faith alone, that baptism is necessary, that Christ's real presence is in the Eucharistic elements, that people do not have free choice when it comes to salvation, that there is only one holy Christian church, and that this church is found wherever the gospel is preached in its truth and purity and the sacraments are administered according to the Gospel.

Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531). Zwingli was a Swiss priest in the canton of Zürich and the first major Protestant reformer after Luther, starting soon after Luther's break from the Roman Catholic Church. Zwingli likely developed his theological positions independent of Luther but became more active in his reformation efforts after being exposed to Luther's positions and seeing large points of agreement. However, Zwingli had a much more aggressive vision of a Reformed church when compared to Luther. Instead of eliminating elements of worship contrary to Biblical teaching, Zwingli advocated only the inclusion of elements specifically taught in the Bible. He also viewed the sacraments as simply public proclamations of faith, resulting in his famous clash with Luther over the real presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements (Luther believed in real presence and Zwingli did not). Zwingli also radically changed Sunday worship service from Mass to expository preaching with a focus on exegetical examinations of biblical passages. He also advocated for the removal of all statues of saints in churches, resulting in a broader iconoclastic movement. Zwingli's views received pushback from the Roman Catholic church, but Zwingli posthumously prevailed and Zurich severed its ties with the Roman Catholic church in 1554, three years after Zwingli's death. Zwingli was killed in a battle between Protestants and Catholics while serving as an army chaplain.

John Calvin (1509–1564). John Calvin was a French theologian and the most important second-generation Reformer (with Luther and Zwingli being the most important in the first generation). Calvin was originally trained as a lawyer and moved to Switzerland after breaking with the Roman Catholic Church in 1530. He initially moved to Basel and later settled

in Geneva, where he participated in Reformed efforts and regularly preached sermons. It was here in Geneva that Calvin published the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which is considered one of the most influential works ever written related to Protestantism. *Institutes* is the doctrinal basis for Reformed churches and what is commonly referred to as Calvinism. Calvinism is often summarized by its five major points represented by the acronym TULIP: T for total depravity, U for unconditional election, L for limited atonement, I for irresistible grace, and P for the perseverance of the saints. Calvin's reform efforts were ultimately successful, and the canton of Geneva broke from the Roman Catholic Church in 1541.

Theodore Beza (1519–1605). Theodore Beza was a French theologian who was a close student of John Calvin. He spent most of his life in Geneva and was the successor of Calvin as its Protestant leader. He and Calvin founded the Geneva Academy in 1559, which developed and taught Reformed doctrine. Beza also served as the chief pastor of the Geneva church until his death in 1605. Beza wrote extensively on Reformed theology and, for the most part, followed Calvin's position in the *Institutes*. But some distinguish Calvin's more pastoral presentation of doctrine with Beza's academic and systematic approach, including Beza's strong emphasis on predestination and the absolute sovereignty of God. These were also the positions taken in Calvin's writings but with a much lower prominence. Reformed theology today is better thought of as the theology of Beza rather than Calvin. This is why it can be confusing to refer to Reformed theology as Calvinism.

John Knox (1514–1572). The Scottish Reformation of 1560 resulted in a large number of churches seceding from the Roman Catholic church and forming the national Church of Scotland. The Reformation movement was led by John Knox, a Scot who had previously lived in Geneva at the same time as John Calvin and was thereby familiar with Reformed theology. Upon returning to Scotland, Knox led the Reformation and helped to write the *Scots Confession* of 1560.

Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609). Jacobus Arminius was a Dutch minister, professor, and theologian during the Protestant Reformation period. He developed a theology that is the basis for Arminianism and the Dutch Remonstrant movement. His theology is also substantially the basis for Wesleyanism and the theology of the Methodist church. Of the five points of Reformed theology, Arminius disagreed with the following three: unconditional election, limited atonement, and irresistible grace. Reformed theology teaches that Christ died for the elect only, and that the elect cannot resist grace. Arminianism teaches that Christ died for all, and it is up to each individual to either accept or reject grace. Arminianism was

codified shortly after the death of Arminius with the publication of the *Five Articles of Remonstrance* in 1610. These include conditional election; unlimited atonement; total depravity; prevenient grace and resistible grace; and the conditional preservation of the saints. The Synod of Dort was called in 1618–1916 (see Synod of Dort in events) largely to condemn Arminianism, resulting in the persecution of Arminian pastors who remained in the Netherlands.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758). Edwards was an American revivalist preacher and theologian. He is perhaps best known for his role in the First Great Awakening, which was a non-denominational evangelical movement where large crowds would gather for extemporaneous preaching, typically in outdoor settings. But Edwards was also an important American theologian who defended Reformed theology against Arminians and Unitarians, but at the same time argued for some modifications. Edwards' work was continued by Joseph Bellamy and Samuel Hopkins, resulting in a theology first known as Hopkinsianism and later New England Theology. Some of the modifications that New England Theology made to Reformed theology include (1) a different understanding of original guilt; and (2) making a strict distinction between the natural ability and the moral inability of a person to follow Christ.

John Wesley (1703–1791). John Wesley was an English theologian and evangelist who was originally ordained as an Anglican priest. He spent several years evangelizing in Savannah, Georgia, and then returned to England and joined a Moravian religious society. Around 1738, Wesley experienced a religious conversion experience and shortly thereafter started his own ministry, largely based on Arminian theology. His primary theological differences with Arminianism are the possibility of Christians living a sin-free life (called Perfectionism or Entire Sanctification) and the efficacy of sacraments in the process of Christian sanctification (although not for justification). Wesley is also known for recognizing four legitimate sources of doctrine, called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Scripture is the primary source, but it is also appropriate to consider reason, tradition, and personal experience. Followers of Wesley were called Methodists due to the methodical way in which they lived out their Christian life. Wesley always maintained that he was an Anglican, but Methodism became a separate denomination several years after his death.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). Friedrich Schleiermacher was a Prussian pastor, professor, and theologian who made significant contributions to numerous fields of study including hermeneutics, philosophy, and theology. He is commonly referred to as the Father of Liberal Theology, as his system offers a pious alternative to the inductive system of the conservative Reformed tradition. Schleiermacher published his first

great work, *On Religion*, in 1799. He published it anonymously but was soon discovered as the author. The impact of *On Religion* was immense. At the time, rationalism dominated Enlightenment theologians and supernaturalism dominated conservative theologians. *On Religion* was a strong challenge to both positions. Schleiermacher's theology was subjective and focused on achieving a sense of absolute dependence on God. His approach was partly a reaction to Kant's writings on the limits of reason and partly a reaction to the German romanticism emphasis on *sturm und drang* (profound emotional experience), silent reflection, and introspection. Schleiermacher's view was that authority is derived from the direct experience of the grace of God through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Body of Christ. This authority from personal religious experience, according to Schleiermacher, is even higher than Scripture. He also believed in the possibility of redemption after death and therefore universal salvation. In support of these beliefs, Schleiermacher argues that eternal blessedness in Heaven would be impossible knowing certain loved ones are facing eternal torture.

Charles Hodge (1797–1878). Charles Hodge was a Reformed Presbyterian theologian and professor at Princeton Theological Seminary. He was a leading voice for Princeton Theology, which was a very conservative version of Reformed theology. Many of the positions of Hodge have been taken by modern-day Fundamentalists and Evangelicals. His three-volume work on systematic theology (1872–1873) is among the most cited of any in the Reformed tradition. He also had an inestimable impact on the growth of Reformed churches as he instructed more than 3000 ministers over his 50 years at Princeton.

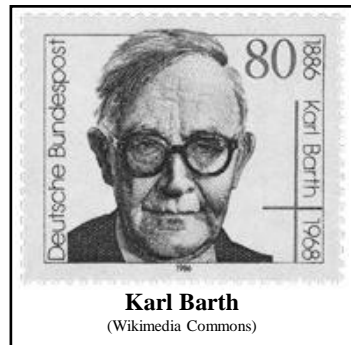
Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855). Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher and theologian who is known as the Father of Existentialism. He was a prolific writer in many areas including organized religion, ethics, psychology, and the philosophy of religion. Kierkegaard's two main contributions to theology relate to subjectivity and faith. With regards to subjectivity, he stressed the importance of distinguishing between objective reality and a person's subjective reaction to this reality. Two people may essentially believe the same thing to be true but respond to that truth in radically different ways. With regards to faith, Kierkegaard believed that true faith must always be accompanied by some measure of doubt, as a certain belief does not require faith. The rational part of a person will always have doubts about spiritual truths, and a "leap of faith" is required to make a commitment. Kierkegaard therefore saw Christians who did not admit of any doubts about Christian doctrine as not having true faith, but merely being incredulous.

Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889). Albrecht Ritschl was a German Protestant theologian. He was strongly influenced by both Luther and Schleiermacher and developed a systematic theology that applied Kant's philosophical works on pure reason to Lutheran theology. There is a strong emphasis on the community of believers in Ritschl's work as he believes that the immediate object of theological knowledge is not the faith of the individual but the faith of the community. Ritschl did not believe in miracles, including the incarnation and the triune God. However, Ritschl felt that the moral instructions of the NT could result in a Christian community forming a Kingdom of God on earth where everyone has faith that one should make good moral decisions. Ritschl therefore places a strong emphasis on ethical instruction and on the development of people in the context of community.

Paul Tillich (1886–1965). Paul Tillich was a German American professor, philosopher and Lutheran theologian who was one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century. Tillich taught at German universities before immigrating to the United States in 1933, where he taught at Union Theological Seminary, Harvard Divinity School, and the University of Chicago. Although an original thinker in many aspects of theology, Tillich is best remembered for his method of correlation, which matches revelatory insights and dogmatic truths to issues facing modern culture. That is, existential questions stemming from psychology and philosophy will often have theological answers based on divine revelation. According to Tillich, philosophy comes up with the questions and theology provides the answers.

Karl Barth (1886–1968). Karl Barth (pronounced Bart) was a Swiss-born pastor, professor, and theologian whose career was primarily in Germany. He was educated in the liberal German theology of his time but became concerned with the outbreak of World War II and how many church leaders and liberal theologians supported the Nazi regime. He therefore initiated a theological movement away from liberalism into what is now called

neoorthodoxy. Neoorthodoxy uses many of the same theological concepts as orthodox theologies such as Reformed and Arminian but does not hold that the Bible is literally true and inerrant. Barth emphasizes the complete unknowable nature of God and uses a dialectical approach to explore seemingly contradictory or paradoxical metaphysical teachings in the Bible. Barth recorded his theology in his massive *Church Dogmatics*



(thirteen volumes and more than 6 million words), which is considered one of the one of the most important theological works of the 20th century. Barth was also a founder of the Confessing Church, a group of theologians and church leaders intent on resisting the Nazi regime's attempt to influence church doctrine. Barth was also author of the *Barmen Declaration*, a document opposing the German Christian movement which was in strong support of Hitler.

Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971). Reinhold Niebuhr was an American professor and theologian who was the driving force in the American neo-orthodox movement just as Karl Barth was in Europe. Theologically, Niebuhr is best known for rejecting Christian idealism and arguing for Christian realism. Niebuhr's position that a realization of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth is impossible due to the sinful nature of mankind and the corrupt tendencies of society, as strongly evidenced by the Holocaust of Hitler and the gulags of Stalin. Christians must therefore be realistic and advocate for compromise political approaches such as government responsibility and balance of power between nations. Realism was in large part a reaction against the Social Gospel Movement, which sought to solve all of problems of evil in the world by applying Christian love and advancing the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

Lewis, C.S. (1898–1963). Clive Staples Lewis is best known for his *The Chronicles of Narnia* books but was also a highly impactful Christian apologist. His most popular apologetic works include *The Screwtape Letters* and *Mere Christianity*, but he also published many others. Lewis rejected Christianity early in life but turned to deism in his early thirties and then to Christianity several years later. He was a professor at Oxford and a member of an informal group called the Inklings, consisting of J.R.R. Tolkien (who was a close friend) and others. Lewis is not considered by many as an academic theologian but did have some original theological ideas such as his theory of atonement as presented in *Mere Christianity* (see Section 8.6). Lewis is also responsible for popularizing the “trilemma” choice regarding Jesus as God. Lewis explains that, based on what Jesus said and taught, He must either be mentally unstable, evil, or our Lord and Savior as He claimed to be.

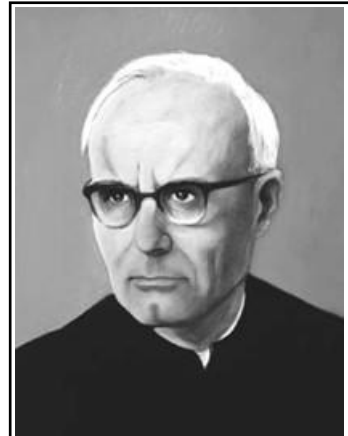
Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945). Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor and theologian who, along with Karl Barth, was a leader of the Confessing Church that was formed to oppose the pro-Hitler German Christian movement. In 1939, Bonhoeffer traveled to the United States to



Dietrich Bonhoeffer
(Wikimedia Commons)

teach at the Union Theological Seminary in New York. It would have been easy for Bonhoeffer to stay in America and avoid all of his difficulties with the Nazi regime, but he shortly returned to Germany, writing to his friend Reinhold Niebuhr that he must “share the trials of this time with my people.” Bonhoeffer was ultimately arrested for being involved in a conspiracy to assassinate Hitler and was executed. Theologically, Bonhoeffer is most known for distinguishing between cheap grace and costly grace. Cheap grace is the mindset of a Christian that simply enjoys the status of their salvation without engaging in discipleship. Costly grace is the mindset of a Christian who submits his life fully to Christ and pursues active discipleship according to Christ’s will.

Karl Rahner. (1904–1984). Rahner was a German Jesuit priest and theologian. He is widely considered one of the most influential Roman Catholic theologians of the 20th century. Rahner’s theological approach is referred to as *nouvelle théologie* (New Theology). It emphasizes a theology based on Scripture, the early church Fathers, and an increased focus on biblical exegesis and typology. *Nouvelle théologie* was highly influential in the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). Rahner is also known for developing the theological concept of abstraction, which recognizes the Kantian principle that people can only experience reality through the filter of sensation. Rahner explains that humans can gain valid spiritual knowledge through the abstraction of this indirect sensory knowledge.



Karl Rahner
(Wikimedia Commons)

Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928–2014). Wolfhart Pannenberg was a German Lutheran theologian who has studied under Karl Barth. He distinguished between analogical truth (truth that describes empirical observations) and doxological truth (truth as immanent in worship). His theology focuses on doxological truths being revealed by the human response to God’s self-revelation. Human experience therefore leads to the triune God as opposed the neoorthodox view that the triune God leads to human experience. Pannenberg also views history as part of the self-revelation of God, with a focus on the resurrection of Christ revealing what can be expected for mankind in the future. Pannenberg did not see the Bible as inerrant and believed that many of the miracle accounts are mythical. But Pannenberg insists on the reality of Christ’s resurrection as a necessary element in God’s soteriological plan.

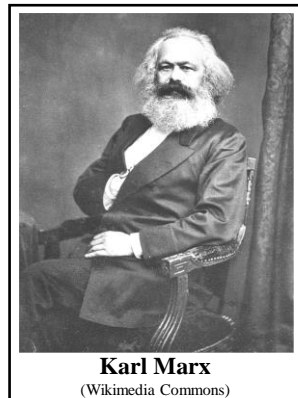
5.4 Heresies

There are only a few Protestant heresies that occurred after the Reformation, as people with differing theological opinions with wide followings tended to form their own denomination. There were a number of heresies identified by the Roman Catholic church such as Quietism and Modernism, but this book classifies these as denominational issues and will therefore not present them as overall Christian heresies.

Anabaptism (1527–present). Anabaptism started as a Protestant movement that did not recognize the validity of infant baptism. People who had been baptized as infants needed to be baptized again. Anabaptism is derived from the Greek words *ana* (again) and *baptizō* (baptism). The Anabaptists were not received well by most governments. Infant baptism was often associated with citizenship and denying its validity could be interpreted as treason. The Anabaptists first recorded their beliefs in 1527 in the *Schleitheim Confession*. Its author, Michael Sattler, was consequently arrested and executed. From this point forward, the Anabaptists were heavily persecuted by both Roman Catholics and Protestants alike. Today, the largest surviving Anabaptist groups include the Amish, the Hutterites, and the Mennonites.

Socinianism (~1550–1700). This heresy was developed by Lelio and Fausto Sozzini, Italian Renaissance humanists and theologians. It was further developed among the Polish Brethren in the seventeenth century and was taught by the Unitarian Church of Transylvania. Socinianism is a nontrinitarian Christian belief system that rejects the pre-existence of Christ and holds that Jesus did not exist until he was conceived as a human being. In 1658, a decree from the Holy Roman Empire ordered the Socinians to either conform to Roman Catholic doctrine or be forced into exile or death.

Christian Marxism (~1850–present). Marxism in its pure form is atheistic and therefore incompatible with any form of Christianity, including heretical Christianity. However, many of the elements of Marxism that have been advanced by liberal Christian theologians have been characterized by conservative theologians (i.e., those holding to the Bible's authority and infallibility) as heretical. The socialistic aspects of Marxism replace the Gospel with the *Communist Manifesto*, the fallen nature of mankind with capitalistic power structures, redemption through



Christ with redemption through the uprising of the proletariat, and the Kingdom of God with social happiness through an equal distribution of wealth.⁵⁷ The Marxist goal of human redemption through collective human effort has been characterized as a revived form of Pelagianism, as it believes in the inherent goodness of human nature that can be inhibited by, among other things, social institutions.⁵⁸ The Marxist belief in the goodness of human nature has also been characterized as a revived form of Gnosticism, which denies that man is a fallen creature and therefore has no need to repent of sin and develop virtue.⁵⁹

5.5 Further Reading

Those interested in a more detailed treatment of church history from the Reformation to present day are encouraged to read *The Story of Christianity, Volume II: The Reformation to the Present Day*, by Justo González. This book reads much easier than typical history textbooks but lacks a certain amount of detail as a result. Those interested in a more typical academic history textbook for reading or reference are directed to *Church History, Volume Two: From Pre-Reformation to the Present Day*, by John Woodbridge and Frank James.

5.6 Study Questions

1. Write a short paragraph describing the events of Martin Luther that led to the Protestant reformation starting with his concerns and ending with the founding of Lutheranism. Who was Martin Luther's closest collaborator when developing Lutheran doctrine?
2. Write a short paragraph describing the events of John Calvin that led to the break of Geneva from the Roman Catholic Church. What does the acronym TULIP stand for, what was Calvin's most famous work called, and who was first to systematize Calvin's theology?
3. What was the initiating event that started the Wars of Religion? What were the primary Roman Catholic and Protestant houses involved? What formally ended the war, what new status quo was created, and did this status quo persist?
4. What was the first year of Vatican II and what was its primary goal? What were some of the specific results of Vatican II?
5. How did the theology of Jacobus Arminius differ from Reformed theology in each of the areas represented by TULIP? What were some of

the modifications that John Wesley made to Arminianism when using its doctrine for the basis of Methodism?

6. Friedrich Schleiermacher is commonly called the father of what type of theology? What two schools of thought was his theology a reaction against? How does Schleiermacher's theology differ from traditional orthodox theology?
7. Karl Barth is commonly called the father of what type of theology? What was his theology a reaction against? How does Barth's theology differ from traditional orthodox theology? What is the approach that Barth uses when considering difficult-to-reconcile passages in the Bible?
8. Søren Kierkegaard is known as the father of what type of philosophical system? How does Kierkegaard view the role of reality and subjectivity in a person's life? Does Kierkegaard believe that a person can attain full faith in theological truths through academic study? Explain.
9. What does the term Anabaptism mean? What was the primary belief of the Anabaptist movement, and why was this not well-received by provincial governments?
10. What is distinctive belief of Socinianism that is also shared by Unitarianism? Why was the Holy Roman Empire willing to execute people for holding this belief?

6. The Doctrine of God

The doctrine of God is the part of theology that, confusingly, is referred to as theology (*theo*=God) in a specialized sense. The doctrine of God is the natural starting point in the study of theology since an understanding of God is necessary to understand the relationship of God to other things. This chapter first starts with the existence of God and various belief systems in this regard. It then discusses the knowability of God since it is not at all apparent what and to what extent humans can understand things about God. It then discusses the core subjects of the doctrine of God including incommunicable attributes, communicable attributes, and the Trinity. A separate section on predestination and free will is then presented, as these views are important distinguishing characteristics of different theological systems. This chapter ends with sections on God as a Creator God and the implications of beauty in God's creation.

6.1 Existence of God

The approach of this book is faith seeking understanding. As such, the existence of the Christian God is assumed, as is the divine revelatory nature of the Bible. Of course, the first words in the Bible are, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." God as the Creator God is assumed in the Bible, and no proof is offered for the existence of God here or in any other place in Scripture. The Bible does teach that the existence of God is self-evident in verses such as Rom 1:19-20, "[T]hat which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made, so that they are without excuse." This is not an argument or a proof and many will simply disagree with this statement. But the believing Christian assumes that nobody is born an atheist.

There are many beliefs that people have about God, some being closer to Christian beliefs than others. The main categories are now presented, starting with those furthest away from Christianity and ending with those that are closest.

Atheism. Atheism is the positive assertion that God does not exist. It is a belief most commonly held by intellectuals that also believe in materialism, in a deterministic universe, and in the development of human beings from evolutionary processes. Atheism is a rare belief from a historical perspective, as nearly all societies from pre-history have a predominant belief in some sort of higher power. Since atheism is the positive assertion that God does not exist, it must be understood as an unprovable belief just as the belief in God can be understood as an unprovable belief. For sure, atheists have given proofs that God cannot exist (e.g., the problem of evil, see p. 313) just as Deists have given proofs that God must exist (e.g., the ontological argument, see p. 297). But these proofs are almost never convincing to those starting out with opposing views.

Agnosticism. An agnostic is a person with the belief that God may or may not exist, is uncertain which is true, and does not have a strong belief as to which is true. An honest agnostic is simply admitting their lack of faith, which is fair. A person should not pretend to have a faith that does not exist, but one can argue that the existence of God is a supremely important question, and that an agnostic should at least be attempting to come to some sort of faith with respect to God. In any case, an agnostic is the same as an atheist in the sense that neither have a God to worship.

Paganism. Paganism sometimes refers to any religion that does not worship the God of Abraham (i.e., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). But with respect to the existence of God, paganism refers to the belief in many gods, none of which are perfect in their goodness and power. Examples of pagan religions in this sense are the old Greek, Roman, and Norse religions. Abraham's father, Terah, is described in Josh 24:2 as being a pagan: "From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods." The struggle of the ancient Israelites against the worship of pagan gods is also a recurrent theme in the OT, culminating in the spiritual failings of Solomon. "Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, the abhorrent idol of Moab, on the mountain that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abhorrent idol of the sons of Ammon. He also did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods" (1 Kgs 11:7-8). Modern forms of paganism include wicca, shamanism, and druidism.



Dualism. Dualism is the belief in both a good supreme power and in an evil supreme power. These powers are in constant tension with each other, and the universe is their eternal battlefield. These powers are equal in status. Neither has moral authority over the other, and a person can freely choose to worship one or the other. Examples of dualistic religions include Zurvanite Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism. Christianity has a dualistic flavor in the sense that there is a spiritual battle between good and evil forces. But Christianity is not a dualistic religion because the head of the forces of evil (Satan) does not have the same status as God. God is perfect and infinite whereas Satan is imperfect and finite.



Deism. There are several forms of deism (see p. 354). But in its most common form, deism is the belief in an impersonal god that created the universe but does not intervene, such as by providing special revelation or by violating physical laws. A deist believes that the universe provides sufficient evidence to believe in a creator god, but that there is no evidence that this god cares about what happens either generally or to specific individuals. Deism is a sort of compromise between atheism and a morally meaningful religion. For the Deist, there is a dual comfort that God exists but does not care about bad behavior. C.S. Lewis describes deism as the belief in a life-force. He writes, “[T]he Life-Force, being only a blind force, with no morals and no mind, will never interfere with you like that troublesome God we learned about when we were children. The Life-Force is a sort of tame God. You can switch it on when you want, but it will not bother you. All the thrills of religion and none of the cost. Is the Life-Force the greatest achievement of wishful thinking the world has yet seen?”⁶⁰

Pantheism. Pantheism is an imprecise term, but generally means that the universe is God, that everything in the universe is part of God, or that everything in the universe is animated by God (*pan*= all, *theo*=God). Pantheists generally think that God is beyond good and evil. Therefore, as one gets closer to God’s perspective, seemingly good things would simply be how they need to be. Similarly, seemingly bad things would also simply be how they need to be. Pantheism is therefore untenable for those who draw a distinction between the truly good and the truly evil. Examples of



pantheistic religions include Taoism, some forms of Buddhism, and Advaita Vedanta Hinduism (see p. 344 for a more in-depth treatment).

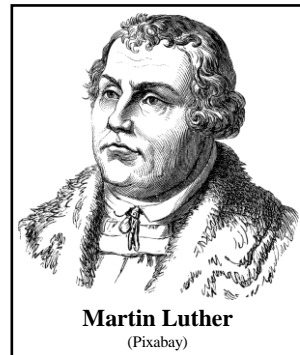
Theism. Theism is the belief in a God or gods who are personal in nature and play an active role in the universe and in people's lives. Monotheism is the belief in one such God and polytheism is the belief in more than one such God. In common usage, theism typically refers to monotheism. The God of theistic religions is typically an all-good, all-powerful, creator of the universe, and the determiner of moral goodness. Examples of theistic religions include Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Rastafarianism.

6.2 Knowability of God

The branch of philosophy related to knowledge is called epistemology. Much of the discussion and debate about the knowability of God relates to epistemological issues and are therefore philosophical rather than theological. These epistemological issues are peripheral to the study of theology, and the interested reader is therefore directed elsewhere.⁶¹

Virtually all Christian theologians agree that God is not perfectly knowable but is knowable enough for people to fulfill their divine purpose in life. Stated differently, the essence of God is unknowable but certain attributes of God are partially knowable to the extent that God has revealed them to us through general and special revelation. The essence of God is inconceivable and incomprehensible and therefore ineffable. After all, God is timeless and exists outside of space and time. Human thought, however, exists within space and time and is limited to the context of space and time. Martin Luther therefore refers to unknowable aspects of God as the Hidden God (*Deus Absconditus*). The aspects of God that have been made known constitute the Revealed God (*Deus Revelatus*).

Some theologians, such as Karl Barth in his early years, believe that general revelation is an untrustworthy source of information about God. For Barth, God is unknowable and indescribable. Special revelation allows us to describe God using attributes, but God possesses these attributes in unknowable and indescribable ways. Other theologians, including the Apostle Paul in the NT, believe that some things about God can be known through God's creation and through human nature. "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine



Martin Luther
(Pixabay)

nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made” (Rom 1:20).

The Bible itself affirms that God is both unknowable in a sense and knowable in another sense. Paul writes, “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:11 NKJV). But God can reveal aspects of Himself to us through the Son. “[N]o one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son determines to reveal Him” (Mt 11:26).

Of course, theology would be impossible without the ability to obtain knowledge of God in some fashion. It is therefore assumed that everyone has a certain amount of knowledge of God and that this knowledge can be increased through study, reflection, and prayer. Knowledge of God that is inherent to everyone is called innate knowledge. Knowledge that is subsequently learned is called acquired knowledge. Innate knowledge of God is possessed by necessity and occurs as a person ages to maturity due to the mere fact of having been made in the image of God. Acquired knowledge is obtained by the study and reflection of God’s general and special revelation.

The primary objective of this book is to significantly increase the acquired theological knowledge of the reader. However, it must be recognized that many liberal theologians, starting with Friedrich Schleiermacher, believe that knowledge of God is best pursued through the examination of personal religious experiences. I do not dismiss the power and importance of personal religious experiences, but they are inherently subjective and therefore impossible to treat objectively. If someone does not recognize the authority of Scripture, perhaps personal experience is the best alternative for gaining a better understanding of God. But if the authority of Scripture is admitted, theology can be objectively presented, studied, discussed, and debated.

6.3 Incommunicable Attributes of God

Characteristics that provide a sense of some aspect of God are commonly called divine attributes. This is an imperfect term, as is inevitable in any attempt to describe God. Some have suggested that better terms might be properties or perfections, as these might result in less risk of viewing God as a divine essence combined with a selection of added properties. 1 Pt 2:9 uses the Greek word *arete* (ἀρετή), which means virtue, excellence, or perfection. “But you are a chosen people, A royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the

arete of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” But “attribute” is the standard theological term, and this will be used hereafter with the understanding that all of the attributes of God must be understood as a unified and inseparable whole, that each attribute is the totality of God’s essence, and that a discussion of an attribute in isolation is somewhat artificial. Nevertheless, the Bible equates God with many attributes. Examples include the following:

- God is a consuming fire, a jealous God (Dt 4:24);
- God is a compassionate God (Dt 4:31);
- God is in your midst, a great and awesome God (Dt 7:21);
- God is with you wherever you go (Jo 1:9);
- God is gracious and compassionate (2 Chr 30:9);
- God is a righteous judge (Ps 7:11);
- God is holy (Ps 99:9);
- God is true (Jn 3:33);
- God is spirit (Jn 4:24);
- God is faithful (1 Cor 1:9);
- God is holy (1 Cor 3:17);
- God is light (1 Jn 1:5); and
- God is love (1 Jn 4:8, 4:16).

The attributes of God have been grouped in many different ways by many different theologians including natural versus moral, absolute versus relative, intransitive versus transitive, and immanent versus eminent. However, the most popular grouping is incommunicable and communicable, which is the approach taken here.⁶² An incommunicable attribute is one that is characteristic of God but not of man. A communicable attribute is a perfect characteristic of God that is endowed by God to man in an imperfect way. The primary incommunicable attributes of God are now presented.

Aseity. Aseity refers to the self-existence of God. The existence of God is inherent in His nature and is independent of all other things. God is the uncaused cause, which is necessary to avoid infinite regress in causation. God is similarly the unmoved mover, since something must initiate activity before activity began to exist. Everything that is not God is derivative and dependent on Him. Scripturally, the aseity of God is described as follows. “The God who made the world and everything that is in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made by hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things” (Acts 17:24-25).

The aseity of God is also evident in His name Yahweh (יהוה), which is commonly thought to mean “I am” or “I am that I am.” God is His own self-existence. The NT attributes aseity to both the Father and the Son, “For just as the Father has life in Himself, so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself” (Jn 5:26).

Immutability. The immutability of God is often referred to as His unchangeableness. God is perfect and His attributes are perfect. It is not possible to change God’s perfection, and it is not possible to change God’s perfect attributes. Biblical references to the immutability of God are numerous. “For I, the LORD, do not change” (Mal 3:6). “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow” (Jas 1:17). “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and forever” (Heb 13:8).

The immutability of God often seems at odds with much of the Bible, where God is shown to act in response to earthly conditions. God repents, changes his plans, becomes angry, sets aside his anger, and shows himself to be friend or foe depending on the attitude of his creatures. Consider Jer 26:13, “Now then, reform your ways and your deeds and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will relent of the disaster which He has pronounced against you.” It appears that the intentions of God can change based on the actions of man. This is commonly explained as God being a God of action, with action being possible without change. It is also commonly explained that this type of situation is indicative of man’s relationship to God changing rather than God changing.

The immutability of God also relates to the free will of mankind. Reformed theologians believe that God determines everything that happens, and therefore God’s knowledge is unchanging. Arminians insist that people have freewill, but that God has perfect foreknowledge of all free choices and therefore God’s knowledge is similarly unchanging. The open theism position is that God knows everything that is possible to know but does not have perfect knowledge of mankind’s future free choices. This means that God’s knowledge is increasing over time, which both Reformed and Arminian theologians would argue violates the immutability attribute.

No doubt many readers at this point are wondering whether the Reformed, Arminian, or open perspective is to be preferred. Each has valid points, and each has implications that go beyond the immutability of God. At this point, it suffices to say that humans understand change in the context of space and time. As God exists outside of space and time, our understanding of change with respect to God is necessarily limited.

Infinite. To say that God is infinite is to say that He has no constraints or limits. However, humans are finite, and the finite cannot fully

comprehend the infinite and therefore cannot fully comprehend the infinite nature of God. This said, God is typically said to be infinite in terms of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence.

Omniscience means that God knows everything. At a minimum, this means that God knows everything that has ever happened and everything that is currently happening. “God is greater than our heart, and He knows all things” (1 Jn 3:20). As discussed above, there is disagreement with regards to God’s knowledge of the future, especially with regards to freely made choices. The Reformed position is that God determines everything, including our choices, and therefore has perfect knowledge of the future. The Arminian position is that moral responsibility requires the ability to make true free choices, but God has perfect foreknowledge of these choices and therefore has perfect knowledge of the future. The open theism position is that true free choice is not possible in either the Reformed or Arminian framework. Therefore, according to open theism, God has all possible knowledge but not perfect knowledge of future free choices as this knowledge is not possible.

Omnipotence simply means that God is all powerful. This attribute is clearly presented in Scripture. “[W]ith God all things are possible” (Mt 19:26) “For nothing will be impossible with God” (Lk 1:37). But God cannot do anything that is contrary to His nature, such as acting out of evil intent. God also cannot make logical contradictions happen, such as making a triangle with interior angles that do not sum to two right angles. And God cannot create absurdities, such as making an object too heavy for Him to move. But these limits do not prevent the power of God from making anything happen in the universe that He desires, including all of the miracle accounts in the Bible. “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived” (Rom 1:20).

God’s omnipresence means that He is everywhere at all times. ““Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?” declares the LORD” (Jer 23:24). This does not mean that part of God is in one place and another part of God is in another place. Rather, it is most helpful to think of the entirety of God being at all places at all times. Aspects of God’s omnipresence remain a mystery as the Holy Spirit resides in believers but not in unbelievers, Jesus has a physical body that was limited to being at a single place, and Jesus now has an ascended body that is presumably similar in this aspect. But God’s omnipresence ensures that He has first-hand knowledge of everything that is happening at all times and in all places.

Unity of God. The unity of God refers to God consisting of a single essence that is not reducible to component parts. God is not a composite of Father and Son and Holy Spirit and incommunicable attributes and

communicable attributes. All of these things are simply human ways to understand God's single nature. Any change, addition, or subtraction to God is impossible since God is perfect as He is. Because God is unity and not a composite of parts, this attribute is sometimes referred to as "simplicity."

6.4 Communicable Attributes of God

As mentioned above, a communicable attribute is perfect characteristic of God that is endowed by God to man in an imperfect way. It is common to interpret man being made in the image of God as man sharing God's communicable attributes. God loves and therefore we can love, but in an imperfect way. God reasons and therefore we can reason, but in an imperfect way. The primary communicable attributes of God are now presented.

God as Spirit. The closest that the Bible comes to defining God is the classic verse, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:24). This verse is a strong affirmation of theology in terms of faith seeking understanding. We must worship God in spiritual faith, but this faith should be informed by spiritual truths. But what does it mean that God is spirit? John uses the Greek word *pneuma* (πνεῦμα), which literally means a breath or a breeze. Spirit therefore means incorporeal and without physical substance. Humans can be thought of as the union of a physical body and an incorporeal spirit. God, in contrast, is pure spirit. Furthermore, he is not just *a spirit*, but Spirit itself. God is not of this physical universe, although He is fully present as Spirit in every place and at every time. Of course, this makes sense since God existed when time and space did not exist and must therefore exist completely apart from the created universe. But we must often keep this in mind since there are many anthropomorphic verses about God in the Bible and many anthropomorphic images of God in artistic representations. Isaiah writes, "I am your God ... I will also uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Is 41:10), but God has no literal hand. Deuteronomy reads, "[M]an shall live on everything that comes out of the mouth of the LORD" (Dt 8:3), but God has no literal mouth. Since God is Spirit, He is not limited to body, form, or boundaries. Rather, God is invisible, immeasurable, and ultimately incomprehensible.

God is Holy. The Bible is clear that God is a Holy God. "Seraphim were standing above Him, ... And one called out to another and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD'" (Is 6:2-3). Holy is translated from the and the Greek word *hágios* (ἅγιος) which means to be set apart. Therefore, it is not correct to view holiness as primarily related to moral purity or

sacred status. In the context of God, His holiness means that He is completely separate from the physical universe and humanity. This means that He is worthy of awe, veneration, and worship. But we are also called upon to be holy. “Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy’” (Lv 19:1–2). We are holy to the extent that we are set apart from things of the world and set towards things that bring glory to God. In this sense, the result of becoming more holy is to be more pure, upright, and free from sin.

God as Love. The second closest that the Bible comes to defining God is the other classic verse, “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). There are several Greek words for different kinds of love, but this versus uses *agapé* (ἀγάπη), which refers to unconditional, selfless, and sacrificial love. St. Augustine thinks that love is so central to God and his message that each verse of Scripture can only be understood in the context of the love of God. Friedrich Schleiermacher goes further and believes that God as described in the Bible is best understood as only having the single attribute of love. He writes, “[O]nly love and no other divine attribute can be equated with God ... Love is the orientation of wanting to unite with others and wanting to be in the other.”⁶³ Furthermore, the Bible is clear that our capacity to love is because it is communicated to us from God. “We love because He first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). The verses about God’s love are numerous. There are over 300 instances of love in the NT including every single book. But God’s love is perhaps best summarized in Jn 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.”

God as Goodness. To say that God is Goodness is somewhat of a tautology since God determines what is good and what is not good. But this attribute not only identifies God as the standard of goodness, but the perfect embodiment of this standard. Everything that God is and does is good, and it is impossible for God to do anything or be anything other than good. Furthermore, like all communicable attributes, only God can be perfectly good. This is why Jesus Himself tells us, “No one is good except God alone” (Mk 10:18). It is also why the psalmist recognizes the inconceivable immenseness of this divine attribute. “How great is Your goodness” (Ps 31:19). As for goodness being communicated to mankind, we are instructed to “love your enemies and do good” (Lk 6:35). But doing what we think is good in human terms is not necessarily being good from God’s perspective. This is why we are told that our true goodness is derived directly from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness” (Gal 5:22).

God as Mercy. It is clear that mercy is an attribute of God that can be communicated to us. “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36). The Greek word used in this verse is *oiktírmōn* (οἰκτίρων), which means to have pity for someone. In this sense, the mercy of God means that He feels pity and compassion for us in our misery, struggles, and hardships, just as we should feel pity and compassion for others with misery, struggles, and hardships.⁶⁴ The OT often describes God exacting harsh punishments on individuals and entire communities. But it must be understood that this is done in the context of mercy. “For the Lord your God is a merciful God” (Dt 4:31 ESV) “The LORD’s acts of mercy indeed do not end, For His compassions do not fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness” (Lam 3:22-23).

God as Righteousness. The OT Hebrew word for righteousness is *tsedeq* (צֶדֶק), which literally refers to measures and scales that are correct and accurate. When applied to moral issues, righteousness therefore refers to the correct and accurate assessment of moral actions and the correct and accurate distribution of rewards and punishment. The NT word for righteousness is *dikaioσynē* (δικαιοσύνη), which literally means a condition of justice that gives to each what is fairly due. In a broader sense, *dikaioσynē* refers to someone being in the condition that one ought to be in. A person who is righteous in the eyes of God is therefore in a condition that is acceptable to God. God’s righteousness refers to His perfect moral judgement and distributive justice, which operates in perfect harmony with His love, mercy, and holiness. This is true for both retributive justice where God righteously punishes evil, and remunerative justice where God righteously rewards goodness. However, an important distinction between retributive and remunerative justice must be made. People deserve retributive justice (Rom 6:23) but are undeserving of remunerative justice (Lk 17:10). As a communicable attribute, this concept is most prominent in God making believers positionally justified before God as a free and undeserved gift by grace for those who have faith. “For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous” (Rom 5:19).

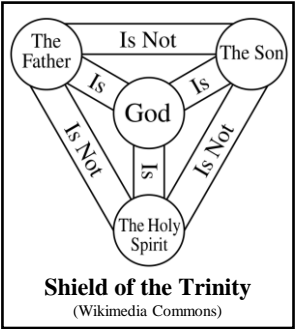
6.5 The Triune God

The orthodox Christian belief is that there is one God consisting of three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost). These three persons are co-eternal and of the same essence. The Father has the specific role of generation, which necessarily results in the Son. That the Son is the only begotten Son of the Father is referred to as

filiation. The Father and the Son have the specific role of spiration, resulting in the Holy Spirit, referred to as procession. All three persons of the Trinity have existed as the one God for all eternally, with generation and spiration being logical relationships and not temporal. This description of the being of God is called the ontological Trinity (and less commonly the immanent Trinity).

There were numerous debates related to the ontological Trinity in the early church. This led to the development of many heretical beliefs such as Gnosticism/Docetism (denies the humanity of Christ), Adoptionism (Christ is not eternally divine), Monarchism/Modalism/Patripassionism/Sabellianism (denies that God consists of three persons), Arianism (God the Father created Christ), Apollinarianism (denies that Christ was fully human), Monophysitism/Eutychianism (Christ did not have a human nature, and Nestorianism (Christ incarnate existed as two separate persons). Largely as a result of these heresy debates, the orthodox relationship of the three Persons of the Trinity was incorporated into many creeds such as the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Apostles’ Creed (see p. 401).

There are many approaches to show that Scripture points to the ontological Trinity described above, but only one will be addressed here. This is based on Jn 1:1-18, which is referred to as the Prologue of John. The Prologue begins as follows, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (Jn 1:1-2) Here it is clear that the Word (Greek *Logos*) refers to Jesus Christ, that Jesus is God (there is only one God), and that Jesus was with God (God consists of multiple persons). The Prologue later states, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God” (Jn 1:1-2). Later, John explains this concept in more detail. “Truly, truly I say to you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which has been born of the flesh is flesh, and that which has been born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’” (Jn 3:5-7). The Prologue specifically identifies the Father as God and the Son as God. It also refers to the process of spiritual rebirth through God, which is later clarified to be the specific action of the Spirit, who is therefore also God. The Prologue is clear that there is one triune God consisting of three Persons.



Scripture is clear about the One God consisting of three Persons. We know this through special revelation and not through logical deduction. However, since God is Love and is also immutable, God must have an independent ability for personal love that is inherent in His nature. This can only be possible if God consists of at least a plurality of persons.

The three Persons of the Trinity always work together in perfect harmony, but certain aspects of the divine economy are particularly attributed to each: creation with the Father, salvation with the Son, and sanctification with the Holy Spirit. More generally, all things are out of the Father, through the Son, and completed through the Holy Spirit. This relates to what God does rather than what God is and is referred to as the economic Trinity. In this context, economic corresponds to the Greek work *oikonomia* (οἰκονομία), which means to manage a household. Just as individuals within a household have specific duties, the Persons of the economic Trinity are ascribed to specific duties. This is most clear when examining the economy of salvation. The Father sent the Son. The Son atoned for our sins. The Holy Spirit completes our salvation by indwelling within us.

The Father is the first Person of the Godhead and has the unique properties of (1) not being begotten or unbegotten, (2) being responsible for the generation of the second Person of the Godhead; and (3) being responsible for the spiration of the third person of the Godhead (along with the second Person). The name Father relates to both His relation to the Son and to His relation to His spiritually adopted children. With respect to the second Person of the Godhead, the relationship of Father indicates (1) an intimate personal relationship akin to a loving Father and Son relationship; and (2) the divine mechanism of the conception of Christ Incarnate. With respect to believers, the Father has adopted them into His spiritual family. “[Y]ou have received a spirit of adoption as sons and daughters by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom 5:15-17).

The Son is the second Person of the Godhead and has the unique properties of (1) being generated by the Father; and (2) spiration of the third Person of the Godhead (along with the first Person). The eternal aspect of the Son is also known as the *Logos* (Λόγος), which literally means spoken word. Figuratively, the Father can be understood as the written Word of God and the Son can be understood as the spoken word of God. “[N]o one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son determines to reveal Him” (Mt 11:27). The Incarnate Son is also the fulfillment of the OT prophesy of the Messiah (Messiah=Christ=Anointed One), who came to earth to save mankind from sin and usher in the Kingdom of Heaven. Isaiah prophesizes,

“For a Child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” (Is 1:6). Jesus Christ’s birth fulfilled this prophesy. “[F]or today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2:11). Last, Christ is the mediator between mankind and the Father. “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). Sin has separated us from the Father, but the full humanity and full divinity of the Son allows this separation to be bridged. This is sometimes referred to as mediation of the New Covenant, where trust in Christ replaces the Old Covenant requirement of strict adherence to the Law.

The Holy Spirit (also called the Holy Ghost) is the third Person of the Godhead and has the unique property of eternally existing from the spiration of the Father and the Son. When thinking of the Holy Spirit theologically, it is critical to understand Him both at a person and as co-equal with the Father and the Son. The *Westminster Catechism* states this as follows, “[T]here are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.”

Much of the characterization of the Holy Spirit in Scripture is that of a supernatural divine force. For example, the descension of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is described as follows: “And tongues that looked like fire appeared to them, distributing themselves, and a tongue rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:3-4). As such, some have questioned whether the Holy Spirit is indeed a distinct person rather than just the power or force of God at work in the world. However, that the Holy Spirit is a person is clear through verses related to triune relationships, titles, and divine activities.

There are many NT verses that mention all three persons of the triune God in a perfectly coordinate way. Consider the great commission: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19). This verse implies that each Person of the Trinity shares the same nature. Similar verses include 1 Cor 12:4-6, 2 Cor 13:1-4, and Eph 4:4-6.



Holy Spirit as a Dove,
Cathedra Petri
(Wikimedia Commons)

Perhaps the clearest Scriptural indication of the personhood of the Holy Spirit is when He is called *Paraklētos* (Παράκλητος), a rare word in Greek literature that refers to someone's advocate in a legal proceeding. Usage of this title clearly indicates that the Holy Spirit is a Person. "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper (*Paraklētos*), so that He may be with you forever" (Jn 14:16; see also Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:7). Other translations of *Paraklētos* such as Counselor, Comforter, and Advocate equally indicate that the Holy Spirit is a person. Personal functions of the *Paraklētos* include teaching (Jn 14:26), bearing witness (Jn 15:26; Rm 8:16), interceding on behalf of others (Rm 8:26-27), and speaking. "Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go up and join this chariot'" (Acts 8:29). The Holy Spirit also has specific roles in personal regeneration and in the Church. These functions are discussed in the chapters on salvation and the church, respectively.

In summary, there is one God that consists of three Persons. All three persons always act together in perfect harmony, but certain functions are particularly ascribed to each. Furthermore, personal relationships are possible with God Himself and also with each of the three Persons of God separately. You can properly pray to the triune God, to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

6.6 Predestination and Free Will

Predestination refers to God having determined everything that happens in the world at (or before) the time of creation. Everything that happens is due to God-determined destiny. People who hold this belief understand God's sovereignty to be absolute.

Predestination is particularly associated with the concept of the elect. Before creation, God predestined certain people to be saved (the elect). Those who are not part of the elect will not be saved (the reprobate). The elect will be saved with certainty. When those of the elect hear God's call, they will be saved by faith and have no choice in the matter, referred to as irresistible grace. Once the elect respond to God's call, they will persevere in their faith and also have no choice in the matter. Similarly, the unlucky remainder who are not part of the elect will never respond to God's calling and have no choice in the matter.

The doctrine of predestination has two basic flavors. The belief that God predestines the elect to be saved but does not explicitly predestine the rest to damnation is referred to as single predestination. The belief that God predestines the elect to be saved and also predestines the rest to damnation is referred to as double predestination. These two views on

predestination are functionally equivalent, but single predestination has more of an emphasis on God's grace and double predestination has more of an emphasis on God's sovereignty. In single predestination, all of mankind is sinful and deserving of eternal punishment but God in His mercy chooses to save some. In double predestination, God has a sovereign plan that includes both the elect and the reprobate.

Both Reformed theology and Roman Catholicism believe in double predestination, although the doctrine is prominent in the former and not prominent in the latter. Lutheranism believes in single predestination, but also teaches that anyone who believes in the Gospel is saved and is therefore one of the elect. Arminianism stands in stark contrast. It believes that people, through free will, can either accept or reject the Gospel. However, Arminianism also teaches that God has perfect foreknowledge of people's free choices, and therefore knows with certainty who will be saved and who will not be saved.

The Bible certainly refers to a certain group of people that God seems to have predestined to be saved. The key passages are both from Paul's epistles (emphasis added):

- "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He *foreknew*, He also *predestined* to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters; and these whom He *predestined*, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified" (Rom 8:28-30); and
- "[J]ust as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He *predestined* us to adoption as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph 1:4-5).

A plain reading of these verses strongly suggests that God has chosen certain people to be justified and adopted into His spiritual family. Furthermore, God does this strictly for His own reasons. This is the essentially the understanding of Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Reformed theology. However, Paul also uses the term "foreknew" in the Romans verse. Arminianism understand this to mean the following: (1) Paul is referring to God's perfect foreknowledge of who will make the free choice to be saved in the future; (2) knowing this, God makes a provision for these people through the redemptive work of Christ; resulting in (3) the predestination of those who God foreknew to actually be saved.

The theological topic of predestination is difficult. From one perspective, it seems unfair for God to elect some to be saved and to not allow any others the chance to be saved. From another perspective, it seems that God must have known everything that would happen in the universe based on how He created it, including everyone's choices. Those believing in predestination tend to say, "Who are we to say what is fair or not. We should not second guess God." But this is not a theological answer to why God would predestine some to eternal damnation without any possibility of salvation. Those opposed to predestination tend to say, "A loving God would never predestine people to Hell without the possibility of salvation." But this is not a theological answer to the issue of God's absolute sovereignty. As such, it is worthwhile to examine some additional verses that address predestination and the elect (emphasis added):

- "To those who ... are *chosen according to the foreknowledge of God* the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you" (1 Pt 1:1-2);
- "In Him we also have obtained an inheritance, having been *predestined* according to the purpose of Him who works all things in accordance with the plan of His will" (Eph 1:11);
- "For this reason I endure all things for the sake of *those who are chosen*, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory" (2 Tim 2:10); and
- "When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and *all who had been appointed to eternal life* believed" (Acts 13:48).

The first thing to note is that the first three verses, like the first two that were presented, are all from the epistles of Paul. Therefore, they can all be examined together in an attempt to understand what Paul is trying to communicate. The verses from 1 Pt 1:1-2 and Eph 1:11 seem to support the plain reading of Rom 8:28-30 and Eph 1:4-5: God's foreknowledge led to some people being chosen for salvation according to His will and plan. This view is also supported by Acts 13:48, written by Luke, who was presumably very familiar with the teachings of Paul. But Paul in 2 Tim 2:10 implies that some of the chosen may not obtain salvation if he does not continue to evangelize. That is, 2 Tim 2:10 can be interpreted as salvation not being certain for at least some of the chosen (although other interpretations are possible).

A theological assessment of predestination requires an examination of all related verses in the Bible, including those that address the intent and

scope of Christ's redemptive work. There are many verses that address this issue, with some of the more critical being the following (emphasis added):

- "For this is the will of My Father, that *everyone* who sees the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:40);
- "The next day [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming to him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who *takes away the sin of the world*'" (John 1:29);
- "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that *everyone* who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him" (John 3:16-17);
- "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for *all*, therefore *all* died; and He died for *all*" (2 Cor. 5:14-15);
- "For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have set our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of *all mankind*, especially of believers" (1 Tim. 4:10);
- "But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of His suffering death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for *everyone*" (Heb 2:9); and
- "[John the Baptist] came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that *all* might believe through him. He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. This was the true Light that, coming into the world, *enlightens every person*" (Jn 1:6-9).

These verses paint a much different picture when compared to the verses about predestination. Christ's redemptive work was for everyone. He is the Savior of all mankind. In coming into the world He enlightens every person. Christ takes away the sin of the world, not just the sin of the elect. How can Christ have died for all if it is impossible for some people to benefit for Christ's death. My goal is not to pick sides, but to demonstrate that this issue is not as simple as is often presented.

The doctrine of predestination is severe in that some people are born who will suffer torture for all eternity and there is nothing that they can do about it. This is a problem for practical theology in that Christians can experience extreme anxiety about whether they are one of the elect or not. A good example of this situation is nineteenth century Scotland, where assurance of salvation was a major issue for many congregations. There was much debate going on about limited versus unlimited atonement: did

Christ die for all (2 Cor. 5:14-15; Heb 2:9) or did Christ die only for the elect (Rom 8:28-30; 1 Pt 1:1-2)? Reformed theology teaches the former and Arminian theology teaches the latter. The Synod of Dort was called in 1618 and categorically rejected Arminianism and affirmed strict Reformed theology. John Cameron, a Scottish theologian, was teaching in France at the time, reacted strongly against Dort. He developed a doctrine where Christ died for all (unlimited atonement), but God only elects some people to accept this atonement. That is, the atonement was not effective at the time of Christ's death but will only become effective at the time of someone's conversion. This position is called Hypothetical Universalism, because Christ hypothetically died for all but not all actually have the ability to partake in Christ's salvific work. Cameron's work was later extended by the French theologian Moses Amyraut, who added that God has two wills, one that will for the salvation of all, and another that will for salvation of the elect only. This is referred to as Amyraldism. Both Hypothetical Universalism and Amyraldism can be thought of as a middle ground between strict Reformed theology and Arminianism.

Neoorthodoxy has yet another view on predestination. Karl Barth understood the appeal of the Reformed position in that maintains God's absolute sovereignty. But Barth did not feel that the Reformed position best represented divine truth. He writes, "I would have preferred to follow Calvin's doctrine of predestination much more closely, instead of departing from it so radically."⁶⁵ Barth views Christ as the only object of predestination as it relates to election. The divine part of Christ is the predestined elect and the human part of Christ is the predestined reprobate. In this way, Barth understands double predestination not as a division of the saved and the lost but as a division of the human and divine. Through this understanding, Barth includes all of mankind in the elect. He writes, "Not in and of himself, but in Jesus Christ as the eternal beginning of all God's ways and works, no man is rejected, but all are elected in Him to their justification, their satisfaction, and also their vocation."⁶⁶ Because of statements like these, many maintain that Barth teaches universal salvation. Although it seems that this is true from his writings, Barth states in no uncertain terms that he does not teach universalism. "I do not teach it, but I also do not teach it."⁶⁷

How one understands predestination cannot be separated from how one understands free will. All Christian theological systems agree that people have free will since this is necessary for moral accountability. But their understanding of free will is typically not what is generally understood as free will. To avoid confusion, theologians say that a people have libertarian free will if they are freely able to choose between different options. If A and B are choices, a person with libertarian free will can choose either

A or B. With this definition of libertarian free will, the following can be said about different denominational views:

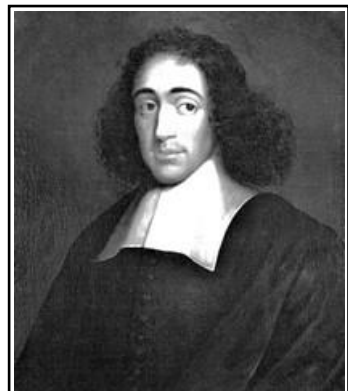
- **Roman Catholic Theology.** Roman Catholicism believes in libertarian free will. Its catechism states, “Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act ... As long as freedom has not bound itself definitively to its ultimate good which is God, there is the possibility of choosing between good and evil.”⁶⁸ However, Roman Catholicism also believes in predestination. It reconciles these views by placing God outside of time. “To God, all moments of time are present in their immediacy. When therefore he establishes his eternal plan of ‘predestination,’ he includes in it each person’s free response to his grace.”⁶⁹
- **Lutheran Theology.** Lutherans believe in libertarian free will in everything except the choice for salvation. Because people are in bondage to their sinful nature, only the elect are able to choose salvation, and this is through God’s grace. Lutherans also believe that the reprobate are not predestined to hell but go there due to their rejection of the Gospel message. That people cannot freely choose salvation but can freely choose to reject salvation is understood as a mystery beyond human understanding.
- **Reformed Theology.** Reformed theology does not believe in libertarian free will. It holds that (1) everything that happens is a result of God’s will; (2) people have free will even though they cannot freely choose between different options; and (3) this seeming contradiction is a mystery beyond human understanding. Louis Berkhof calls the Reformed view a “revised conception of freedom.” But in answering whether libertarian free will is consistent with predestination, he writes, “[I]t certainly is not.”⁷⁰
- **Arminian Theology.** Arminians believe in libertarian free will for all choices including the choice for salvation. However, God has perfect foreknowledge and therefore knows who will choose salvation and who will reject salvation. Those who are foreknown to choose salvation are the elect and those who are foreknown to reject salvation are the reprobate. Since God has perfect foreknowledge, free choices are certain and cannot be otherwise. The seeming paradox of people being able to freely choose and yet have these choices being certain is a mystery beyond human understanding.
- **Open Theism.** Open theism is the belief in true libertarian free will where people are actually free to choose between different options. Because of this, God cannot have perfect foreknowledge of every free decision. Of course, God can intervene in the world at His

pleasure to ensure the eventual completion of His divine plan, but His knowledge of when and where this will be necessary is also not perfect. God therefore knows everything that is knowable, but future free choices are not knowable. Open theism is criticized as unbiblical because it seems to violate God's omniscience (because God doesn't know everything) and also God's immutability (because God's knowledge is growing over time).

All of the above positions except for open theism have logical challenges. This can be demonstrated by assuming that God has always existed, that the universe has not always existed, and that God created the universe. Based on these assumptions, the following logic holds:

1. In creating the universe, God either:
 - a. Created it in a way that He had perfect knowledge of all decisions that would be made by mankind; or
 - b. Created it in a way that He did not have perfect knowledge of all decisions that would be made by mankind.
2. If 1a: All decisions of mankind are exclusively a result of the creative decisions of God. Mankind cannot freely choose between moral options in a libertarian sense.
3. If 1b: Decisions of mankind can be influenced by libertarian free will.

The implications of line 2 above are essentially the conclusion of the philosopher Baruch Spinoza in his masterpiece, *Ethics*.⁷¹ This work is a 180-page proof that mankind does not have libertarian free will. The implications of line 3 above are in agreement with open theism. The Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Arminian views are all somewhere in between and are therefore logically problematic. Nevertheless, each of these theological systems maintain the truth of their views, understand the logical difficulties, and characterize these difficulties as mysteries beyond human understanding. Although it does not solve the logical difficulty presented above, many find that viewing God as existing outside of time can be helpful. C.S. Lewis writes, “[I]f God foresaw our acts, it would be very hard to understand how we could be free not to do them. But



Baruch Spinoza
(Wikimedia Commons)

suppose God is outside and above the Time-line. In that case, what we call ‘tomorrow’ is visible to Him in just the same way as what we call ‘today.’ All the days are ‘Now’ for Him ... This idea has helped me a good deal. If it does not help you, leave it alone.”⁷²

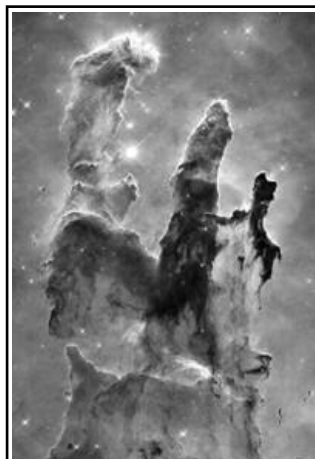
6.7 Creation

God is the creator of both the physical and spiritual realms. “You alone are the LORD. You have made the heavens, The heaven of heavens with all their lights, The earth and everything that is on it, The seas and everything that is in them” (Neh 9:6). Both the physical and spiritual realms were created out of nothing, *ex nihilo*. Since God is the Creator of everything, all things belong to Him, and all things are subject to Him.

God is eternal and necessarily exists outside of space and time as we experience it.⁷³ This is beyond human conception since we experience all things in time that progresses from past to present to future. It is equally impossible for the human mind to conceive of a time with nothing prior to it and for time to extend back to infinity. But God created time (as we experience it) when he created the heavens and the earth. Time is therefore best thought of as part of God’s creation, but not the whole of reality and certainly not a constraint for God in any way.

A literal reading of the creation story in Gn 1 has God creating the universe in seven days. Many Christians believe that this refers to seven literal days while many other believe that this is an allegorical account of creation. Literalists point to the story reading as a historical narrative and the many references to it in other parts of Scripture seeming to understand it as a literally true account. Allegorists point to scientific difficulties such as God creating light on the first day but the sun and stars on the third day, the creation of the earth before the sun and stars, and the presence of plants and animals on an early earth that is known to not have been hospitable to life. Literalists sometimes counter that God could have made the universe and the earth quickly and in the recent past as if it were old, but this would imply that this aspect of general revelation is not trustworthy.

Regardless, the spiritual message of Genesis is that God created the universe and



Pillars of Creation Nebula
(Wikimedia Commons)

considers His creation good. This must be the case since God is perfect goodness and always acts in perfect accordance with His goodness. The same is necessarily true of the spiritual realm with regards to creation.

Relatively little is known about the creation of the spiritual realm except that it involved the creation of angels.⁷⁴ Angels are spiritual beings without corporal bodies (Heb 1:13-14), are more intelligent than mankind (Mt 24:36), and exist in large numbers (Rev 5:11). Angels do not procreate, and so this large number of angels does not increase (Mt 22:30). Furthermore, there appears to be several different categories of angels. The Cherubim are guardians of great power (Gen 3:24) and serve as the steed on which God descends to earth (2 Sm 22:11). The Seraphim are attendants to the heavenly throne (Is 6:2). And there appears to be several additional ranks of angels such as thrones, dominions, and rulers (Col 1:16). The primary function of angels seems to be praising God constantly (Rv 4:8). Other functions of angels mentioned in Scripture include watching over believers (Ps 34:7), watching over children (Mt 18:19), and being present at church assemblies (1 Cor 11:10; 1 Tm 5:21). The only two angels that are mentioned by name in the Bible are Gabriel and Michael, both who have the title of archangel.

There are fallen angels as well as unfallen angels. It is known that everything that God originally created was very good. The fallen angels must therefore have been created good and then lost favor with God somehow. “God did not spare angels when they sinned but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, held for judgment” (2 Pt 2:4; see also Jude 6). Satan is the recognized head of the fallen angels (Mt 25:41) and is also known as the Devil and the Father of Lies. “He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies” (Jn 8:44). Satan is also called the ruler of this world (Jn 12:31, 14:30, 16:11) and even the god of the world. “[T]he god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they will not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Cor 4:4). But this does not mean that Satan is equivalent to God. Satan is powerful, exerts evil influence on sons of disobedience (Eph 2:2), and even tempted Christ in the wilderness (Mt 4:1; Mk 1:13; Lk 4:1). But in the end Satan will be defeated and spend eternity in eternal torment (Rv 20:10).

The three primary components to the theology of physical creation are that the universe had a beginning (i.e., it is not eternal), that it was formed out of nothing (i.e., *ex nihilo*), and that God did not necessarily have to create the universe but did so out of free will. Creation is also divided into first order creation and second order creation. First order creation (also called immediate creation) occurred when God instantaneously created the

matter and energy that constitutes the universe, but in an unordered form. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was a formless and desolate emptiness, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters” (Gn 1:1-2). Second order creation (also called mediate creation) then occurred over time where God and the physical laws of the universe organized chaotic energy and matter into things like the stars, planets, and ultimately life forms.

Much of the rest of the theological debate about creation relates to whether and to what extent the creation stories should be interpreted literally versus allegorically or even mythologically. Literalists understand the six days of creation as six literal days, referred to as the Hexameron. Others view God as having created the formed universe instantaneously. Still others view the six days of creation as long geological periods. This said, God’s general revelation strongly indicates that the universe is more than 13 billion years old, that the earth is more than 4 billion years old, and the *homo sapiens* having existed for about 200-300 thousand years. Viewed as long geological periods, the creation account is remarkable in its agreement with the general understanding of modern science. Charles Hodge writes, “As the Bible is of God, it is certain that there can be no conflict between the teachings of the Scriptures and the facts of science ... the Church has been forced more than once to alter her interpretation of the Bible to accommodate the discoveries of science. But this has been done without doing any violence to the Scriptures or in any degree impairing their authority.”⁷⁵

6.8 Created Beauty

One of the ways that God’s creation is very good is in its beauty. The concept of beauty is central to the philosophy of aesthetics and the appreciation of art. But what about theology? This section addresses this question by first discussing the religious context of beauty as found in Scripture. It then examines the theological treatment of beauty as a transcendental quality. After these background topics, it discusses the religious and theological significance of beauty in terms of natural beauty, created beauty, and beauty in worship.

The Bible is surprisingly silent on the topic of beauty as a divine attribute, as a description of creation, or as serving a sacramental function. The combined terms “beauty” and “beautiful” occur 109 times in the OT and only 8 times in the NT. In the OT, divine beauty is addressed three times in Psalms and once in Isaiah: “Your eyes will see the King in His

beauty” (Is 33:17). In the NT, divine beauty is hinted at twice in reference to the infant Moses (Acts 7:20, Heb 11:23).

Psalms is where divine beauty is most directly referenced, and even here only a few times. These include the following:

- “One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His temple” (Ps 27:4);
- “Splendor and majesty are before Him, strength and beauty are in His sanctuary” (Ps 96:6); and
- “Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant and praise is beautiful” (Ps 147:1).

From a direct reading of the Bible, one can “behold the beauty of the Lord,” know that “strength and beauty are His sanctuary,” and that “praise is beautiful.” These basic truths are quite simple when compared to typical theological treatments of beauty.

Most theological understandings of beauty involve the Platonic triad of truth, good, and beauty, typically referred to as transcendentals. These three transcendental qualities roughly correspond to the classical Greek “rhetorical triangle” of *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*. These refer to reason/truth (*logos*), emotion/beauty (*pathos*), and authority/goodness (*ethos*). But there is nothing in the Bible that directly associates beauty with truth or beauty with goodness. This is perhaps the reason that that opinions on the use of images in worship vary so widely.

God created the natural world, and there is natural beauty in the goodness of His creation. “Notice how the lilies in the field grow; they do not labor nor do they spin thread for cloth, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these” (Mt 6:28-9). Through aesthetic contemplation we can partake in the part of general revelation that demonstrates God’s truth and goodness through beauty. Pavol Bargár writes, “It is in the beauty that one can find the fragments of the divine.”⁷⁶ Benjamin Crowe adds, “The deepest reason ... for the fact that our sense of beauty fits the world is that the pleasures it engenders play a central role in coming to know God.”⁷⁷ In this sense, natural beauty can be



Beauty, by Bisson
(Wikimedia Commons)

understood as divine revelation. One final quote from Richard Viladesau emphasizes this point. “[B]eauty has an intrinsic relation to the sacred and that art can therefore be a means of the mind’s apprehension of God—or from another point of view, of God’s self-revelation through creation.”⁷⁸

God is the Creator and made man in his likeness. As such, we too are also able to create, including objects of beauty that we can look through to glimpse aspects of the divine and remind us of God’s glory. George Steiner writes that the human creation of beautiful objects harkens to God’s creation. “There is aesthetic creation because there is *creation*.”⁷⁹ Steiner lists a wide range of human emotions that can be stirred through aesthetic contemplation. Works of fine art are “re-enactments, reincarnations via spiritual and technical means of that which human questioning, solitude, inventiveness, apprehension of time and of death can intuit of the *fiat* of creation.”⁸⁰ In this way, an artist can target specific combinations of emotions not possible in natural beauty. This emotional content, often in the context of biblical themes, can help us to gain deeper meaning on a variety of theological and religious subjects.

An influential Swiss Roman Catholic theologian who wrote extensively on beauty is Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988). Balthasar is best known for his 15-volume work on the transcendentals of truth, goodness, and beauty. In his works on beauty (*The Glory of the Lord*), Balthasar emphasizes the importance of Christians to appreciate, consider, and meditate on beauty and the reality of beauty just as much as for truth and goodness. Balthasar writes:

Beauty is the word which shall be our first. Beauty is the last thing which the thinking intellect dares to approach since only it dances as an uncontained splendor around the double constellation of the true and the good and their inseparable relation to one another. Beauty is the disinterested one, without which the ancient world refused to understand itself, a word which both imperceptibly and unmistakably has bid farewell to our new world, a world of interests, leaving it to its own avarice and sadness. No longer loved or fostered by religion, beauty is lifted from its face as a mask, and its absence exposes features on that face which threaten to become incomprehensible to man. We no longer dare to believe in beauty, and we make of it a mere appearance in order the more easily to dispose of it. Our situation today shows that beauty demands for itself at least as much courage and decision as do truth and goodness, and she will not allow herself to be separated and banned from her two sisters without taking them along with herself in an act of mysterious vengeance. We can be sure that whoever sneers at her name, as if she were the ornament of a bourgeois past, whether he admits it or not, can no longer pray and soon will no longer be able to love.⁸¹

Thomas Aquinas was the first to emphasize the role of transcendentals in theology. Transcendentals are fundamental properties of being that cannot be derived from any other properties. Fundamental attributes of God are therefore perfect truth, perfect goodness, and perfect beauty. Since the

ultimate goal of a Christian is to become like God, the pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty is of primary importance. The point of Balthasar is that Christians today commonly pursue truth and goodness but neglect the pursuit of beauty. This neglect inhibits the pursuit of truth and goodness (neglected beauty will take truth and goodness “along with herself in an act of mysterious vengeance”) and will fundamentally inhibit one’s relationship with God (i.e., prayer) and one’s ability to obey the greatest commandment (i.e., love).

The use of beautiful art in worship has been common in Eastern Orthodoxy, but the use of physical images in worship in general is controversial. Many have cautioned against their use and many others have embraced their use. This is still true today. This said, Scripture is filled with imagery. In addition, the formation of mental images during worship is inevitable. Therefore, Trevor Hart asserts that theology is incomplete without the consideration of images. “Christian theology is inexorably wedded to the economy of the image due to the nature of its proper object.”⁸² Pavol Bargár believes that beautiful objects are particularly useful when pondering theological questions. “[B]eauty represents a key theme for theological reflection (*locus theologicus*), having aesthetic, ethical, and ontological implications for Christian theology.”⁸³ For this reason, good worship art must be beautiful. Nicholas Wolterstorff thinks that this is particularly true for Christian music. “For the aesthetic merits in things to work in one’s consciousness, there producing satisfaction, it is enough that one’s awareness of them be peripheral. Ugly or vapid music, no matter how effectively it may serve its dominant purpose, is not good liturgical music.”⁸⁴

In summary, beauty plays a key role in both theology and religion. Beauty is a theological transcendental and is as fundamental to the human experience as truth and goodness. These features are also those found in effective worship art, which can guide out mental images to become closer to the divine. To quote John Keats, “A thing of beauty is a joy forever.”⁸⁵

6.9 Names of God

Although not core to theology, a knowledge of the names of God used in the Bible can provide insight on how God was viewed in ancient times. The following are the names of God used in the OT and the NT.

Elohim (אֱלֹהִים). This title for God is most likely a combination of *el*, which means strong and mighty, and *alah*, which means to be smitten with fear. Therefore, *Elohim* refers to a strong and mighty God who is to be feared. A similar name with a similar meaning is *Elyon*. These names are

not used exclusively in the OT for God. They are also used to refer to idols (e.g., Ps. 95:3; 96:5) and human rulers (e.g., Ex 21:6; Jgs 5:8; Ps. 82:1).

Adonai (אֲדֹנָי). This title for God is most likely derived from either *dun* or *adan*, both of which refer to a judge or a ruler. Therefore, *Adonai* is a name for God that emphasizes Him as the almighty Ruler of all things.

El Shaddai (אֵל שַׁדַּי). This title for God is derived from *shadad*, which means powerful. It differs from *Elohim* in that it stresses the all-powerful nature of God but not in a fearful way. Rather, God's power is a source of peace and comfort.

Yahweh (יְהוָה). *Yahweh* is typically understood as meaning "I am that I am," or "I shall be what I shall be." It is known as the tetragrammaton due to its four-letter representation: YHWH. This title emphasizes God's covenant faithfulness and is therefore specifically associated with the God of the Hebrews and no other God. The predominant modern view is that this word is pronounced Yahweh, but the pronunciation Jehovah also has wide usage.

Theos (θεός). *Theos* is the most common name used for God in the NT. It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Elohim*. Therefore, it refers to a strong and mighty God who is to be feared, although OT references to *El Shaddai* are also translated into *Theos*.

Kurios (Κύριος). The Septuagint translates YHWH into *kurios* about 7000 times which results in a close association between these two terms. However, *kurios* simply means lord. In the NT, *kurios* is used over 700 times. This NT usage is not identical to the OT *Yahweh* in that it emphasizes the role of God as Lord and Ruler. *Kurios* in the NT is used both to refer to God generally and to refer to Christ.

Pater (Πατήρ). *Pater* simply means *father*. In the NT, *Pater* is variously used to refer to God as the Creator (e.g., Eph 3:15; Heb 12:9; Jas 1:18), specifically as the Father of Christ, and as the spiritual Father of His adopted human children.

6.10 Further Reading

Those interested in a more detailed treatment of the doctrine of God are encouraged to read Part 1 of Louis Berkhof's book *Systematic Theology* with the understanding that Berkhof is primarily presenting and defending Reformed theology. Also recommended is Part 1 of Volume 1 of Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology*. Hodge also takes the Reformed position but presents major competing views (although with the intent of demonstrating why they are not to be preferred). Last, Part 2 of Gregg Allison's *Historical Theology* presents a history of the doctrine of God, including the

development of all of the major theological positions. Easier reading can be found in Part 2 of Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (2nd ed., Ch. 9-20). He primarily follows Berkhof, but also adds much content from an evangelical perspective.

6.11 Study Questions

1. Describe at least five belief systems regarding the existence or non-existence of God or gods.
2. What is the branch of philosophy related to knowledge? In what sense is God unknowable? In what sense is God knowable?
3. What are some of the incommunicable attributes of God? How do we know that God has these incommunicable attributes?
4. What are some of the communicable attributes of God? How do these attributes as they exist in God compare to how they exist in a person?
5. Who are the three Persons that consist of the triune God? What are some of the divine functions particularly associated with each of these Persons?
6. Explain difference in how free will is to be understood according to the following two options: (1) everything that happens is predestined by God, and (2) everything that happens is not predestined by God. Which theological systems are closely associated with these two assumptions?
7. What is the difference between single predestination and double predestination? What are your personal views about whether everyone has the possibility of salvation versus only the elect?
8. What are three theologically-important aspects of creations? What is the difference between first order creation and second order creation?
9. What are several different interpretations of the creation stories in Genesis? What theological implications, if any, are associated with these different interpretations?
10. What are the three transcendental qualities? Why are they called this? What is the equivalent concept in Greek philosophy?

7. The Doctrine of Man in Relation to God

The study of the nature of mankind is called anthropology. The study of the nature of mankind as described in Scripture is called biblical anthropology. This chapter could therefore alternatively have been titled Biblical Anthropology. It starts with the origin of man, continues with the nature of man, explains what is meant by man being created in the image of God, and concludes with sections on the fall of man, the impact of sin, and the nature of divine grace.

7.1 The Origin of Man

The primary components to the theology of man's origin are that God created man, that God created man in His own image, that mankind is elevated above the lower animals, and that each person consists of a physical body and a spiritual soul. God says, "Let Us make mankind in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the livestock and over all the earth, and over every crawling thing that crawls on the earth" (Gn 1:26-28).⁸⁶

As discussed in the doctrine of creation (see p. 106), God created all things through the immediate generation of all energy and matter *ex nihilo* and then through the mediate formation of all things by organizing the original chaotic state. In the first creation story, the mediate creation of man is stated in simple terms. "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Gn 1:27). The second creation story has a bit more detail, "Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living person" (Gn 2:7-8). From these passages it is understood that (1) God created man in some way that is distinct from other animals in that man is somehow like God in a way that the other animals are not; (2) God created man from existing matter; and (3) that God is the source of life rather than life being a property of physical biology.⁸⁷

It is generally believed by OT scholars that the two stories of creation (Gn 1:1-Gn 2:3, and Gn 2:4-2:25) are from independent sources.⁸⁸ A plain reading indicates some apparent discrepancies. In the first story of creation, God creates all of the lower animals and then man and woman together. In the second story of creation God first creates Adam from the dust on the ground, then creates the lower animals so that Adam would not be alone, and then creates Eve out of Adam's rib. Literalists typically reconcile these differences by understanding the first story of creation as a chronological account and not the second. But a plain reading of the second story clearly indicates a chronological account. God first makes Adam, and "then" God created animals so that Adam would not be alone, and "then" formed Eve out of Adam's rib.

Innumerable volumes have been written on the relationship of the Genesis account of the creation of man and Darwin's theory of evolution. Of course, belief in a Godless process where life emerged from non-life and then gradually, through random genetic mutations and natural selection, resulted in human beings, is incompatible with a belief in the Christian God. Rather, all Christians necessarily must believe that God is the source of all life, and that mankind is the result of a deliberate creative act of God, whether instantaneously or gradually. The closest Christian view to Darwinism would perhaps be the belief that God directed the evolutionary process to ultimately result in *homo sapiens*, whereupon God created mankind in His image by giving these early humans a soul. The furthest Christian view from Darwinism is a literal account of Genesis where God created fully formed humans, complete with a soul, in recent history. Most Christians believe in a creation of mankind account that lies somewhere in the middle of these two extremes.

7.2 The Nature of Man

Scripture teaches that a human has both an earthly element and a spiritual element. The earthly element is our physical makeup and something we share with the lower animals. The spiritual element relates to what the Bible refers to as our soul and/or our spirit.

There are two main theological opinions with regards to soul and spirit. The dichotomist view is that soul and spirit refer to the same thing and that a person therefore consists of two elements: a body and a soul/spirit. The trichotomist view is that the soul and spirit are different and that a person therefore consists of three elements, a body, a soul, and a spirit.

The dichotomist view is supported by scriptural passages that in some places refer to people as consisting of a body and soul and other places referring to a body and spirit. “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul” (Mt 10:28). “[A]bsent in body but present in spirit” (1 Cor 5:3). It is also supported where death is sometimes referred to as giving up the soul and sometimes as giving up the spirit. “It came about as her soul was departing (for she died)” (Gn 35:18). “Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit” (Lk 23:46).

The trichotomist view is supported by several passages that refer to both soul and spirit. “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete” (1 Th 5:23). “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit” (Heb 4:12).

The dichotomy and trichotomy views can be largely understood as a matter of definition. From a dichotomy perspective, soul and spirit both refer to the entire spiritual aspect of man. From a trichotomy perspective, soul and spirit together constitute the entire spiritual aspect of man. For the remainder of this section, soul will be used in the dichotomist sense to refer to the entire spiritual aspect of man.

If a person consists of a body and a soul, the question arises as to how and when the soul is created. The dominant views on this issue are referred to as traducianism and creationism. Traducianism holds that souls are transmitted from parents to children just as genetic makeup is transmitted from parents to children. Creationism holds that God creates a new soul for each new person, typically understood to be at conception. Traducianism offers an easy explanation of the transmission of moral and spiritual depravity to each new generation, but it is problematic in that Christ’s human nature would be tainted with inherited sin. Creationism avoids the Christological difficulties of traducianism but puts God in the role of creating pure and sin-free souls and then corrupting them by combining them with sinful bodies. Louis Berkhof tends to prefer creationism, admits that it does not solve all difficulties, and writes, “Caution is required in speaking on the subject. It must be admitted that the arguments on both sides are rather well balanced.”⁸⁹

7.3 Man as the Image of God

The very first chapter of Genesis has God saying, “Let Us make mankind in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Gn 1:26). Mankind being made in the image of God is commonly referred to by the Latin phrase *imago*

Dei. But what does being made in the image of God mean, and does being made in the image of God mean the same thing as being made in the likeness of God? Theologians have widely varying opinions on these questions.

In terms of image and likeness, most theologians understand them as being used by Scripture synonymously with regards to the creation of man. Some, however, understand image to refer to the body and likeness to the soul. Others understand that image refers to intellectual capacity and likeness to moral capacity. Still others understand that image refers to the innate nature of man and that likeness refers to attributes that are supernaturally added. This book, however, takes the majority view that being made in the image of God and being made in the likeness of God mean precisely the same thing.

There are different possibilities for human attributes that are like those of God. First, this could be an attribute that God created in Adam and Eve that current man no longer has. Second, it could be an attribute that God created in Adam and Eve that current man has but in a corrupted form. Third, it could be an attribute that God created in Adam and Eve that current man has in the same form.

The first created people are said by God to be very good. This is generally understood to mean that Adam and Eve, before the Fall, were righteous in the eyes of God. As God is righteous so were the first created people. This “original righteousness” means that Adam and Eve were not morally neutral creatures. Rather, they were good and holy and in the moral likeness of God. This original righteousness was lost in the Fall and is no longer characteristic of unsaved people. After the fall, positional righteousness before God is only restored through trust in the redemptive power of Christ.

Besides original righteousness, most theologians include communicable attributes in how mankind is made in the image of God. This includes the power to reason, the power to love, moral awareness, and free will. Also typically included is the spiritual nature of mankind including the immortal nature of the soul.

Original righteousness was lost due to the Fall, but opinions vary as to its impact on other God-like aspects of man. Some believe that the Fall corrupted all of our divine Godlikeness. The view is that we can no longer reason or love or make moral choices as well as mankind could prior to



**The Creation of Adam,
Michealangelo, Sistine Chapel**
(Pixabay)

the Fall. Others have the view that our Godlikeness has always been an imperfect version of what is perfect in God. God loves perfectly and we love imperfectly. God reasons perfectly and we reason imperfectly. Both positions can be biblically defended, but Scripture does specify the impact of the Fall (Gn 3:16-21) and does not mention any diminishment of communicable attributes. Some also maintain that man's dominion over the lower animals should be included in how we are created in God's image, but Scripture does not specifically address this issue.

This section concludes by emphasizing the theological importance of this topic. Louis Berkhof writes, "The doctrine of the image of God in man is of the greatest importance in theology, for that image is the expression of that which is most distinctive in man and in his relation to God. The fact that man is the image of God distinguishes him from the animal and from every other creature."⁹⁰

7.4 Fallen Man

As discussed above, man was originally created "very good" and therefore had original righteousness. Adam and Eve then directly disobeyed God's command in eating the forbidden fruit and thereby committed the first sin. The serpent tempts them by saying they can become like God, but the original sin was disobedience.

Genesis describes the direct impact to Adam and Eve for their disobedience. For Eve, this includes painful childbirth and to be subject to Adam's rule. For Adam, this includes a difficult life of hard labor. God also say to Adam, "For you are dust, And to dust you shall return" (Gn 3:19). Some understand this to mean that Adam and Eve were not subject to physical aging and death before the Fall, but with the Fall came the inevitability of death.

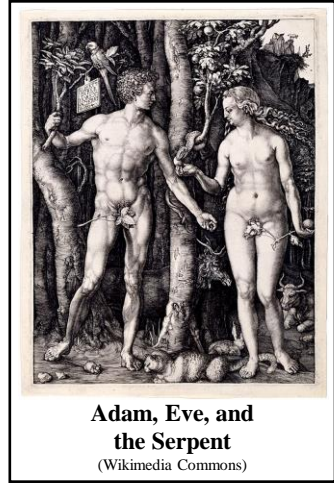
The creation stories make no mention of original sin, the loss of original righteousness, or the impact of the Fall on future humanity. However, Paul teaches us about the impact of the Fall in several verses:

- "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all mankind, because all sinned" (Rom 5:12); and
- "So then, as through one offense the result was condemnation to all mankind, so also through one act of righteousness the result was justification of life to all mankind. For as through the one man's

disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous” (Rom 5:18-19).

The first passage states that sin entered the world through the original sin of Adam and therefore all are now sinners. The second verse is similar but adds that the original sin of Adam resulted in the condemnation of all of mankind. Virtually all agree that this condemnation means that everyone is born spiritually dead and with a sinful nature, referred to as original sin. More controversial is that everyone is guilty of Adam’s original sin, referred to as original guilt. The argument for original guilt is that Adam is the head of all humanity and therefore all of humanity shares Adam’s guilt. The argument against original guilt is that someone cannot be held morally accountable for an action unless they had the power stop the action. Since nobody except Adam or Eve could have stopped the original sin, nobody except Adam and Eve (it can be argued) can be guilty of the original sin.

The issue of original guilt is of no practical importance to adults since all have sinned and are therefore condemned before God regardless of original guilt. But this is not the case for infant salvation. If one believes in both original guilt and infant salvation, one must also believe that original guilt has no practical consequence. Charles Hodge described the Reformed position as follows, “All who die in infancy are saved ... All the descendants of Adam, except Christ are under condemnation; all the descendants of Adam, except those of whom it is expressly revealed that they cannot inherit the kingdom of God, are saved.” The salvific implications of this statement are discussed later in the chapter on salvation.



7.5 Sin and the Impact of Sin

Sin can be thought of in a philosophical sense and in a moral sense. Philosophical explanations of sin seek to answer metaphysical questions such as whether it is a privation, a defect, a negation, a physical or spiritual essence, a selfish feeling, and so forth. Although intellectually interesting, philosophical theories about sin are only of secondary importance to theology.

The definition of sin is simply a moral evil (as opposed to a physical evil). Evil is anything opposed to God, and so sin can also be thought of as thoughts and actions that are opposed to God's moral standards. This means that motive is important when considering sin, not just the action or the result of the action. Accidentally harming an innocent person is not a sin, but intentionally harming an innocent person is sinful. "But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and those things defile the person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, acts of adultery, other immoral sexual acts, thefts, false testimonies, and slanderous statements" (Mt 15:18-19). This verse also mentions that thoughts can be evil and therefore sinful. Impure thoughts that arise in your mind are temptations but not sins. But encouraging impure thoughts and indulging in them can rise to the level of sin. Jesus makes this clear with the example of lustful thoughts. "You have heard that it was said, 'you shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:27:28). This is a hard teaching for many and illustrates just how deficient our morality is when compared to God's standard.

Sin is commonly understood to have two effects: the guilt of sin and the pollution of sin. Guilt relates to God's justice with respect to sin. Pollution relates to God's holiness with respect to sin. When someone sins, the associated guilt results in the deserving of punishment to satisfy justice. The associated pollution results in the sinner being more blameworthy, unworthy, hell-deserving, and less Christ-like. When one becomes justified through trust in the redeeming power of Christ, the guilt aspect of sin is removed but the pollution aspect of sin remains. All Christians know this to be true from personal experience. We are saved and know the comfort of being positionally righteous in the eyes of God, but also know that we remain sinners and are still not perfectly righteous in a practical sense.

The formal doctrine of sin was developed in response to heretical teachings, particularly Pelagianism and St. Augustine's strong attack against it. Pelagius taught that God would only require man to do what man is capable of doing. Therefore, sin consists only in the free choice to make morally evil choices, and it is possible in theory for every person to resist in making all morally evil choices. Sin must exclusively be due to free human choices otherwise God would be the author of sin, either directly or indirectly. Furthermore, according to Pelagianism, Adam's sin only impacted Adam and people are born today into the same moral state as Adam was. Anyone (including Pagans) can achieve salvation by living a sin-free life, although trust in Christ and the Gospel makes this much easier.

Augustine's aggressive rebuttal against Pelagianism has a metaphysical aspect and a moral aspect. Metaphysically, Augustine defined sin as a depravation of goodness to show that sin is not necessary and also that God is not the author of sin. He uses the analogy of an untuned harp. The player of the harp is responsible for the sound, but not the discordant notes. In the same way (according to Augustine), God and his divine economy are responsible for our actions, but not the result of our actions due to our sinful nature.

The moral aspect of Augustine's doctrine of evil remains the predominant view of orthodox theologians today. This is that (1) all people are shown to be sinners as soon as they are able to reason; (2) sin is not necessary but a willful and voluntary act of man; (3) all people are born spiritually dead; and (4) unsaved people are in complete bondage to sin and are completely helpless to free themselves from this corruption through their own power. Unregenerated people, according to Augustine, are in a state referred to as total depravity. In a state of total depravity free choices can be made, but only sinful free choices, and nothing can be done in a state of total depravity that is pleasing to God, including choosing to trust in the redeeming power of Christ. Rather, God through his good grace regenerates the elect, resulting in them irresistibly putting their faith in Christ with perfect certainty.

Eight hundred years after Augustine, Thomas Aquinas developed a doctrine of sin that was very similar. It differs slightly in that he views the original righteousness of Adam as a divine gift that was forfeited for him and all of posterity due to his disobedience. Original sin resulted in both the loss of the gift of original righteousness (the formal effect) and the consequent disordering of our whole nature due to an orientation that is away from God (the material effect). Aquinas refers to this material effect as the corruption of the soul. In a spiritual healthy person, sensual desires (i.e., concupiscence) are subordinate to rational desires which are themselves subordinate to God's desires. Corruption of the soul allows for sensual desires to overpower both reason and obedience to God, resulting in sin. The difference between Aquinas and Augustine on this topic is that Augustine views man as fully corrupted and not able to cooperate with God without God's help. Aquinas, in contrast, believes that corrupted man is still able to cooperate with God's grace. Reformed theologians primarily agree



Thomas Aquinas
(Wikimedia Commons)

with Augustine on this subject while the Roman Catholics and Arminians tend to agree with Aquinas.

There are several theories as to how original sin has been transmitted to subsequent generations. The most prominent is immediate imputation, where the guilt of Adam's sin is transmitted directly into each new person. As a result, each person upon conception is subject to the penalty of Adam's disobedience. Next is mediate imputation, where sinful nature is inherited from Adam but not his guilt. With mediate imputation, people are only guilty of the sins that they actually commit. A variant of mediate imputation is that Adam's loss of original righteousness resulted in a corrupt human nature, and this nature is propagated like all other aspects of human nature. Last is the realistic theory, which understands the whole of the human race to exist in Adam and Eve. When Adam and Eve sinned, the entire human race sinned and is subject to the consequent guilt and pollution.

Although theological opinions vary as to why and how sin is transmitted, it is clear from Scripture that all people are sinners and are born spiritually dead. This fact is absolutely central to theology and to Christianity in general. I will therefore spend some time presenting scriptural evidence in support of each.

With regards to the sinful nature of man Paul writes, "[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23); and, "But the Scripture has confined everyone under sin" (Gal 3:22). John writes, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us ... If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us" (1 Jn 1:8-10). "[T]here is no person who does not sin" (1 Kgs 8:46). "[T]here is not a righteous person on earth who always does good and does not ever sin" (Eccl 7:20). There are innumerable verses that make the same point. Christ was the only earthly person without a sinful nature.

With regards to our unregenerated state as the equivalent of spiritual death Paul writes, "And you were dead in your offenses and sins" (Eph 2:1); "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23); and "And when you were dead in your wrongdoings and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him" (Col 2:13). John writes, "We know that we have passed out of death into life" (1 Jn 3:14) and "The one who has the Son has the life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have the life" (1 Jn 5:12).

In summary, Adam was born sinless and spiritually alive but sinned and became spiritually dead. We are born sinful and spiritually dead. We can become spiritually alive through trust in the redemptive power of Christ, but remain sinful creatures that, though positionally righteous, still fall far short of Godly perfection.

7.6 Grace

Grace is something positive that is bestowed to someone underserving, such as a gift, a blessing, or love. In theology, grace typically refers to the good things that God bestows upon undeserving humanity. This divine grace can further be divided into grace that God gives to everyone, called common grace, and grace that relates to God’s redemptive role, called saving grace. This section addresses the doctrine of God’s saving grace.

The theological concept of grace became prominent during the Pelagian controversy. Pelagianism taught that God would never command people to do something impossible; people are not tainted by original sin and are therefore capable through free will to live a sin-free life. In this view, there is no need for God’s grace for a person to achieve salvation.

Augustine vigorously opposed Pelagianism. He writes, “Whoever maintains that human nature at any period required not the second Adam for its physician, because it was not corrupted in the first Adam, is convicted as an enemy to the grace of God.”⁹¹ In other words, Aristotle views salvation as requiring God’s saving grace which is only available through the salvific work of Christ, referred to as the second Adam.

According to Augustine, original sin significantly taints man’s ability to correctly make decisions regarding sinful actions. He uses the analogy of a scale to describe people’s ability to make correct moral assessments. Due to original sin, an unregenerated person has a biased scale that makes correct moral assessments impossible (see Figure 7-1). Mankind’s corrupted nature will tend to make good things seem to be not as good and evil things not to as evil. It is only through God’s grace or regeneration that this bias can be overcome, allowing the regenerated person to make correct moral assessments with God’s help.

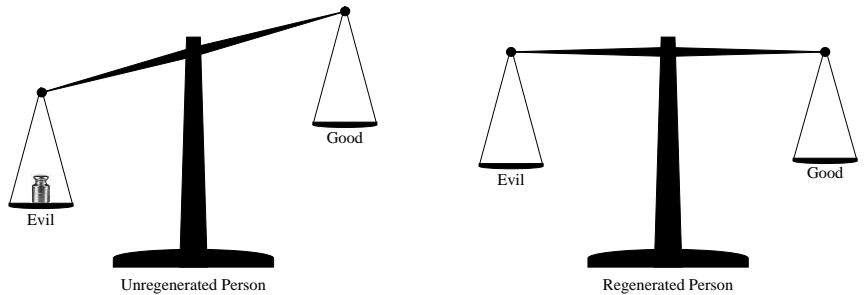


Figure 7-1. Aristotle’s Biased Scale Analogy of Moral Assessment

Aristotle sub-divides God's grace into three kinds: prevenient grace, operative grace, and cooperative grace. Prevenient grace is active in all people, even to unbelievers. It prepares a person for conversion, without which conversion would be impossible. Conversion is accomplished by God's operative grace, which does not rely on any human cooperation. After conversion, cooperative grace allows a person to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the sanctifying process of becoming more Christlike.

Thomas Aquinas adds to Aristotle formulation of grace through the concepts of actual grace and habitual grace. Actual grace refers to acts of God that positively influence our behavior. Habitual grace refers to a supernatural substance put in a person's soul by God that permanently changes the soul for the better. This understanding of grace by Aquinas eventually lost favor, but the general Aristotelian understanding of grace remains highly influential.

Up until the Protestant reformation, the concept of salvation focused on biblical verses that emphasize grace such as "[W]ith Christ by grace you have been saved" (Eph 2:5). This radically changed with the Reformation and Martin Luther's strong focus on verses that emphasize justification by faith. Although both concepts are theologically compatible, it is clearer to understand salvation as involving both grace and faith. For this reason, it is perhaps clearer to describe justification and salvation to be by "grace through faith" rather than by "faith alone."

Although post-Reformation language tended to switch from grace to faith, Reformed theology developed an extensive doctrine called the Covenant of Grace. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were under the Covenant of Works, where they could remain righteous before God through obedience. Since the Fall, mankind is under the Covenant of Grace, where salvation through grace is offered to all people on the condition of faith. People are sinners, are completely undeserving of saving grace, and are completely helpless to achieve salvation through any human effort. Grace is simply a free gift offered by a loving God to all those willing to receive it through faith.

The Reformed doctrine of grace holds that the means of salvation has always been the same since the Fall. This is necessarily true since God is eternal and unchangeable. The form has changed throughout history (in periods called dispensations), but OT saints were saved by faith in the same way that NT saints were saved by faith as are people today. Louis Berkhof writes, "It is essentially the same in all dispensations, though its form of administration changes ... The Bible teaches that there is but a single gospel by which men can be saved. And because the gospel is nothing but the revelation of the covenant of grace, it follows that there is also but one covenant."⁹² Charles Hodge echoes this thought but adds that grace

is not bestowed to those with general faith in God, but to those with faith in the redemptive power of the Messiah.

As the same promise was made to those who lived before the advent which is now made to us in the gospel, as the same Redeemer was revealed to them who is presented as the object of faith to us, it of necessity follows that the condition, or terms of salvation, was the same then as now. It was not mere faith or trust in God, or simply piety, which was required, but faith in the promised Redeemer, or faith in the promise of redemption through the Messiah.⁹³

That faith has always justified sinful man is echoed in Hebrews, which discussing the role of faith in of OT figures (such as Abraham and Moses) in gaining God's approval. "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for the one who comes to God must believe that He exists, and that He proves to be One who rewards those who seek Him" (Heb 11:6). The NT brings additional clarity as to the mechanism of salvation by grace through faith, but Abraham and Moses became righteous before God in essentially the same way as Peter and Paul.

If grace is offered in the OT in the same manner as the NT, the question arises about the specific role of Christ's death and resurrection, which obviously had not yet occurred during OT times. The answer to this question is ultimately a mystery but may have to do with God existing outside of space and time. Although people witnessed Christ's death and resurrection from the human perspective of being within space and time, the redemptive power of Christ (if God is understood to be immutable) must be an eternal quality.

Although the term is not used, the Covenant of Grace is essentially shared by Roman Catholic, Lutheranism, Reformed, and Arminian theologies. In each, initial justification is achieved by divine grace through faith. The difference is that Roman Catholics and Lutheranism believe that original sin is cleansed by baptism, and all but Reformed theology believes that everyone has the ability to experience saving grace. Reformed theology limits saving grace to the predestined elect.

7.7 Further Reading

Those interested in a more detailed treatment of the doctrine of man in relation to God are encouraged to read Part 2 of Louis Berkhof's book *Systematic Theology* with the understanding that Berkhof is primarily presenting and defending Reformed theology. Also recommended is Part 2 of Volume 2 of Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology*. Hodge also takes the Reformed position but presents major competing views (although with the

intent of demonstrating why they are not to be preferred). Last, Part 3 of Gregg Allison's *Historical Theology* presents a history of the doctrine of humanity, including the development of all of the major theological positions. Easier reading can be found in Part 3 of Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (2nd ed., Ch. 21-25). He primarily follows Berkhof, but also adds much content from an evangelical perspective.

7.8 Study Questions

1. How are the two stories of creation in Genesis both similar and seemingly different?
2. What are some of the different interpretations of the stories of creation with respect to how mankind was created?
3. What is the difference between the dichotomist view of mankind and the trichotomist view of mankind?
4. What are two ways that a new human life might acquire their soul? What is one theological difficulty associated with each?
5. What are some the theological opinions about what it means for mankind to be made in the image of God?
6. What does the Genesis account describe as the consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience to God?
7. What is the difference between original sin and original guilt? What is your opinion on whether a baby that dies in infancy is deserving of eternal punishment?
8. Paul writes that the disobedience of Adam resulted in sin entering the world and the resulting condemnation of all mankind. He also writes that through the obedience of Jesus the many will be made righteous. Was it possible for people in the OT, such as Abraham, Moses, and Elijah, to be made righteous? Explain.
9. What are the two primary effects of committing sinful acts and to which divine attributes do they relate?
10. What is the Pelagian heresy and how does it differ from the orthodox understanding of man's sinful nature?

8. The Doctrine of Christ

Christ is the Greek-based equivalent of the Hebrew-based word messiah, which literally means anointed one.⁹⁴ In the OT, messiah is generally used when referring to a savior or a liberator of people. For example, when a new Jewish king or priest was installed, they were anointed with oil to sanctify them and make them holy. More specifically, the OT refers to a specific future Messiah from the lineage of David who would deliver Israel from foreign bondage and restore her to glory. Christians believe that Jesus Christ incarnate was the fulfillment of this messianic prophesy.

The first time Jesus uses a title for Himself in the Bible is in Matthew. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 7:21). Here Jesus refers to His heavenly status as Lord rather than his earthly status as Messiah. But Jesus referring to himself as Heavenly Lord is the exception rather than the rule. By far the most common term Jesus uses when referring to himself is Son of Man (*Huios Anthrōpou*). Jesus does this 30 times in Matthew, 16 in Mark, 29 in Luke, and 13 in John. The first instances in each Gospel include “The foxes have holes and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Mt 8:14); “But so you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Mk 2:10); “But should you know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Lk 5:24); and “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (Jn 1:51).

The use of Son of Man by Jesus is commonly thought to be a reference to Dan 7:13, which refers to the son of man descending from the clouds of heaven. This view is debatable due the generic usage of the term in Daniel which refers to something with the form or appearance of a man.⁹⁵ Although Jesus referring to himself as the Son of Man may hint at his messiahship, He is very secretive about this throughout His ministry. This is evident through a direct instruction to his disciples. “Then He gave disciples strict orders that they were to tell no one that he was the Christ” (Mt 16:20). In academic literature, Jesus’s intentional concealment of His messiahship is called the “messianic secret.”

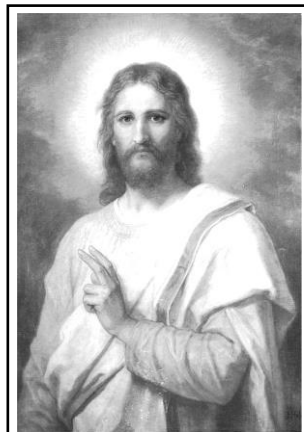
Why did Jesus refer to himself as the Son of Man rather than the Messiah? There is a general hiddenness aspect and a specific messiah aspect to the answer. In terms of hiddenness, Christ was trying to keep a low profile during his ministry because notoriety could become problematic in terms excessive crowds and premature punitive actions by Jewish officials. In terms of messiah, it was a loaded term in which Jews had a specific interpretation and its use would almost certainly result in confusion. Jews expected the messiah to be a warrior king who would deliver them from Roman occupation. Jesus needed sufficient time to instruct His disciples on the true divine role of His Messiahship, particularly the need for the Messiah to suffer and die. This message was not to be preached to the broader community until Christ's death and resurrection.

The remainder of this section addresses the doctrine of Christ including Christ as a person, Christ as a God-man, the states of Christ, the offices of Christ, the work of Christ through the Atonement. The combination of these subjects is also referred to as Christology.

8.1 The Person of Christ

The early church understood Christ to be both human and divine, the Son of Man and the Son of God. The concept of Jesus as divine was, however problematic for many with Jewish backgrounds due to the strong emphasis in Judaism on monotheism. There were therefore many heretical teachings that emerged that viewed God the Father as the One God and Jesus Christ as something less than fully God. Some regarded Jesus as a normal person who assumed the role of the prophesized messiah when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him at His baptism. Some also believed that this resulted in Jesus having supernatural powers. Dynamic Monarchianism was a specific variant of this belief where the divine Logos descended upon Jesus along with the Holy Spirit at the time of Jesus's baptism. These types of beliefs where Jesus was born a normal human deny the full divinity of Christ.

Other heretical beliefs erred in the other direction by denying the full humanity of Christ. This was first seen in Gnostic teachings where Christ was thought to not have a physically human body because all matter was considered corrupt. One form of this



Jesus Christ, by Hoffman
(Wikimedia Commons)

belief is that the Logos descended upon the man Jesus at His baptism and then left just prior to Jesus's death. Hence, the dying Jesus cries out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me" (Mt 27:46)? Another form has Jesus's body simply being a non-corporal phantasm. All of these variants focus on Jesus's human form as simply a mechanism for the divine Logos to interact with the fully corrupted physical world.

There were a number of additional heretical beliefs that deny the full divinity of Christ in various ways. Arianism does this by making Christ something created by the Father. It defends this belief by pointing out that the Bible says that Christ is God's only begotten Son, and that something begotten has not always existed. Apollinarianism views a man as having a body, soul, and spirit, with the Logos taking the place of the human spirit in Jesus (thereby denying His full humanity). Adoptionism understands God as simply adopting Jesus at His baptism. Nestorianism understands Christ as two separate persons, one human and one divine. Eutychianism taught that Christ was neither human nor divine, but a fusion of the two into a single nature. These are the major heretical positions, but there are many other variations and interpretations.

These heretical teachings were addressed at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The result was the Confession of Chalcedon (also called the Chalcedonian Definition), which states the following:

Following, then, the holy fathers, we unite in teaching all men to confess the one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This selfsame one is perfect both in deity and also in humanness; this selfsame one is also actually God and actually man, with a rational soul and a body. He is of the same reality as God as far as his deity is concerned and of the same reality as ourselves as far as his humanness is concerned; thus like us in all respects, sin only excepted. Before time began he was begotten of the Father, in respect of his deity, and now in these "last days," for us and on behalf of our salvation, this selfsame one was born of Mary the virgin, who is God-bearer in respect of his humanness. [We also teach] that we apprehend this one and only Christ—Son, Lord, and only-begotten—in two natures; [and we do this] without confusing the two natures, without transmuting one nature into the other, without dividing them into two separate categories, without contrasting them according to area or function. The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union. Instead, the "properties" of each nature are conserved and both natures concur in one "person" [*prosōpon*] and in one hypostasis [essence]. They are not divided or cut into two *prosōpa* [persons], but are together the one and only and only begotten Logos of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus have the prophets of old testified; thus the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught; thus the Symbol [confession] of the Fathers has handed down to us.⁹⁶

The Confession of Chalcedon was reaffirmed at the Council of Nicaea (325), at the Council of Ephesus (431), and remains the orthodox doctrine of Christ today. Jesus Christ is a single person that is both fully human and fully divine. Theologically, Jesus Christ consists of a single substance with

two natures. These two natures are joined in what is referred to as the hypostatic union. Being fully human, Christ has a human mind and is therefore responsible and morally accountable for His actions. The human nature of Christ is not to be thought of as a human person as the totality of Christ is the second Person of the triune God. Rather, the human nature of Christ is an impersonal nature that is part of the God-man person. However, the human nature of Christ is generally thought of as having both a will and a consciousness that is distinct from that of the divine nature. As such, Christ is a single person with a human will, a human consciousness, a divine will, and a divine consciousness.

Christ's full divinity and full humanity are both theologically necessary. Only in being both fully human and fully divine can Christ serve as the perfect Mediator between man and the Father. "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tm 2:5). Christ also needs to be fully human for two additional reasons. The first was the need suffer and die as a full human to satisfy the redemptive function of the Atonement. The second was to provide a perfect human example for how His followers should live their lives. Christ also needs to be fully divine because Scripture is clear on this point. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God ... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we saw His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:1-14; see also 8:58; 10:30; 20:28).

This section has so far provided typical treatment of the doctrine of Christ since Chalcedon in that it focuses on what Christ is versus what Christ does. In other words, this section has presented ontological Christology rather than functional Christology. A famous debate occurred between C.S. Lewis and W.N. Pittenger about ontological Christology. Lewis defended it while Pittenger criticized it as an invention of the Church. Lewis emphasized "the very being, the ontology, of Jesus Christ in relation to the uncreated divine nature: very man and very God, fully human and fully divine, and in this divinity co-eternal with the Father from eternity to eternity."⁹⁷ Pittenger accused Lewis of belonging "to that modern school of thought which believes that if the catholic church has taught something long enough, then that something must necessarily be true."⁹⁸

Morna Booker does a good job of explaining why the NT focuses on functional Christology, but theology gradually shifted towards ontological Christology.⁹⁹ Essentially, this is due to the significant difference in Jewish versus Greek theological and philosophical thinking. The NT Jewish authors in the time of Jesus were primarily concerned with showing how OT beliefs about God are compatible with NT beliefs. The OT portrays a God of action and therefore the NT focus should be a God of action.

By the time of Chalcedon, revival of Greek philosophy in the West resulted in a more philosophical approach to theology. The Logos terminology is neo-Platonic, but Christology at the time of Chalcedon was based on Aristotelian metaphysics and its corresponding focus on the psychology and doctrine of substance. Today, Christological debates are still almost exclusively related to ontology and not divine action. But functional Christology has taken hold today in many parts of Africa in the form of Christ as a divine conqueror. This view of Christ responds to the need felt by many Africans to frame Christianity in the context of needing a powerful protector against evil spirits that work against human beings. But a theologian need not choose between ontology and functionality, and a balance of perspective is encouraged.

8.2 Christ the God-Man

And so, Christ is the God-man. This is what is meant when theologians refer to Christ as the Theanthropos (*theo*=God; *ánthrōpos*=human). This ontological characterization of Christ is summarized in the Chalcedonian Definition (CD) which asserts these four fundamental theses about Christ: (1) Christ is numerically one person; (2) Christ is both fully human and fully divine; (3) the human and divine natures of Christ are distinct; and (4) Christ unifies His human and divine natures. Although the CD successfully refutes a number of heresies, the claim that Christ is fully human and fully divine is not explained. This issue therefore continues to be a subject of controversy among philosophers and theologians. The primary controversy relates to the logical compatibility of human and divine attributes. The Bible is clear that Christ is God (Jn 1:1; Jn 10:30; Jn 20:28; Tit 2:13) and that Christ has many human attributes like a human body (Phil 2:7), the ability to suffer (1 Pt 3:18), and the ability to grow in wisdom (Lk 2:52). But the Bible does not explain how Christ can simultaneously be fully human and fully divine.

The logical problem of the CD can be represented as follows: (A) something fully human is not omniscience, omnipotence, nor omnipresence; (B) something fully divine is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent; and (C) if Christ is a single person that is both fully human and fully divine, He must be both omniscient and not omniscient, both omnipotent and not omnipotent, and both omnipresence and not omnipresent. This difficulty cannot be dismissed as a mystery beyond human understanding as it seems to imply logical contradictions. I refer to this as the Chalcedonian Definition Difficulty (CDD). Each of the heresies addressed at Chalcedon

solves the CDD with a different approach but, in doing so, contradict the CD in one-or-more areas.

Theologians have attempted to solve the CDD in many ways that are typically categorized as either abstract models or concrete models. Some abstract models include the Alvinized abstract-nature view, the Reaified abstract-nature view, neo-Apollinarianism, ontological kenotism, functional kenotism, and the abstract two minds view. These models all involve the Logos undergoing change in order to become human. Some concrete models include prophetic and compositional. These involve the Logos entering a relational union with a human body or soul-body. Brief descriptions of these Christological models are now provided.

Alvinized Abstract-Nature. This model was developed by Alvin Plantinga. It holds that the Logos became a human soul at the time of virginal conception. This involves the Logos adding any properties that are necessary and sufficient for it to become a human soul that exists within the material body of Jesus.

Reaified Abstract-Nature. This model was developed by Michael Rea. It holds that the incarnate Christ did not require a human soul. Rather, the Logos simply assumed the role of a human soul within the material body of Jesus at the time of virginal conception. In this model, Christ incarnate does not have a human soul *per se*, but a functional equivalent.

Neo-Apollinarianism. This view holds that the Logos already had all of the attributes required to be fully human prior to the incarnation. The only thing missing was a human body. Therefore, when the Logos joined with a human body, the resulting union possessed all of the elements required to be both fully human and fully divine.

Ontological Kenotism. This view holds that the Logos, in the instant before the incarnation, ceded all of the divine attributes that would prevent the God-man from being fully human. This concept is derived from the NT reference to kenosis. Kenosis is derived from the Greek word *kenōō* (κενῶω), which means to empty or to make empty. It appears once in Scripture, “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, as He already existed in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied (*kenoō*) Himself by taking the form of a bond-servant and being born in the likeness of men” (Phil 2:5-7).

Functional Kenotism. This view holds that the Logos did not actually cede any divine attributes during the incarnation. Rather, the Logos simply refrained from using any of the divine attributes that would have been incompatible with the God-man from being fully human. Functional kenotism therefore does not interpret Phil 2:5-1 to mean a literal emptying out

of divine attributes, but a suspension of use of certain ones such as omniscience and omnipresence.

Abstract Two Minds. This model was developed by Thomas Morris. It holds that Christ incarnate has both a divine mind and a human mind, and that the human mind is contained within the divine mind. The result is a asymmetric accessing relationship where the divine mind has full access to the human mind but the human mind only has access to the divine mind to the extent that the divine mind allows. Of course, God can access any human mind and give any human mind access to divine knowledge. The difference in the abstract two minds model is that these two minds are part of the same person. Morris writes, “[T]he cognitive and causal powers of God the Son ... under the constraints proper to the conditions of a fully human existence, were just such as to give rise to a human mind ... two minds of one person, one center of causal and cognitive powers.”¹⁰⁰

Prophetic Model. Prophetic models hold that Jesus was a prophet akin to OT prophets but was given a unique and special relationship with God the Father, most commonly understood to have occurred at His baptism. An example of the prophetic model is adoptionism (see p. 52).

Compositional Model. The Chalcedonian Definition asserts that Christ is both fully human and fully divine. But the Incarnate Christ also involves concrete things such as the Logos, a human body, and a human soul. Compositional Christologies attempt to explain how these three concrete things become relationally related in the Incarnation. An example of a compositional model is Nestorianism, which is heretical in that it views the Incarnation as two separate persons (a divine person and a human person, see p. 55). Classical Christology is also considered a concrete compositional model. It holds that the Logos assumed human nature consisting of a human body and a human soul. This differs from heretical view like Apollinarianism, where the Logos joins with a human body but not a human soul (see p. 54). It also differs from the abstract two minds model in that the Logos acquires a human nature that includes a separate consciousness and a will rather than these being contained within the divine mind.

The concept of kenosis has been introduced above through the Christological models of ontological kenotism and functional kenotism. There are several other interpretations of kenosis that warrant mention. A strong form of ontological kenosis is Christ emptying Himself of all divine attributes during the Incarnation. A weak form of ontological kenosis is Christ emptying Himself of only some divine attributes during the Incarnation (e.g., omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence) while keeping others (e.g., holiness, truth, love). Both of these have a variation where Christ still retains all of His divine attributes, but in a modified form that is compatible with space-time existence. Last, some interpretations of kenosis do

not involve divine attributes. An example is Christ emptying himself of His position of heavenly glory to become a humble man.

All of the above Christological models are, in some way, inconsistent with the CD. The sole exception is classic Christology, which is essentially an extension of the CD. However, classic Christology does not solve the CDD problem. There is not a biblical answer to the CDD, and so the best we can do is to identify at least one possible solution to show that the CD is not self-contradictory. One possible solution is called the divine preconscious model (DPM).¹⁰¹

In the DPM, the Logos when becoming incarnate adds a human body and a human mind to His full divinity, just as with classical Christology. A human personality is not added since Christ is a single human/divine person and therefore only has a single personality. The human mind serves as the conscious mind. The divine mind serves as the preconscious mind. The preconscious has knowledge that is accessible to the conscious in a process similar to recalling a memory. The preconscious is still fully the Logos and is able to, for example, sustain creation and enable miracles. This model also allows the conscious to have a human will and the preconscious to have a separate divine will.

DPM has the Logos adding a human body and a human mind. The human body and mind interact like all humans, except that there is no original sin or original guilt. The divine mind acts as a pre-conscience that can interact with the human conscience as needed. For example, the human conscience will not normally be aware of people's thoughts. But the human conscience can become aware of other people's thoughts by accessing the divine pre-conscience. The divine pre-conscience can also enable miraculous acts through its divine power. For example, before feeding the masses Jesus's human conscience could simply ask the divine pre-conscience what should be done. The divine pre-conscience would then instruct the human conscience and also empower the miracle.

To avoid the Apollinarianism heresy, Christ must have both a human and a divine will. In DPM these wills interact in a manner similar to the human conscience and divine pre-conscience. The human conscience is normally aware of the human will. However, the human conscience can access the divine will through the divine pre-conscience. This helps to explain Jesus's plea to the Father, "Abba, Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will" (Mk 14:36).

DPM is speculative and cannot be shown true by Scripture. But that is not the point. Rather, DPM shows that the CD is not necessarily self-contradictory. Ultimately, the single person of Christ that is fully human and fully divine is a mystery beyond our full understanding.

8.3 The States of Christ

From the time of His incarnation to the time of His ascension, Christ is said to have been in a state of humiliation. From the time of His ascension onward, Christ is said to be in a state of exaltation. The word “state” in this context refers to Christ’s position in life, particularly with respect to the Law. In His state of humiliation, Christ was subject to the Law even to the point of condemnation due to His assumption of our sins. “God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law” (Gal 4:4-5). In His state of exaltation, Christ is no longer subject to the Law and is free from condemnation due to His atoning work.

A common approach to describing Christ’s state of humiliation is to divide it into five stages: incarnation, suffering, death, burial, and His descent into hades. These five stages of humiliation are each now briefly discussed.

The Incarnation is properly understood as the second Person of the triune God assuming a human nature. Something with infinite qualities in a deliberate act of humiliation entered into something with finite qualities. “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14).

There is debate about whether the Incarnation was necessary and would have still occurred if sin had not entered the world. There are good arguments on both sides. Those believing that the Incarnation was not contingent upon sin points to God’s sovereign plan, God’s immutability, and the fact of the ascended Christ having duties beyond just that of redemption. Those believing that the Incarnation only occurred because sin entered the world point to Scriptural passages consistently conditioning the Incarnation with sin. “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk 19:10; see also Jn 3:16; Gal 4:4; 1 Jn 3:8).

Orthodox doctrine is that Christ was born of the Virgin Mary (Mt 1:18-20; Lk 1:34-35). For example, the Apostle’s Creed states precisely this, that Christ was “born of the Virgin Mary.” This is also affirmed in the Roman Catholic Catechism, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Westminster Catechism, the Augsburg Confession, and in many other statements of faith. Beyond Mt 1:18-20 and Lk 1:34-35, justification for the virgin birth of Christ includes the prophesy by Isaiah, “Behold, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and she will name Him



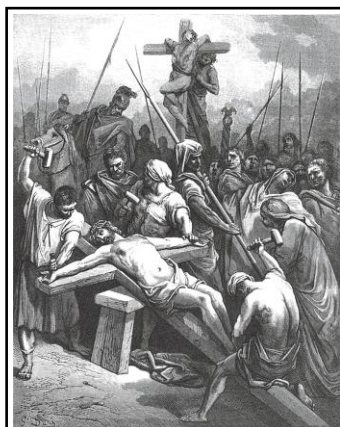
**Madonna and Child
and Two Angels, Lippi**
(Wikimedia Commons)

Immanuel” (Is 7:14). But virgin is a translation of the Hebrew word *almah* (עַלְמָה), which can also simply mean a young woman. Theologically, it makes sense that the God-man was a result of both God and humanity, which would be the case if Mary’s conception was due to the Holy Spirit. Last, some believe that people are born with sin that is inherited from their Father’s line. If so, this would account for Christ assuming human nature but not the associated sin.

Those questioning the virgin birth deviate from orthodox doctrine but point to several things. The first is that of Is 7:14 discussed above. If Matthew and Luke understood this verse to refer to a virgin, they may have assumed that Jesus must have been the result of a virgin birth. The second is the fact that the Messiah was prophesized to come from the line of David. If Joseph was not Jesus’s biological father, Jesus was not a biological descendant of the male lineage of David. Last, no other mention of the virgin birth appears anywhere else in the NT. Both the earliest and latest Gospels do not mention it (Mark and John, respectively). And Paul does not mention it in any of his letters. When he writes, “God sent His Son, born of a woman” (Gal 4:4), he uses the word *gynaikos* (γυναικός), which means woman rather than choosing to use a word that means virgin.

A middle position is that the virgin birth may or may not have occurred, but this issue is not a matter of theological importance. Often, this position is motivated by a skepticism of supernatural events and is accompanied by a dismissal of most if not all other miracle accounts in the Bible. But there is merit to the position that the virgin birth is not a belief upon which any other theological doctrine depends and does not necessarily follow from any other theological doctrine.

The sufferings of Christ are most closely associated with the Passion, the torture He endured just before His crucifixion. The word passion comes from the Greek word *pathos* (πάθος), which literally means to suffer. But it is understood that Christ’s entire life on earth consisted of suffering as a sinless person in a sinful world. In this sense, His suffering was of the soul in addition to the body. At Gethsemane, Jesus makes this clear when He says, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death” (Mt 26:38). That Christ suffered in body and in soul is theologically important since His atoning work needed to address the effects of sin on both our bodies and on



Crucifixion of Jesus, by Doré
(Wikimedia Commons)

our souls. All of this was also required to fulfill Isaiah's prophesy of the Suffering Servant:

However, it was our sicknesses that He Himself bore, And our pains that He carried; Yet we ourselves assumed that He had been afflicted, Struck down by God, and humiliated. But He was pierced for our offenses, He was crushed for our wrongdoings; The punishment for our well-being was laid upon Him, And by His wounds we are healed. (Is 53:4-5)

Christ's death on the cross involves more than just the physical death of the God-man. First, it was an execution of someone judged to be innocent through due legal process. The Roman prefect and governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, says to the Jewish crowd, "You brought this man to me on the ground that he is inciting the people to revolt; and behold, after examining Him before you, I have found no basis at all in the case of this man for the charges which you are bringing against Him. No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us" (Lk 23:14-15). The Roman legal system was considered one of the most sophisticated to have ever existed, providing clear evidence that the crucifixion was the killing of an innocent person, and therefore served no direct judicial function. Second, death by crucifixion was seen as so humiliating a death that it was not allowed to be used on Roman citizens. Christ's crucifixion was therefore the humiliating death of an innocent person.

Upon his death Jesus cries out, "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). This marks the end of Jesus's physical life, but not his humiliation. His humiliation continues with his burial in the tomb and His subsequent and descent into Hades. The *Westminster Catechism* writes, "Christ's humiliation after death involved his being buried and continuing in a state of being dead and under the power of death until the third day. This period is referred to in the words, He descended into hell."¹⁰²

It may seem strange that *Westminster Catechism* refers to Jesus being dead for three days as descending into hell. In fact this specifically addresses language found in several creeds. For example, both the Apostles' Creed and the Athanasian Creed states that Christ descended into hell after his death. It seems that these creeds are referring to something more than Jesus being dead, but the scriptural basis for an actual descent of Christ into hell is scant. Hence, a defining-away of the issue in the *Westminster Catechism*.

There is some indirect scriptural basis for Christ descending into hell prior to His resurrection. Paul writes, "Now this expression, 'He ascended,' what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things" (Eph 4:9-

10). Additionally, Peter writes, “For Christ also suffered for sins once for all time, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which He also went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison . . . For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead” (1 Pt 3:18-19; 4:6). Many interpret these verses such that Christ’s spirit after His death descended to hell to preach the gospel to the dead and unsaved. But others reject this interpretation as it would seem likely, if true, that the burial and resurrection accounts in the Gospels would also include an account of the descent.

The humiliation of Christ is followed by His exaltation. Christ’s state of exaltation is typically divided into four stages: the resurrection, the ascension, Christ at the right hand of God, and the physical return of Christ to earth. Each of these stages will now be briefly discussed.

Christ’s resurrection consisted of the reunification of His soul with a glorified body that was difficult to recognize and could suddenly appear and disappear. “Now while they were telling these things, Jesus Himself suddenly stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be to you.’ But they were startled and frightened, and thought that they were looking at a spirit” (Lk 24:36-37). Furthermore, Christ’s resurrection was through His own power. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn 2:19). In this sense Christ’s exaltation includes His defeat of death.

It should be noted that Christ’s death and resurrection are credible accounts by historical standards. Paul writes that after Jesus’s resurrection, “He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also” (1 Cor 15:5-8). If Christ had not made these appearances, it is almost certain that Paul would have been publicly revealed as a fraud. Louis Berkhof writes, “Even liberal scholars admit that no fact is better attested than the resurrection of Christ.”¹⁰³ Denial of the resurrection is essentially a refusal to believe in any miraculous account, no matter how strong the evidence may be. For more complete treatment of this issue, see the apologetics section on the Resurrection (p. 331).

Some have suggested possible ways that Jesus could have made His post-crucifixion appearances. Examples range from the apostles practicing deliberate deception, Jesus only appearing to die on the cross, or Jesus’s appearances being visions sent by God. All of these theories have fatal flaws except perhaps the vision theory. But Christ purposefully demonstrates his physical body when appearing to the disciples. “[Jesus] said to Thomas, ‘Place your finger here, and see My hands; and take your hand

and put it into My side; and do not continue in disbelief, but be a believer” (Jn 20-27). The vision theory would therefore make God a deceiver and, if one can believe in a vision sent by God, why not simply believe in the resurrection in the first place?

The ascension of Christ is described by Luke as follows, “And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were watching, and a cloud took Him up, out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, then behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them, and they said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:9-11; see also Lk 24:50-53; Heb 4:14). Of course, there can be very few things as exalting as to be lifted up to Heaven to be seated at the right hand of God. But the ascension of the Man-god was also theologically necessary for Christ to fulfill His role as Mediator. “For Christ did not enter a holy place made by hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb 9:24).

The Bible makes numerous references to the ascended Christ being at the right hand of God. Jesus himself predicts this when being questioned before the Sanhedrin. “But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God” (Lk 22:69). In the time of Jesus, being designated as a ruler’s right hand gave that person equal honor and authority. Therefore, Christ is not literally at the right hand of God as God is Spirit and does not have a literal hand. Scripture is clear on this meaning. “Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him” (1 Pt 3:21-22). Therefore, the exalted state of Christ at God’s right hand means that Christ has been given all authority over Heaven and Earth. Jesus Himself makes this clear just before his ascension at the Great Commission, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me” (Mt 28:18).

The future physical return of Christ to earth is referred to as the *Parousia* (Παρουσία) which literally means a coming or a presence. The word appears in many places in the NT where it refers to the return to earth of Jesus from heaven to raise the dead, hold the last judgment, and set up formally and gloriously the kingdom of God. A typical example occurs in James, “Therefore be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming (*parousias*) of the Lord” (Jas 5:7). Although the *Parousia* is something Christians look forward to in the future, the Nicene Creed sums up this culmination of Christ’s exaltation nicely, “He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.”

8.4 The Offices of Christ

There are three offices associated with Christ: the priestly, the prophetic, and the kingly. These offices are clearly anticipated in the OT. For example, Moses foretells the prophetic office (Dt 18:15) and the joint offices of king and priest are foretold by Zechariah (Zec 6:13). Charles Hodge writes, “Nothing, therefore, can be plainer than that as the Old Testament prophets predicted that the Messiah should be a prophet, priest, and king.”¹⁰⁴

In the OT, prophet is a translation of *nbiy'ah* (נְבִיאָה), which means an inspired spokesman for God. Christ perfectly fulfilled the prophetic role in directly communicating God’s message during His ministry. This must be so since He is the Logos, the literal Word of God (Jn 1:1; Rv 19:13). Christ’s teachings included personal instruction, discourses, parables, and teachings about the Law and prophetic writings. He also provided prophetic communication as to Himself, His purpose on earth, the Kingdom of Heaven, and the will of God for our salvation. Christ also claimed authority to clarify and expand OT teachings in saying “You have heard that ...” followed by “But I say to you ...” (Mt 5:21-48). These prophetic teachings are the basis for the entire NT and therefore the entire foundation of the Church today. The prophetic office of Christ is clear from the words of Christ himself. “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me” (Jn 7:16). The prophetic office can be thought of as the work of Christ in His incarnate life.

The Hebrew word for priest is *kôhên* (כֹּהֵן). In the OT, this word referred to people who performed the function of mediators between God and His people. The book of Hebrews also emphasizes the role of priests in the offering of gifts and sacrifices to God, explaining that Christ sacrificed Himself to “put away sin” (Heb 9:26). In His priestly office, Christ therefore undertakes two related aspects of His work. First, He died for our sins and His death allows for sinners to be reconciled with God. Second, he serves a mediator, allowing sinful man to approach the Holy Father through this reconciliation. That Christ needed to die for our sins is the work of His priestly office but in the context of His atoning work. Therefore, this aspect of Christ is further discussed in the section of the Atonement below. This said, the priestly office can be thought of as the work of Christ in His death.

People, even saved people, are sinful whereas the Father is perfectly Holy. Christ as mediator is the only way to bridge this gap. This is taught by both Jesus (Mt 11:27) and by Paul: “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). The role of Christ as mediator is therefore of the highest theological

importance. The puritan preacher Jeremiah Burroughs writes, “The most supernatural truth revealed in all the book of God [is that] God communicates His mercy through a mediator, through his Son.”¹⁰⁵ The mediation of Christ is how the broken relationship with God is mended. Since there are OT examples of people in a right relationship with God, this means that Christ must have eternally been the Mediator. This is necessarily true due to (1) the identity of Christ and His Works, and (2) the immutability of God. John Calvin writes, “The name of Mediator applies to Christ not only because he took on flesh or because he took on the office of reconciling the human race with God. But already from the beginning of creation he was truly Mediator because he was always the Head of the Church.”¹⁰⁶

Christ is the King of his Kingdom, meaning He rules and has absolute authority over all believers. Christ assumed the office of King after His resurrection when he was seated at the right hand of the Father. “When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3; see also Mk 16:19, Ep 1:20-21; Rom 8:34; 1 Pt 3:22). In his kingly office Christ specifically does the following: (1) calls people to His kingdom; (2) establishes the rules of governing His kingdom; (3) supports members of His kingdom in temptation and suffering; (4) acts against His kingdom’s enemies; (5) orders members to act according to His glory; and (6) eventually exacts justice on the unrepentant. Christ has absolute authority over all of creation, but has the additional unique position of being the head of the Church. “And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and made Him head over all things to the church, which is His body” (Eph 1:22-23).

The kingdom over which Christ rules is a spiritual kingdom—the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ makes this clear, “My kingdom is not of this world ... My kingdom is not of this realm” (Jn 18:36). As a spiritual kingdom, it has no power over the earthly lives of its members in terms of liberty or property. Charles Hodge writes, “Its prerogative is simply to declare the truth of God as revealed in this Word and to require that the truth should be professed and obeyed by all under its jurisdiction.”¹⁰⁷ Believers who still live in the earthly realm must remember that “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil 3:20). The book of Revelation writes, “And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written: ‘King of Kings, and Lord of Lords’” (Rv



**Christ the King,
Antipolo Cathedral**
(Wikimedia Commons)

19:16). Therefore, the kingly office can be thought of as the work of Christ in His resurrection.

8.5 The Atonement

In Christianity, the Atonement refers to the redemptive effect of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Through these works, Christ atoned for our sins, making it possible for unrighteous sinners to become positionally righteous in the eyes of God and to be adopted into His family. The words atone and atonement are portmanteaus of "at" and "one" first used by John Wycliff in the fourteenth century. They literally mean "at one" and "an onement" and indicate the healing and reconciling of a separated relationship into a unified relationship.

For theology, the most important aspect of the Atonement is what it does. It allows for the broken relationship between a person and God due to sin to be reconciled. But theologians also like to speculate on how the Atonement works by developing theories of the Atonement. The following are short summaries of the most popular theories of the Atonement.

Ransom-to-Satan Theory. Although theories of the Atonement were not discussed extensively by early church patricians, the most common view was the ransom-to-Satan theory. This theory was first developed by Origen (c.185–c.253) and is also known as *Christus Victor*. This theory assumes that the Fall somehow left all of mankind in legal bondage to Satan. Christ offered Himself as a ransom payment to Satan, thereby freeing mankind from this bondage. However, Satan was not able to retain his hold on Christ, and Christ emerged as the supreme Victor over Satan and his evil forces. Biblical support for this theory comes from the words of Jesus: "[T]he Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28 NASB), and from the words of Paul, "[Christ] gave Himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim 2:6).

Recapitulation. This theory, developed by Irenaeus (c.130–c.202), holds that the disobedience of Adam that resulted in the fallen nature of man, which Christ rectified through His perfect obedience to God. Since Adam was the head of humanity, Adam's sin is shared by everyone. Christ is the new head of humanity. As Adam's sinful and disobedient nature was shared by all, Christ's sinless and perfectly obedient nature can now be shared by all. This theory has its focus on the incarnation rather than the crucifixion. By Christ becoming fully human, God creates a way for humanity to become spiritual children of God through Christ. Biblical support for recapitulation comes from verses contrasting the role of Adam and Christ. "For if by the offense of the one, death reigned through the one,

much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:17; see also 1 Cor 15:45-50).

Satisfaction Theory. This theory, developed by Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), is that mankind’s sin robbed God of honor and glory. It is derived from the concept of honor in the feudal system in which Anselm lived. If the honor of a feudal lord was impugned, an offering to the lord could restore the lost honor. Christ was sinless and was under no obligation to die. His death therefore brought infinite glory and honor to God, restoring what was lost. This theory is sometimes called the commercial theory: mankind owed a debt to God that was paid by the death of Christ on the Cross. “Having canceled the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col 2:14). Biblical support for this theory comes from the descriptions of Christ’s death as a propitiation for people’s sins (Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17; 1 Jn 2:2; 1 Jn 4:10).

Moral Influence. The moral influence theory was first developed by Peter Abelard, an eleventh century French theologian, primarily in response to Anselm’s satisfaction theory. Abelard objected to Christ’s death being viewed both as debt payment and as a ransom. He felt that these theories focused too much on God’s righteousness and justice and not enough on God’s love. Furthermore, Abelard found it problematic for an unchangeable God to change His mind with regards to someone’s salvation after accepting Christ’s death as a sacrificial death. Therefore, Abelard developed the moral influence theory that understands Christ’s sinless life and death as a demonstration of God’s love that has the power to reorient a sinner’s heart towards God. In this theory, the death of Jesus on the cross is the result of Christ’s perfectly moral, sin free, and unconditionally loving life. Christ knew that this would lead to death but still continued living a perfect life out of His love for us. Biblical support for this theory are Jesus’s insistence that he must suffer and die. When Peter suggests otherwise, Jesus responds, “Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s purposes, but on man’s” (Mk 8:23). The Moral Influence theory gained renewed prominence in liberal theology in the early 20th century through the writings of Hastings Rashdall (1858–1924).

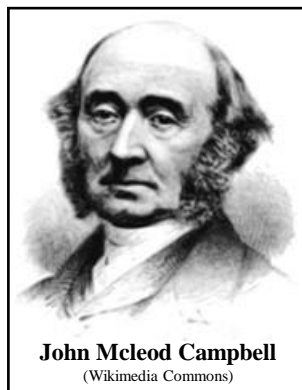


Peter Abelard
(Wikimedia Commons)

Penal Substitution. This theory is the Reformed position as well as the belief of most evangelicals. It holds that the penalty of sin is death. Therefore, Christ died on the cross in our place to satisfy God's justice. Christ's death is a perfect substitutional sacrifice, similar to the burnt offering sacrifices in the OT where animals were sacrificed to God to atone for sins. Hence, Christ is the Lamb of God that is sacrificed and then consumed through the sacrament of Holy Communion just as the unblemished lamb is sacrificed on Passover and then consumed. Biblical justification for penal substitution comes from the characterization of Jesus's death as a sacrifice. "[Jesus] has been revealed to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb 9:26; see also Heb 10:12; Eph 5:2).

Governmental Theory. The governmental theory (also known as the rectoral theory and the moral government theory) is similar to the penal substitution theory in that it views Christ's death as sacrificial punishment. It was initially developed by Hugo Grotius, a seventeenth century Dutch theologian. Although Christ's death is understood to be punishment, it did not satisfy the exact punishment required for mankind's sins. Rather, Christ's suffering and death are to show God's displeasure towards our sins. Christ therefore died to demonstrate God's wrath towards sin and that there are severe penalties associated with sin. Although Christ did not die for our specific sins, Christ's suffering and death nevertheless served as a substitute punishment. Therefore, God is able to forgive our sins while still satisfying His justice and divine order. Biblical justification for the governmental theory is the same as for penal substitution.

Vicarious Repentance. This theory, developed by John McLeod Campbell (1800-1872), holds that the Atonement is Christ's perfect repentance performed on behalf of all sinners. Biblical support for this view relates to Christ assuming our sin, which therefore requires repentance. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin in our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21). Those believing in penal substitution tend to strongly object to this theory. For example, Louis Berkhof writes that this theory "proceeds on a gratuitous assumption ... denies the necessity and possibility of penal substitution ... proceeds on erroneous principles ... [and] is really a contradiction in terms."¹⁰⁸



This section ends with a discussion about the scope of the Atonement. Did Christ suffer and die for all or just for some? The position that Christ died only for the elect is called limited atonement. The position that Christ

died for everyone is called unlimited atonement (also called general atonement or universal atonement). Limited atonement, the Reformed position, typically views Christ's death as removing the effects of sin from the elect at the time of its occurrence. That is, the Atonement was immediately effective. Unlimited atonement, the Arminian position, views the Atonement as conditionally effective. Christ died for everyone's sins, but this atoning act only becomes effective when someone repents and puts their trust in Christ. An intermediate view is that Christ's death was for everyone, but God only gives the elect the ability to realize its saving benefits.

8.6 C.S. Lewis on the Atonement

At this point I will go beyond what is essential in Christian theology to talk about C.S. Lewis's views on the Atonement. Uninterested readers can skip this section, but Lewis's views are helpful to me and will hopefully be helpful to others.

Lewis considers the fact of the Atonement as central to Christianity but considers theories of the Atonement important only if they are personally helpful. Lewis writes, "The central Christian belief is that Christ's death has somehow put us right with God and given us a fresh start. Theories about it are another matter ... Theories about Christ's death are not Christianity: they are explanations of how it works ... [Theologians] would probably admit that no explanation will ever be quite adequate to the reality."¹⁰⁹

Lewis was quite critical of the penal substitution theory. "[Penal substitution] on the face of it ... is a very silly theory. If God was prepared to let us off, why on earth did He not do so? And what possible point could there be in punishing an innocent person instead? None at all that I can see."¹¹⁰ In addition, Lewis does not think divine retribution is the defining problem facing sinful humanity. Rather, Lewis believes that our need for repentance is the driving factor, which involves a death to the sinful self.

Lewis is more sympathetic to the Atonement as substitutional debt payment (as in the satisfaction/commercial theory), "If you take 'paying the penalty,' not in the sense of being punished, but in the more general sense of 'standing the racket' or 'footing the bill,' then, of course, it is a matter of common experience that, when one person has got himself into a hole, the trouble of getting him out usually falls on a kind friend."¹¹¹ However, Lewis does not believe that "footing the bill" is done to restore God's impugned honor. Rather, the Atonement somehow helps sinners who have got themselves "into a hole" and cannot get out by themselves.

Lewis therefore disagrees with both commercial substitution and penal substitution.

Lewis presents in *Mere Christianity* his own theory of the Atonement that differs from traditional theories. This theory is rarely mentioned in either literature about atonement theories or in literature about Lewis's Christian beliefs. Those that do suspect that it is the same as or is strongly influenced by John McLeod Campbell theory of vicarious repentance or of Robert Campbell Moberly's modified theory, as all refer to Christ performing a perfect repentance.¹¹² But Lewis's theory has original elements that are worth considering. Recall that Lewis describes the Atonement as something that somehow lets God help sinners get out of their predicament. This is needed because fallen people cannot sufficiently repent of their sins. Lewis writes:

Now repentance is no fun at all. It is something much harder than merely eating humble pie ... It means killing part of yourself, undergoing a kind of death. In fact, it needs a good man to repent. And here comes the catch. Only a bad person needs to repent: only a good person can repent perfectly. The worse you are the more you need it and the less you can do it. The only person who could do it perfectly would be a perfect person—and he would not need it.¹¹³

Lewis explains that God adds to human mental capability by giving us a bit of divine mental capability in the sense of communicable attributes. But Lewis points out that repentance is not an inherent divine attribute that can be communicated. He solves this problem with his theory of the Atonement:

Can we do it if God helps us? Yes, but what do we mean when we talk of God helping us? We mean God putting into us a bit of Himself, so to speak. He lends us a little of His reasoning powers and that is how we think: He puts a little of His love into us and that is how we love one another. ... But unfortunately, we now need God's help in order to do something which God, in His own nature, never does at all—to surrender, to suffer, to submit, to die. Nothing in God's nature corresponds to this process at all. So that the one road for which we now need God's leadership most of all is a road God, in His own nature, has never walked. God can share only what He has: this thing, in His own nature, He has not. But supposing God became a man—suppose our human nature which can suffer and die was amalgamated with God's nature in one person—then that person could help us. He could surrender His will, and suffer and die, because He was man; and He could do it perfectly because He was God. You and I can go through this process only if God does it in us; but God can do it only if He becomes man. Our attempts at this dying will succeed only if we men share in God's dying, just as our thinking can succeed only because it is a drop out of the ocean of His intelligence: but we cannot share God's dying unless God dies; and He cannot die except by being a man. That is the sense in which He pays our debt, and suffers for us what He Himself need not suffer at all.¹¹⁴

Lewis views substitutional atonement as God paying a price in order to help mankind deal with a problem. In this case, God helps people repent of their sins, which they cannot do alone. In order to help with repentance, God needs to experience all aspects of a perfect repentance, which He does through the incarnation and crucifixion. Once done, repentance becomes a communicable divine attribute that allows people to sufficiently repent with God's help.

Lewis's theory contains elements of several traditional theories. The biblical verses most directly related to the purpose of Christ's death refer to it as a "ransom for all" (1 Tim:26), "to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb 9:26), and a "propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb 2:17). Ransom, sacrifice, and propitiation are distinct concepts. Therefore, a systematic theological assessment must conclude that Christ's death must be metaphorically related to each, while not being literally equivalent to any. Lewis's view is that fallen man is separated from God and is unable to help himself bridge this gap. "But the same badness which makes us need it, makes us unable to do it."¹¹⁵ That is, we are in bondage to our badness (sinful nature). Lewis's theory of the Atonement frees sinners from this bondage and can therefore metaphorically be likened to a ransom. Lewis is clear that Christ needed to suffer and die in order to help sinners repent. "Our attempts at this dying will succeed only if we men share in God's dying."¹¹⁶ The sacrifice of Christ is therefore central and essential to Lewis's theory of the Atonement. Lewis is less direct about satisfying God's impugned honor, but specifically rejects substitutionary atonement in both its penal and commercial forms. But Lewis does believe that sins are an offence to God. He describes Jesus acting as if He was "the person chiefly offended in all offences."¹¹⁷ Lewis then describes sin as acts of rebellion against God. The sinner is a "rebel who must lay down his arms."¹¹⁸ That is, God's requirement of sinners is that they surrender. Part of Christ's perfect repentance was to "surrender His will,"¹¹⁹ thereby allowing sinners to surrender their will with God's help. In this sense, the surrender of the will in Lewis's theory can also be seen as a propitiation that satisfies the offence done to God by our sins.

Whereas prominent theories focus on ransom, satisfaction, and sacrifice, Lewis focuses on the need for personal repentance aided by God. This approach has much merit, as Christ's very first words in Mark are "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1:15; see also Mt 3:2; Lk 13:3; Acts 2:38; Rom 2:4; 2 Pt 3:9; Rev 3:19). Furthermore, Lewis's theory is compatible with aspects of ransom, satisfaction, and sacrifice, resulting in a somewhat unified concept. Ultimately, Lewis found substitutionary theories personally unhelpful, and therefore developed a theory that reflects his way of

looking at the Atonement. Lewis hopes that this theory will also be helpful to others, and it certainly has been for me.

8.7 Further Reading

Those interested in a more detailed treatment of the doctrine of Christ are encouraged to read Part 3 of Louis Berkhof's book *Systematic Theology* with the understanding that Berkhof is primarily presenting and defending Reformed theology. Also recommended is Part 3 of Volume 2 of Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology* (Ch. 1-14). Hodge also takes the Reformed position but presents major competing views (although with the intent of demonstrating why they are not to be preferred). Last, Part 4 of Gregg Allison's *Historical Theology* (Ch. 17-19) presents a history of the doctrine of Christ, including the development of all of the major theological positions. Easier reading can be found in Part 4 of Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (2nd ed., Ch. 26-29). He primarily follows Berkhof, but also adds much content from an evangelical perspective.

8.8 Study Questions

1. Describe at least two heretical beliefs that deny the full humanity of Jesus Christ.
2. What is a logical difficulty with Jesus Christ being fully God and fully human? What is a potential solution to this logical difficulty?
3. What are some of the interpretations of the term kenosis as it applies to Christ's incarnation?
4. What is meant by the state of humiliation of Christ? What are the different stages of Christ's humiliation?
5. What is meant by the state of exaltation of Christ? What are the different stages of Christ's exaltation?
6. What are the different offices of Christ? What are some of the functions of each of these offices?
7. What is meant by the term atonement in terms of what it does?
8. Briefly describe the Ransom-to-Satan theory and the Recapitulation theory and discuss which one you prefer and why.
9. Briefly describe the Satisfaction theory and the Penal Substitution theory and discuss which one you prefer and why.
10. Briefly describe C.S. Lewis's theory of the Atonement and how this differs from traditional theories.

9. The Doctrine of Salvation

Soteriology is the study of the doctrine of salvation. Salvation, in turn, is the deliverance from sin and its effects. It is common among Protestants to organize the process of salvation into three stages: justification, sanctification, and glorification. Although these terms can be used in different ways, their use for stages in salvation refers to the following. Justification occurs when a believer becomes a Christian, often identified as when someone puts their trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Once justified, sanctification is the process of maturing in Christian faith so as to be more and more guided by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and less and less guided by sinful urges. Glorification occurs after the last judgement when a believer's soul reunites with a transformed body and is no longer subject to sin. Stated succinctly, justification makes one free from the penalty of sin, sanctification makes one free from the power of sin, and glorification make one free from the presence of sin.

But theologians typically include many more soteriological stages than three and have strong disagreements about their order in occurrence. For example, Wayne Grudem lists the following ten soteriological steps in his proposed order of salvation: election, the gospel call, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, death, and glorification.¹²⁰ There are far more proposed orders of salvation than can be addressed in this chapter. It will therefore begin with a section presenting the order of salvation for the four major theological systems. It then discusses the doctrine of redemption in the broad context of justification, sanctification, and glorification, with additional sections on several important topics of redemption that warrant more extensive treatment.

9.1 Order of Salvation

The order of salvation (*ordo salutis* in Latin) refers to the stages and events that occur in the soteriological process. Scripture does not directly address this issue. Perhaps the closest it comes to presenting an order of salvation is when Paul writes, “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the

firstborn among many brothers and sisters; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified” (Rom 8:29-30). But there are many additional potential elements in an order of salvation and therefore considerable variation in different theological systems. This section will therefore present the order of salvation as understood by Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Reformed theology, and Arminianism.¹²¹

The order of salvation in Roman Catholicism is largely based on five sacraments. Salvation starts with baptism, which usually occurs in infancy. Baptism results in regeneration and the removal of the guilt and penalty of original sin. Confirmation, usually occurring as a young adult, involves a public acknowledgement of one’s faith and results in a strengthening of the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Eucharist typically occurs weekly (or more) and provides regular spiritual nourishment throughout life. Penance occurs as needed and results in the forgiveness of mortal sins that would otherwise prevent salvation. Last, the sacrament of extreme unction prepares a person for death and pardons all sins not yet forgiven through penance.

The order of salvation in Lutheranism begins with calling (also called vocation). This involves God offering forgiveness by making the Gospel known. When this calling occurs, God also provides sufficient grace so that the unbeliever has the ability to put their trust in the redemptive power of Christ. After calling comes illumination, which involves a quickening of the soul such that the person understands the consequences of either accepting or rejecting the Gospel message. Acceptance of the Gospel message results in conversion (also called repentance). This is when the Holy Spirit shows the person the gravity of their sins, their separation from God, and that they may be saved through the atoning work of Christ. Repentance is followed by regeneration, where the person is born again and has the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This naturally leads to justification, where the person becomes positionally righteous in the eyes of God and is no longer subject to the punishment of sin. Justification is followed by a life of renovation (also called sanctification) where the person becomes increasingly led by the Holy Spirit and less by sinful desires. Renovation also involves conservation, which requires sustained belief and trust in



Christ. In Lutheranism, a regenerated person can forfeit salvation if faith is lost.

In Reformed theology, people are born with total depravity and are therefore not able to respond to the Gospel message. However, God has predestined certain people to be saved. That these people, the elect, will be saved is certain. Therefore, God will start by regenerating the soul of an elect, typically early in life. The regenerated person may not even be aware of being regenerated but is now able to respond to the Gospel message. Next in the order of salvation is conversion, which involves both repentance and faith. With conversion, the work of regeneration becomes part of consciousness. The person becomes aware of his sinful nature, sincerely repents, and puts his trust in the redemptive power of Christ. Conversion is followed by justification, where the person becomes positionally righteous in the eyes of God and is no longer subject to the punishment of sin. Justification is followed by a life of sanctification, where the person becomes increasingly led by the Holy Spirit and less by sinful desires. Sanctification leads to perseverance of the saints, as salvation cannot be lost in the Reformed tradition. Last comes glorification, where the person lives for eternity in the presence of God and is completely without sin.

In Arminian theology, the order of salvation begins with a universal external calling where God extends the offer of salvation to everyone through a combination of the Holy Spirit working on the soul and through exposure to the Gospel message. Everyone is able to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and respond to this calling due to universal prevenient grace that partially removes the effects of original depravity. If a person accepts the external calling, they undergo conversion in a manner similar to the Reformed tradition. The person becomes aware of his sinful nature, sincerely repents, and puts his trust in the redemptive power of Christ. Conversion is followed by justification, which is *not* seen as God declaring a person righteous. Rather, the Arminian view of justification is having one's sins forgiven that in turn inclines one to sin less. A life of sanctification then proceeds with the hope of experiencing entire sanctification. This "second blessing" results in the Spirit completely eradicating the inclination to sin and filling one's heart with perfect love for others. Sanctification also involves perseverance, which requires sustained belief and trust in Christ. In Arminianism, many believe that a regenerated person can forfeit salvation if faith is lost.

Although the above orders of salvation can be instructive when examining various theological frameworks in-depth, it is typically sufficient to think of all orders of salvation as consisting of justification, sanctification, and glorification. These terms are used in different ways in both the Bible and in different theologies but are defined as follows for the following

summaries. Justification occurs when someone becomes a Christian, has the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and is adopted by God as a spiritual child. Sanctification is the lifelong process of a Christian being increasingly led by the Holy Spirit and decreasingly by sinful and selfish desires. Glorification is eternal life in the presence of God.

Justification

Roman Catholicism: open to all; occurs at baptism; can be lost through unrepented mortal sins.

Lutheranism: open to all; occurs when faith and trust are put in Christ's redemptive power; can be resisted; can be lost if faith is lost.

Reformed: only occurs to the predestined elect; finalized when faith and trust are put in Christ's redemptive power; cannot be resisted.

Arminian: open to all; occurs when faith and trust are put in Christ's redemptive power; can be resisted; can be lost if faith is lost.

Sanctification

Roman Catholicism: Called progressive justification; is closely associated with good works. Involves sacraments (e.g., confirmation for strengthening the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; Eucharist for spiritual nurturing; penance for the repentance of ongoing sins).

Lutheranism: Become increasingly led by the Holy Spirit and less by sinful desires; requires sustained belief.

Reformed: Become increasingly led by the Holy Spirit and less by sinful desires; sustained belief is assured.

Arminian: Become increasingly led by the Holy Spirit and less by sinful desires; Can lead to a second blessing where the inclination to sin is eradicated.

Glorification

Roman Catholicism: Occurs after residual sins are cleansed in purgatory; capacities for union with God will vary based on achieved sanctity in life.

Lutheranism: Occurs after the Final Judgement where the saved will reside in a new creation. There will be degrees of reward in heaven due to good works, although these rewards are granted out of grace and not merit.

Reformed: Occurs after the Final Judgement where the elect will reside in the perfect renewal of the current creation. There will be degrees of bliss based on good works.

Arminian: Occurs after the Final Judgement where the saved will reside in a new creation. It is unclear whether Jacob Arminius believed in degrees of reward in Heaven, but John Wesley believed that heavenly rewards will be based on earthly effort, not success.

With this background on the order of salvation, this chapter will continue in the context of justification, sanctification, and glorification as defined above. But first the important topic of justification by faith alone versus faith plus works is presented, as this concept is core to both justification and sanctification.

9.2 Faith Alone Versus Faith Plus Works

It is common to understand the Protestant view of salvation as being based on faith alone (*sola fide* in Latin), as this is the view of which Martin Luther is most closely associated. It is also common to understand Roman Catholicism as salvation by faith plus works, although this is an oversimplification. These two views primarily stem from the writings of Paul and James. Some representative passages are:

Paul on Faith and Works

- “[K]nowing that a person is not justified by works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the Law; since by works of the Law no flesh will be justified” (Gal 2:16).
- “Where then is boasting? It has been excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the Law” (Rom 3:27-28)
- “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph 2:8-9).

James of Faith and Works

- “What use is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? In the same way, faith also, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself” (Jas 2:14-17).

- “But are you willing to acknowledge, you foolish person, that faith without works is useless?” (Jas 2:20).
- “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone ... For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead” (Jas 2:14-17).

Paul clearly says that we are saved by faith and not by works. But James clearly says that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. A simple explanation is that Paul and James simply disagreed on this issue or are addressing different things. Louis Berkhof writes, “Paul had to contend with legalists who sought to base their justification, at least in part, on the works of the law. James, on the other hand, joined issue with Antinomians, who claimed to have faith, but whose faith was merely an intellectual assent to the truth, and who denied the necessity of good works. Therefore he stresses the fact that faith without works is a dead faith.”¹²² Therefore, one can argue for justification by faith plus works by assuming Paul is speaking about ritualistic works of the Law and not simply good Christian deeds, although this is not the orthodox Protestant belief. Protestant theology almost always argue for justification by faith alone by assuming that James’s use of justification refers to either justification in the eyes of men or progressive justification (i.e., sanctification).

The Roman Catholic position is somewhat different. Justification is viewed as a lifelong process. Initial justification is through faith alone, similar to the Protestant position. Progressive justification occurs throughout life and involves both faith plus works. In this sense, the Roman Catholicism understanding of progressive justification is similar to the Protestant understanding of sanctification, although Roman Catholics tend to view good works as more of a deliberate effort whereas the Protestants tend to view good works as a natural result of faith. The remainder of this chapter will assume the Protestant view that justification is a free gift from God and not dependent upon good works.

It will be helpful at this point to examine other Biblical passages that need to be reconciled for a proper systematic theological treatment of salvation. Exhaustive treatment of all relevant verses is not possible, but the following will suffice.

- “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mk 1:15).
- “And behold, a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ And He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?’ And he answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and

with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.’ And He said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live” (Lk 10:25-28).

- “For if you forgive other people for their offenses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive other people, then your Father will not forgive your offenses” (Mt 6:14-15).
- “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. The one who believes in Him is not judged; the one who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (Jn 3:16-18).

Much theological debate can and does happen with regards to the order of salvation, but an examination of these verses can provide a high-level understanding of which most theologians will agree. We are to believe in the Gospel. If we love God and others, we will inherit eternal life. And if we believe in the Son, we will have eternal life. Based on these teaching, the conversion process of repentance and faith involves: (1) repentance as a surrender to God in love by the admission of our sinful nature and the humble asking of forgiveness; and (2) belief in Christ in the sense of trusting in His redemptive power to save us from God’s judgment.

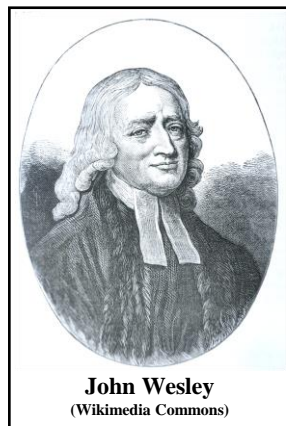
But we also need to love our neighbor to inherit eternal life and to forgive others for God to forgive us. Clearly, most new Christians have not forgiven everyone for everything. This requirement is typically not even mentioned in a Gospel call. But their sins have been forgiven and they will not be judged by God for those sins. Also, most new Christians do not love *everyone* as themselves, or God with all of their heart and soul and strength and mind. Yet they will inherit eternal life. These aspects of salvation must therefore be aspirational rather than requirements for conversion. As Christians mature through the process of sanctification, they will increasingly have a loving and forgiving heart.

I will end this section with a discussion as to the sensitivity of this subject, even between the very similar views of Reformed and Arminian theology. This is often where the battle lines are drawn. Reformers feel that, if faith results in justification, it is a work of which man can boast. Faith is therefore seen as a condition by which justification is given as a free gift from God. The Arminian position is that God wants all to be saved and since not all are, justification must be the result of a free choice. In both

cases, faith leads to justification. But Charles Hodge (Reformed) and John Wesley (Arminian) have this to say on the issue:

Charles Hodge on Arminianism: “[The Arminian doctrine of justification] is moreover dishonoring to God. It supposes the Gospel to be less than the law ... it is in direct contradiction to the plain and pervading teachings of the word of God.”¹²³

John Wesley on Reformed theology: “[Reformers] represent God as worse than the devil; more false, more cruel, more unjust. But you say you will prove it by Scripture. Hold! What will you prove by Scripture? That God is worse than the devil? It cannot be. Whatever that Scripture proves, it never can prove this; whatever its true meaning be, this cannot be its true meaning.”¹²⁴



These strong positions are mentioned precisely because they are strong positions. Heavily invested people can become defensive during discussions, which typically results in something unhelpful and often destructive. The reader is cautioned in advance to engage in these and other sensitive theological topics with discretion and with an attitude of Christian love.

9.3 Justification

The previous section on the order of salvation addressed different views as to *who* is saved and the specific *steps* of being saved. This section discussed the *effects* associated with justification, which is much less controversial. But first, it is worthwhile to discuss the NT language that is involved.

The word justification in the NT is translated from the Greek word *dikaiōsis* (δικαίωσις), which means an acquittal or to be freed from deserved punishment. It is used in various ways in the NT, but with regards to salvation it is always used in the sense of God acquitting us of deserved punishment for our sins. This is clearly seen when the word justified is presented in opposition to condemnation in Rom 8:33-34, “Who will bring charges against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies (*dikaioō*); who is the one who condemns (*katakrinō*)?” Whereas *dikaioō* means to acquit from deserved punishment, *katakrinō* (κατακρίνω) means precisely the opposite: to judge worthy of punishment. Therefore, the core meaning of justification is the change in legal status before God from being

condemned by your sins to being acquitted of your sins. Justification is a forensic act of God in His role as Judge rather than a sovereign act of God in His role as Lord.

But there is much more to justification if it is considered in the broader sense of what happens at the time of conversion of a non-believer to a believer. That is, what changes have happened once a person is justified, regardless of the orders of salvation discussed above? This includes much more than just being acquitted from the guilt of our sins, which is the specific effect of justification in a narrow sense. In addition, a new Christian is no longer polluted by sin, is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is adopted as a child of God, becomes a member of the Body of Christ, and becomes at peace with God. All of these things happen once and are not repeated.

It was discussed above that justification results in an acquittal such that you are no longer subject to the just penalty of your sins. This can also be understood as the forgiveness of sins. But the mere forgiveness of sins does not make you just in the eyes of God. Your sinful nature remains. Your former relationship with God was broken, resulting in separation. Your new relationship with God is healed and made right, not by works of the Law but by faith. “[N]ot having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” (Phil 3:9). Paul is clear that righteousness before God comes strictly from the atoning work of Christ. “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly” (Gal 2:21). Furthermore, the imputation of righteousness has always come from faith and not by works, even back to the time of Abram. “Then he [Abram] believed in the LORD; and He [God] credited it to him as righteousness” (Gn 15:6).

A new Christian also transitions from being spiritually dead to spiritually alive. “And when you were dead in your wrongdoings and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him” (2 Col:13; see also Eph 2:5; Eph 2:1-10). A spiritually dead person does not have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit whereas a spiritually alive person does have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Paul also speaks of being “in Christ” (1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:17; Rom 8:1) and Christ living within a believer (Gal 2:20), but this is to be understood as living in Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and not as a separate phenomenon. “[Y]ou are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness” (Rom 8:9-10; see also 2 Cor 1:22). This transition from spiritual death to spiritual life is referred to by Jesus as being born again in His conversation with Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say

to you, unless someone is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God ... unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:3-8).

A new Christian is also adopted into God’s family with the Father becoming a spiritual Father and all other Christians becoming spiritual brothers and sisters. This is profoundly comforting as Christians can relate to God as a perfectly loving Father and understand that everything He does is out of perfect fatherly love. Furthermore, as children of God we are also heirs to the future Kingdom along with Christ. Paul writes, “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons and daughters of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons and daughters by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:14-17; see also Eph 1:5). Last, we can understand in a simple way why we choose to do good and why we choose to avoid evil. We do this simply because we love our Father and want to please him.

In terms of adoption, we share a similar status with Christ. Christ is the Son of God, and we are children of God. But there is an additional relational position that a new Christian has and is arguably more important having a common Father. This involves the new Christian becoming a member of the Body of Christ of which Christ is the head. Paul writes, “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it” (1 Cor 12:27). The Body of Christ can also be understood as the invisible church of which all Christians are members. Christ is the head of the Body and therefore the Lord and Savior of all Christians. “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also the head of the body, the church” (Col 12:17-18). Paul is also clear that each member of the Body has been given spiritual gifts that are to be used synergistically with others in the Body with different gifts. “For just as we have many parts in one body and all the body’s parts do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually parts of one another” (Rom 12:4-5; see also 1 Cor 12:12-31; Eph 4:16).

Lists of spiritual gifts appear in various places in the NT and are not thought to be exhaustive. The longest list appears in 1 Cor 12:8-10 and includes wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, and the interpretation of tongues. Additional mentioned gifts include speaking in tongues (1 Cor 12:28), serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing, leadership, and mercy (Rom 12:6-8). Spiritual gifts are gifts from God and we are called to be good stewards of these gifts and to use them to advance the Kingdom. “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards

of the multifaceted grace of God” (1 Pt 4:10). Moreover, we should appreciate the gifts that are bestowed upon others, especially if these gifts are different than our own. Instead of being jealous, we are to recognize that different gifts have been bestowed so that they can all cooperate in a complementary way when working to advance the Kingdom. Paul explains this in his first epistle to the Corinthians as follows.

But now God has arranged the parts, each one of them in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But now there are many parts, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again, the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, it is much truer that the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those parts of the body which we consider less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor, and our less presentable parts become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable parts have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that part which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same care for one another. And if one part of the body suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if a part is honored, all the parts rejoice with it. (1 Cor 12:18-267)

As is appropriate, being justified in the eyes of God and having faith in God enables a life of being at peace with God. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). This divine peace is more than just a tranquil state of mind. It also allows the Christian to better face difficulties and temptations in life. “And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:7). Of course, a Christian remains sinful and still experiences all of the associated anxiety and guilt. But the new Christian now has the ability to rely on the Spirit to counter these feelings. “For those who are in accord with the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are in accord with the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,” (Rom 8:5-6). Last, this peace is both individual and corporate. The Holy Spirit brings peace to the individual who submits to His rule, but also brings peace to groups of believers who collectively submit to His rule. “Let the peace of Christ, to which you were indeed called in one body, rule in your hearts; and be thankful” (Col 3:15).

The newly justified Christian can be thought of as someone who has been given the tools necessary to become more Christlike, but no immediate change to the inner self occurs. This happens through the process of sanctification, which is discussed below.

9.4 Sins After Justification

Justification results in the forgiveness of sins. This obviously applies to past sins. But what about future sins? Christians retain their sinful nature and will always fall short of sinless perfection. John writes, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:8-9). Roman Catholics treat ongoing sins through the sacrament of Eucharist, which results in the forgiveness of venial sins, and through the sacrament of penance, which results in the forgiveness of mortal sins. Furthermore, Roman Catholics believe that unrepented venial sins at death are cleansed in Purgatory. The remainder of this section will address the Protestant perspective of sins after justification.

Protestant Christians believe that they are saved by faith in Christ and reject the idea that church-administered sacraments are necessary for the confession and forgiveness of sins. This is because a Christian’s positional justification before God does not change with ongoing sins. Still, the Bible in numerous places instructs believers to confess their sins. The verse from 1 Jn above says that God will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness if we confess to them. James instructs us to confess our sins to other believers, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another” (Jam 5:16). Jesus is even stronger on this point, “For if you forgive other people for their offenses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive other people, then your Father will not forgive your offenses” (Mt 6 14:15). Jesus is presumably referring to God’s active forgiving of ongoing sins after justification.

And so theologically one must conclude from a Protestant perspective that the confessing of ongoing sins is important but not in the sense of being salvific. One can think of God treating sin in a non-believer as a judge and sin in a believer as a loving Father. A non-believer is guilty, unrighteous, and in need of punishment. A believer has experienced a moral weakness, has distanced himself relationally from God, and is in need of loving discipline. Confession of sins, like prayer, is therefore an essential component of spiritual formation through the broader process of sanctification.



Confessional, by Molteni
(Wikimedia Commons)

9.5 Infant Salvation

The doctrine of infant salvation may not be of practical significance to many Christians, but it very is worthwhile to consider with regards to theological systems. An examination of infant salvation forces one to examine difficult questions that may expose theological gaps and inconsistencies. Alan Hamilton writes, “The utter inability of an infant to do anything for himself derives the investigator to the core of theology to consider the attributes and decrees of God; to the core of anthropology to consider the nature and extent of sin and grace; to the core of soteriology to know the breadth of the salvation provided in Christ and the part, if any which the recipient must play in it; and to the core of ecclesiology to understand the character of the true church and to discover whether or not the visible church has any capability of dispensing grace by means of its ordinances.”¹²⁵ In other words, any theological system is fatally flawed unless it has a doctrine of infant salvation that is logical and consistent.

It is instructive to examine the history of infant salvation, which stems from the practice of infant baptism, the Anabaptist rejection of infant baptism, and the responding defenses of theologians. It seems that infant baptism was practiced very early in Christianity, even during the time of the original apostles. Edward Browne writes, “If we consult the records of antiquity, we shall find every reason to believe that the practice of infant baptism prevailed from the very first ... during the lifetimes of the Apostle St. John and of other Apostolic men.”¹²⁶ Furthermore, it appears that the motivation for infant baptism was to cleanse the infant of original sin. Origen writes, “Infants are baptized for the remission of sins.”¹²⁷

And so, the early church practiced infant baptism so that a person dying in infancy would not be condemned to hell. But this raises the question of the fate of infants who died before being baptized. This question led to a broadening of the understanding of baptism. In addition to baptism proper, one could also experience the benefits from a baptism of intention or from a baptism of blood. A baptism of intention occurs when it is the intention of the parents to baptize the infant but the infant dies before this occurs. A baptism of blood occurs when a Christian dies a martyr before baptism occurs.

Some Roman Catholic theologians, in defense of the efficacy of sacraments, developed the doctrine that the unbaptized do not go to heaven, but do not experience the save eternal fate as unregenerated adults. Rather, unregenerated adults experience *poeni sensus*, damnation involving pain of the senses. Unbaptized infants, in contrast, experience *poeni damni*, loss of the eternal beatific vision of God but not sensual suffering. The place

of is typically called *poeni damni* (infant limbo) and is also the post-death destiny of the mentally impaired.

When the Anabaptists rejected the practice of infant baptism, all of the major denominations mounted a defense. The Lutheran position is stated in the Augsburg Confession. “Of Baptism they teach that it is necessary to salvation, and that through Baptism is offered the grace of God, and that children are to be baptized who, being offered to God through Baptism are received into God’s grace. They condemn the Anabaptists, who reject the baptism of children, and say that children are saved without Baptism.”¹²⁸ This Lutheran position is clear that children cannot be saved without Baptism. But this is an uncomfortable position and many Lutheran theologians have proposed theories as to how infant salvation is not necessarily in conflict with the Augsburg Confession. The Missouri Synod is a bit more equivocal when answering the question of infant salvation. “There is some basis for the hope that God has a method, not revealed to us, by which He works faith in the children of Christians dying without Baptism (Mark 10:13-16). For children of unbelievers we do not venture to hold out such hope. We are here entering the field of the unsearchable judgments of God (Rom. 11:33).”¹²⁹

The Reformed position is similarly tested. Recall that the Reformed position is that only the predestined elect are saved. Therefore, it is necessary for all who die in infancy to be part of the elect in order to avoid their eternal damnation. According to Reformed theology, infants that die that are not part of the elect have no possibility of salvation. It is worth quoting Charles Hodge at length on this topic.

All who die in infancy are saved. This is inferred from what the Bible teaches of the analogy between Adam and Christ. “As by the offence of one judgement came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom V 18-19). We have no right to put any limit on these general terms, except what the Bible itself places upon them. The Scriptures nowhere exclude any class of infants, baptized or unbaptized, born in Christian or in heathen lands, of believing or unbelieving parents, from the benefits of the redemption of Christ ... all the descendants of Adam, except those of whom it is expressly revealed that they cannot inherit the kingdom of God, are saved.¹³⁰

In all other areas of theology, Hodge cites Scripture as positive evidence. With regards to infant salvation he resorts to negative evidence—limits that the Bible places on salvation. But the Reformed position is that the limit placed on salvation is being one of the elect. Therefore, Hodge’s systematic theology can only be consistent if all who die in infancy are part of the elect. Therefore, one should hope that all infants should die as

to assure eternity in heaven, rather than allowing them to live and therefore be exposed to the possibility of eternal damnation. This is why a Reformed theology that includes infant salvation tends to imply universal salvation for all. Many feel that this position is biblically supported by Paul who writes, “So then, as through one offense the result was condemnation to all mankind, so also through one act of righteousness the result was justification of life to all mankind” (Rom 5:18).

The Arminian/Wesleyan position is also that all who die in infancy go to heaven. But the theological reasoning is based on the role of free choice in salvation. Recall that the Arminian position is that Christ’s atonement was conditionally effective for all, but only takes effect when a person makes the free choice to have trust in this redemptive message. Since infants are not able to make informed free choices, they are guaranteed eternal salvation until they reach the “age of accountability,” which is the point in a person’s life when they are able to make informed moral choices and are therefore morally accountable for these choices. A corollary to this position is that the condition of original sin is not punished by God, only actual sins committed by a morally-aware person. But this position has the same troubling implications of the Reformed position. If the possibility of eternal damnation only occurs once one reaches the age of accountability, one should hope that all children die before this time so that eternity in heaven is assured.

The purpose of this section was not to argue for or against infant salvation. It is to recognize that the almost universal abhorrence of the thought of infant damnation often results in the proverbial theological cart being before the theological cart. That is, many start with a strong feeling that God would never condemn infants and then look to Scripture to support this view. This amounts to eisegesis and is bad theology, though not necessarily doctrinally wrong. Scripture does not directly address this issue, but those arguing for infant salvation typically cite Mt 18:14, “So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven for one of these little ones to perish.” Also common is to cite David’s lament of his dead infant. “But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I am going to him, but he will not return to me” (2 Sm 12:23; see also 1 Cor 7:14; Lk 18:16).

9.6 Sanctification

As discussed previously, sanctification is essentially the lifelong process of a Christian becoming more Christlike. This is true in both a negative sense and in a positive sense. In a negative sense, sanctification weakens

the power of sin and selfishness, referred to as mortification of the old person. In a positive sense, sanctification strengthens the role of the indwelling Holy Spirit, referred to as quickening of the new person. Louis Berkhof offers the following definition. “Sanctification may be defined as that precious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit, by which He delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works.”¹³¹ The Westminster Catechism definition is similar: “Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.”¹³²

In the NT, sanctification is a translation of the Greek word *hagiamos* (ἁγιασμός). It literally means to be made holy. Holy, in turn, means to be set apart for God. The core concept of sanctification is therefore being increasingly distanced from earthly considerations and becoming closer to divine considerations. In this sense, sanctification is better understood as becoming more sacred rather than more morally pure, although this is an inevitable result.

All people have a sinful nature, and this sinful nature remains after justification. But the process of sanctification allows the Holy Spirit to increasingly diminish the power of the sinful nature. This is made possible due to a heightened awareness of one’s own depravity and impurity due to the opposite presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. In contrast to God’s perfect holiness, we begin to understand our deserving of God’s wrath and can therefore begin to understand the infinite value of God’s grace. Paul sums up our condition, “I find then the principle that evil is present in me ... I see a different law in the parts of my body waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin, the law which is in my body’s parts. Wretched man that I am!” (Rom 7:21-24).

Being aware of our sinful condition, we are of course instructed to rid ourselves of it the best we can with the help of our Spirit-powered new self. Paul writes, “[I]n reference to your former way of life, you are to rid yourselves of the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you are to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph 4:22-24). Paul refers to this overcoming of the power of our sinful nature as various things including our old self being crucified along with Christ (Rom 6:6), no longer being a slave to sin (Rom 6:6), and our earthly body being dead to sin (Col 3:5).

In the process of sanctification, overcoming our sinful nature occurs in parallel with the strengthening of our spiritual nature which was formerly dead but is now alive. Christians are said to be a new creation (2

Cor 5:17) that are experiencing newness of life (Rom 6:4). With the indwelling of the Holy Spirit comes the possibility of comfort, spiritual guidance, and spiritual strengthening. The Holy Spirit can also help to illuminate your understanding of Holy Scripture. Charles Hodge likens this process to the leavening of bread:

It is leaven introduced to diffuse its influence gradually through the whole mass. Sanctification, therefore, consists in two things: first, the removing more and more the principles of evil still infecting our nature, and destroying their power; and secondly, the growth of the principle of spiritual life until it controls the thoughts, feelings, and acts, and brings the soul into conformity to the image of Christ ... Sanctification therefore, according to this representation, consists in the gradual triumph of the new nature implanted in regeneration over the evil that still remains after the heart is renewed. In other words ... it is a dying unto sin and living unto righteousness ... on the one hand ... to lay aside all malice, and wrath, and pride, and jealousy; and on the other, to cultivate all the graces of the Spirit, faith love, hope, long-suffering, meekness, lowliness of mind, and brotherly kindness.¹³³

Sanctification is a divine work of the triune God but is particularly associated with the Holy Spirit who in indwelling in the believer. Paul says that the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). In turn, the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Grace (Heb 10:29), the Spirit of Truth (Jn 14:17 ESV), the Spirit of Glory (1 Pt 4:14), and the Comforter (Jn 15:26 KJV).

But sanctification also requires cooperation with the Holy Spirit as one can still choose to be led by desires of the flesh. This is why sanctification can sometimes proceed wonderfully and other times seem to regress, both in oneself and in others. Jesus demonstrates this in its extreme form through the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32). The prodigal son abandons his father for a life of unholiness and debauchery but always remains an unconditionally loved son by his Father. This represents extreme regression in the sanctification process. When the son humbly returns to the father, he is welcomed with joy rather than with contempt for the lapse, which is what will always happen when adopted children of the almighty Father return after a lapse, no matter how extreme. An equally



**Dublin Christ Church Cathedral,
Fruit of the Spirit Window**

(Wikimedia Commons)

important message is the attitude of mature believers to those struggling with sanctification. In the parable, the elder son who has been a model child is jealous and confused about the Father's love and joy towards the returning son. But Jesus is clear in this parable that God is always pleased with strong believers but the return of the struggling is cause for celebration. Jesus summarizes this in the parable of the lost sheep, "If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, will [the shepherd] not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains, and go and search for the one that is lost? And if it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that have not gone astray. So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven for one of these little ones to perish" (Mt 18:10-14).

Much can be done alone with regards to sanctification through spiritual formation efforts such as private prayer and Bible study. But people are social creatures that develop intellectually and socially best when pursued with others. Sanctification is no different. Charles Hodge writes, "Thus also it is by the Church-life of believers, by their communion in the worship and service of God, and by their mutual good offices and fellowship, that the spiritual life of the soul is developed."¹³⁴ Thus, we are admonished to not neglect worshipping together. "[A]nd let's consider how to encourage one another in love and good deeds, not abandoning our own meeting together, as is the habit of some people, but encouraging one another" (Heb 10:24-25). And if we meet together for worship, God will work not only upon the individual soul but in the group as a whole. Jesus explains, "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst" (Mt 18:20).

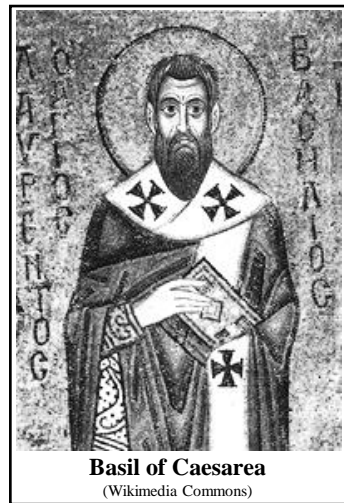
Part of the sanctification process therefore includes sacraments with a corporate function. With the Lord's supper we collectively remember and reflect on the atoning work of Christ. With baptism we celebrate the joy of admitting a new believer into the Body of Christ and therefore becoming a spiritual brother or sister. These communal rituals, in addition to regular corporate worship at church gatherings, are edifying and therefore support the sanctification process. Many ascribe more to these sacraments, which will be discussed further in the chapter on the Church.

How is one to know if sanctification is progressing in a positive or in a negative way? A good test is the previously mentioned fruits of the Spirit. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). This verse makes it clear that being led more the Spirit and the new man and less by desires of the flesh and the old man will result in moral improvement. If you see these traits strengthening in you or in others it is good evidence that sanctification is progressing. If you see these traits weakening in you

or in others it is good evidence that something in your pursuit of Christian maturation is probably misguided.

I end the work by addressing the views of Basil of Caesarea on the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in his *De Spiritu Sancto*.¹³⁵ Basil was one of the three great Cappadocian Fathers and was heavily engaged in the Arian controversy. Basil's writings were therefore focused on demonstrating the full divinity of the Holy Spirit in addition to the full divinity of the Son. Part of his approach in doing this was to emphasize the divine work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification. Basil links sanctification to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He describes the Holy Spirit as the "Breath of God" and the source of sanctification when indwelling in believers. At the time, this was a new way of understanding the Holy Spirit. David Gilooly writes, "The third section of the treatise on the Holy Spirit by Saint Basil (329-379) is a most important and valuable part of pneumatic theology. It sheds a new light upon the Holy Spirit as the Breath of God, and the Holy Spirit's role as the sanctifier of souls."¹³⁶

Being divinely perfect, the Holy Spirit is capable of perfecting others. In Basil's view this is primarily accomplished by illuminating the power of reason in believers so that they can increasingly comprehend divine truth. Basil writes, "All who are in need of sanctification turn to the Spirit ... Capable of perfecting others, the Spirit himself lacks nothing ... The source of sanctification, a light perceptible to the mind, he supplies through himself illumination to every force of reason searching forth truth."¹³⁷ But the efficacy of sanctification depends upon the strength of faith and trust. The sanctifying effect of the Holy Spirit is not always the same, "not sharing according to a unique measure but by distributing his energy in proportion to faith."¹³⁸ Last, Basil teaches that the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit that is imparted spirituality to the believer can be used with effect upon others. "Souls in which the Spirit dwells, illuminated by the Spirit, themselves become spiritual and send forth their grace to others."¹³⁹ And so sanctification can be thought of as the Holy Spirit working in individuals, but also as the Holy Spirit working through individuals for the sanctifying benefit of others.



Basil of Caesarea
(Wikimedia Commons)

9.7 Perfectionism

Perfectionism is the doctrine that a Christian can achieve a sin-free state in this lifetime. The sinful nature remains, but it is possible to resist all sinful temptations. In the Pelagian form, perfectionism is possible because the fall did not corrupt the nature of man. Since God commands us not to sin, and God would not command us to do the impossible, living a sin-free life must be possible. In its Wesleyan form, perfectionism is possible if someone experiences a second blessing (also called a second work of grace or Baptism of the Holy Spirit). The first work of grace results in justification and forgiveness. The second work of grace eradicates original sin and the motivation to backslide into sin.

Those supporting perfectionism typically cite the following verse, “Therefore, you shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). Many interpret this verse as aspirational. Christians should strive to be perfect like Christ. But this verse says that we shall be perfect, seemingly supporting perfectionism. But a closer examination reveals that both interpretations are questionable. The word perfect is a translation of the Greek word *teleios* (τέλειοι), which literally means complete, full grown, or mature. It is therefore better to understand perfect in this context to be mature and not childlike. Louis Lotz explains, “In Jesus’s day the word ‘perfect’ meant to be full grown, to be mature, to reach the end of development.”¹⁴⁰

The understanding of this verse can be thought of as something like, “Therefore, you shall be fully mature as moral Christians, as your Father is a fully mature moral God.” Robert Smith paraphrases as follows, “This perfection is the condition of being fully mature, all grown up, of having reach the end and goal (τέλος) of human life under God. It means being children of God, sharing in the divine nature that is marked by stunning and indiscriminate acts of generosity to all.”¹⁴¹ This verse is related to the process of sanctification in the sense that becoming more holy through the power of the Holy Spirit is essentially the same as becoming a more mature Christian.

9.8 Good Works

In the context of Christianity, good works are things that are done out of obedience to God, love for God, and for God’s glory. Many things that people do are good in a benevolent sense but may not be good works in this Christian sense. If they have no spiritual motivation they have no spiritual value.

The Bible describes good works as the inevitable result of a good heart. They go hand in hand. “So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit ... So then, you will know them by their fruits” (Mt 7:17-20; see also Mt 12:33).

There is much theological debate about whether true faith can exist without good works, but all agree that a Christian is called to do good works. Paul writes, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph 2:10). Hebrews instructs, “[A]nd let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works” (Heb 10:24 ESV). And, of course, James writes, “What use is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? In the same way, faith also, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself” (Jas 2:14-17).

Martin Luther, though closely associated with justification by faith alone, has this to say about good works.

“[A] living, creative, active and powerful thing, this faith. Faith cannot help doing good works constantly. It doesn’t stop to ask if good works ought to be done, but before anyone asks, it already has done them and continues to do them without ceasing. Anyone who does not do good works in this manner is an unbeliever... Thus, it is just as impossible to separate faith and works as it is to separate heat and light from fire!”¹⁴²

In saying this, Luther was refuting the Antinomians, who believe that Christians are freed from the Law including the requirement to follow the Ten Commandments and any need to perform good works.

Theologically, the primary difference on the relation of good works to sanctification is the Roman Catholic View that good works increase sanctification and the dominant Protestant view that sanctification results in good works. In either case there are good works, but psychologically the Roman Catholic might be more motivated due to the resulting spiritual benefits. The Protestant position is aptly summarized by Martin Luther above. The Roman Catholic position was defined at the Council of Dort: “If any one saith, that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of Justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof; let him be anathema.”¹⁴³

Another theological question related to good works is whether they will result in blessings or rewards in this life and/or the afterlife. This topic is addressed in the chapter on the doctrine of Last Things.

9.9 Perseverance and Assurance

This section jointly discusses the doctrines known as perseverance of the saints and assurance of salvation. Perseverance of the saints teaches that once a believer is regenerated and justified, they can never lose their saved status. Assurance of salvation teaches that a believer that has confidence in their faith, they can be assured that they are currently saved (but not necessarily in the future, depending upon whether there is perseverance of the saints).

It is instructive to examine these two doctrines as they developed over time. Little was written about these issues until St. Augustine's *Treatise on the Gift of Perseverance* in the early fifth century. He viewed these issues in the context of predestination of the elect and concluded that the regenerated elect are certain to persevere and never lose salvation. Augustine believes that baptism resulted in regeneration, but the elect receive a second gift of perseverance that assures salvation. The regenerated non-elect are predestined to fall away from faith and therefore lose salvation. According to Augustine, the elect are assured of salvation but in this life a regenerated person can never know if he is one of the elect and can therefore not be assured of personal salvation.

Roman Catholicism is for the most part in full agreement with Augustine. Baptism results in regeneration, but salvation can be lost through unrepented mortal sins. The predestined elect are assured of salvation, but you cannot know in this life with assurance if you are one of the elect apart from special revelation. This doctrine was formalized at the Council of Trent in 1546 with the statement, "No one, so long as he lives in this mortal life, ought to be presumptuous about the deep mystery of divine predestination as to decide with certainty that he is definitely among the number of the predestined."¹⁴⁴

Lutheranism is similar in believing that baptism results in regeneration, the predestined elect are certain to persevere, and that non-elect true Christians can fall away from faith and lose salvation. However, Lutheranism is somewhat more optimistic with regards to assurance. If you prayerfully reflect on God's Word and promises in Christ, you can be certain of your present state of grace, but this is no assurance that you might not fall from grace in the future.

The Reformed position on these issues is based on unconditional election (the U in TULIP) and perseverance of the saints (the P in TULIP). It differs from Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism in that once an elected person is regenerated, this regenerated state can never be lost. However, in the visible church it is not possible with certainty to determine whether others are truly regenerated or not. But someone who is truly regenerated,

as with Lutheranism, can prayerfully reflect on God's Word and be certain of this regenerated state. Furthermore, since regeneration cannot be lost, a person who becomes certain of his regenerated state also has assurance of salvation.

Jacobus Arminius was uncertain whether a regenerated person could fall from grace. This uncertainty was documented in the *Five Articles of Remonstrance* that states that this possibility is likely but needs to be further investigated by an examination of Scripture. In any case, eternal salvation requires continued faith. If faith is lost, salvation is also lost. John Wesley essentially adopted the Arminian position and believed that it is likely that a regenerated person can fall from grace since he could not find anything in Scripture that teaches the contrary. Wesley did think that Paul and many others has assurance of their salvation, but that this does not mean that everyone can enjoy such assurance.



All of the above positions are primarily based on different interpretations of Heb 6:4-6:

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

A plain reading of this verse shows that those who have been made partakers in Holy Spirit and are in a state of repentance can fall away. Furthermore, if they fall away, they can never be restored to a state of repentance. Interpretations of this verse are primarily based on whether it is referring to true believers or false believers, and whether it is referring to the loss of salvation or the loss of heavenly reward. Major views can therefore be classified as a true believer's actual loss of salvation, a true believer's hypothetical loss of salvation, a true believer's loss of rewards, and a false believer not obtaining salvation.

The true believer's actual loss of salvation is supported by strong arguments, as it understands the terms used as they are commonly understood. That is, being enlightened, tasting the heavenly gifts, and partaking in the Holy Spirit means that one is regenerated. Falling away refers to apostasy, a willful rejection of the gospel message and a corresponding rejection of Christ. The biggest weakness of this interpretation is that is

seems to contradict other passages that teach that salvation cannot be lost. For example, Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (Jn 5:24; see also Jn 10:28-30; Rom 8:28-30; and Eph 4:30). In this view, it is also not clear why it is impossible for a person that loses their faith to regain it.

The true believer’s hypothetical loss of salvation solves the problem of other verses implying perseverance but has several difficulties of its own. First, a broader reading of the warning passages in Hebrews shows that they are referring to specific people who have forsaken or abandoned the Christian community. This is described as “the habit of some people” (Heb 1-0:25). Second, it seems unlikely that the author of Hebrews would so forcefully warn Christians about something that is an impossibility.

The true believer’s loss of rewards also avoids the problem of other verses implying eternal security for the saved. But the warnings in a broader reading of Hebrews seems to describe a punishment that is much more severe than the loss of heavenly blessings. “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries” (Heb 10:26-27). Furthermore, if Christians can lose blessings due to a lack of commitment of faith, why would it be impossible for them to be restored again to repentance? This seems to be at odds with how Hebrews describes believers. “For we have become partakers of Christ if we keep the beginning of our commitment firm until the end” (Heb 3:14).

The last major position is that Heb 6:4-6 is not referring to true believers who have been saved. This view has the strengths of not conflicting with other verses assuring perseverance and in interpreting the consequences of apostasy in their commonly-understood meanings. However, this position requires one to believe that unsaved people can be characterized as enlightened, tasting the heavenly gifts, and partaking in the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of perseverance and assurance is difficult, especially in the practical Christian life. Saved people are promised to experience the fruits of the Spirit, including joy and peace. But experiencing joy and peace can be difficult if you are unsure whether you will spend eternity in heaven or hell. In terms of perseverance, anxiety can result from the possibility of losing salvation. In terms of assurance, anxiety can result from the possibility that you are not saved in the first place. For example, Reformed theology teaches limited atonement (the L in TULIP), that Christ died only for the elect. How can someone have assurance that they are part of the elect? The Reformed churches of Scotland struggled mightily

with this issue. Consider the Scottish theologian and minister John McLeod Campbell. As a minister, Campbell noticed that a large number of his congregants were extremely anxious about the assurance of their salvation. In response, Campbell began to preach universal atonement such that anyone who hears and believes the gospel is assured of salvation. This was very comforting to his congregation, but Campbell was eventually deposed for heresy by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.



The Ascension, by West
(Wikimedia Commons)

9.10 Glorification

Many systematic theology textbooks do not dedicate a section to glorification. However, the common salvific framework of justification/sanctification/glorification seems to warrant its inclusion. Furthermore, glorification is to be understood as the completion of a Christian's spiritual journey. Paul writes, "[A]nd these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified" (Rom 8:30). In simple terms, justification delivers a believer from the punishment of sin, sanctification delivers a believer from the power of sin, and glorification delivers a believer from the presence of sin.

The primary theological basis for glorification is the promise that believers will be resurrected in glorified bodies like Christ was resurrected in a glorified body. Paul writes, "But the fact is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man death came, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor 15:20-12). Firstfruit is translated from the Greek word *aparché* (ἀπαρχή), which literally refers to the earliest crop in the year. Christ is therefore the first to be glorified and will be followed by the glorification of all believers.

Paul emphasizes that our perishable bodies cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Instead, deceased Christians will be resurrected in glorified bodies and living Christians will have their bodies changed. Paul writes:

Now I say this, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I am telling you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality (1 Cor 15:50-53).

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our lowly condition into conformity with His glorious body, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself (Phil 3:20-12; see also 1 Jn 3:2).

And so the final glorified state will be where the soul is reunited with a glorified body akin to Christ. This body will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, and bear the image of the heavenly (see 1 Cor 15:42-49).

9.11 The Roman's Road to Salvation

At this point in the book we have covered all topics of systematic theology except for the doctrine of the church (ecclesiology) and the doctrine of last things (eschatology). That is, we have examined what the Bible as a whole teaches on all aspects of God, mankind in relation to God, Christ, and culminating in the doctrine of salvation. Those with the perseverance to undertake the study of theology in this manner are to be commended, but there is a shortcut that may be useful for many.

This shortcut is called the Roman's Road to Salvation and relies exclusively on Paul's letter to the Romans. Romans is the closest the Bible gets to a systematic theological treatment of salvation. Paul presents his theological logic in such a compelling way that the book of Romans has historically been used at Law schools as an example of how to make a strong legal argument. The Roman's Road to Salvation therefore takes excerpts from Romans to present the doctrine of salvation in a succinct and understandable manner. Technically this is a form of Biblical theology as it only looks at a single book, but salvation according to the book of Romans is fully consistent with the systematic theology of salvation.

There are different formulations of Roman's Road to Salvation, but a common one consists of the following four subjects:

1. The Problem
2. The Hope
3. The Required Action
4. The Results

The problem with humanity is our sinful condition resulting in a broken relationship with God. But even with our sinful condition there is hope in Jesus Christ. All that is required is to repent of our sins and submit to Jesus as our Lord and Savior. If we do this, our broken relationship with God will be made right and our problem with sin is solved.

Although simplistic, these four points summarize the aspects of the gospel message that should be understood by someone considering conversion. That is, these four can appropriately be used as a gospel call. Furthermore, each of these points is clearly presented by Paul in Romans, which is why they are called the Roman's Road to Salvation. Each of these points is now further considered as they are addressed in Romans.



The Conversion of Paul on the Road to Damascus, by Speckaert
(Wikimedia Commons)

The Problem. The problem with humanity is that we have sinned against God and therefore have a broken relationship with God. Paul cites the OT to demonstrate that our broken relationship with God is an old teaching: “THERE IS NO RIGHTEOUS PERSON, NOT EVEN ONE” (Rom 3:10). To be righteous is to have a right relationship with God. Everyone has a sinful nature and therefore everyone's relationship with God is broken. Paul continues, “[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). Paul explains that our sinful nature results in us being spiritually dead: “For the wages of sin is death...” (Rom 6:23).

The Hope. But there is hope. Because God loves us and wants to be in a right relationship with us, He sent his only Son to earth to die for our sins. Paul writes, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). We are completely undeserving of this act of love. We therefore must put our hope in God's grace and mercy rather than in our own efforts. If we accept God's free gift through faith, our relationship with the Father becomes positionally righteous and we become spiritually alive. “[T]he gracious gift of God is eternal life in Christ” (Rom 6:23).

The Required Action. We can accept the gracious free gift of God by accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. This will make right your relationship with God and result in salvation. Paul put it this way, “[I]f you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation” (Rom 10:9-10). Furthermore, this free give is offered to everyone. Paul again cites the OT, showing that God's free give of salvation has been the same throughout time: “EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED” (Rom 10:13).

The Results. After being saved by faith through grace, our relationship with God is healed and justified. With this brings peace, comfort, and the hope of eternal life in the presence of God's glory. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we also have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we celebrate in hope of the glory of God" (Rom 5:1-2). Even though we remain sinners, we are now adopted sons and daughters of God and are therefore no longer condemned. "Therefore there is now no condemnation at all for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1).

9.12 Further Reading

Those interested in a more detailed treatment of the doctrine of salvation are encouraged to read Part 4 of Louis Berkhof's book *Systematic Theology* with the understanding that Berkhof is primarily presenting and defending Reformed theology. A good book that is dedicated to the topic of salvation, including the order of salvation, is Bruce Demarest's *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*. Also recommended is Part 3 of Volume 3 of Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology* (Ch. 15-19). Hodge also takes the Reformed position but presents major competing views (although with the intent of demonstrating why they are not to be preferred). Also, Part 4 of Gregg Allison's *Historical Theology* (Ch. 17-19) presents a history of the doctrine of Christ, including the development of all of the major theological positions. Easier reading can be found in Part 4 of Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (2nd ed., Ch. 26-29). He primarily follows Berkhof, but also adds much content from an evangelical perspective.

9.13 Study Questions

1. What is meant by the order of salvation? Although many different theological systems have detailed orders of salvation, they all can be characterized by what three basic elements?
2. What is the difference in the role of works in justification and sanctification with regards to typical Protestant theology and typical Roman Catholic theology?
3. What are the elements typically associated with justification in typical Protestant theology (regardless of order)?
4. If a person's sins are forgiven when they first become justified, what is the role of continuing sin in a believer's life?

5. What is the particular role of the Holy Spirit in the process of sanctification?
6. Discuss the theological implications of a saved person who achieves a high level of sanctification after being saved as compared to a person who only achieves a low level of sanctification after being saved.
7. A famous NT verse is “Therefore, you shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). Using proper exegesis, what is the spiritual message intended by this verse?
8. What is the purpose of performing good works in the life of a Christian? How might one interpret the situation where a Christian with a lifelong history of good works stops performing good works?
9. What are some arguments both for and against whether a saved Christian can lose salvation?
10. What is meant by associating Christ with the firstfruits?

10. The Doctrine of the Church

Ecclésiology is the study of the doctrine of the Church. The word “church” is used in a variety of way and can therefore be confusing if people are thinking of it in a different sense. The invisible Church refers to true believers whereas the visible church refers to people claiming to be Christians but may or may not be true believers. The invisible Church is the Church as God sees it whereas the visible church is the church as man sees it. As Augustine points out, the visible church will always contain non-believers and there will always be true believers outside of the visible church. “For in the ineffable foreknowledge of God, many who seem to be outside are actually within, just as many who seem to be within are in reality outside.”¹⁴⁵

But it is even more complicated than that. Some believe that the invisible Church consists of all true believers for all time whereas others believe that the invisible Church started at Pentecost and therefore only consists of believers since this time. The visible church can refer to a small gathering of Christians, a physical building, the organization that worships in the physical building, an entire denomination, all professed Christians in the world, and so forth. Frederick Mayer writes, “Ecclesiastical terminology may also become a barrier to a common understanding and may actually be the cause that two partners in a conversation talk past each other.”¹⁴⁶ To avoid this type of confusion, this chapter will use invisible Church or Church (capital C) to mean the group of all believers, alive and dead, that is headed by Christ. It will use visible church or church (lower case C) to mean a local group of people that worship together that is headed by a pastor, minister, or priest.

10.1 Nature of the Church

The most common NT word that is translated into church is *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία), which literally means a calling out or an assembly of people. It is variously used in the NT to mean the whole body of Christians scattered throughout the earth, a local assembly, and the entire network of local assemblies. But the English word church is not derived from *ekklēsia*.

Rather, it is derived from the word *kuriake*, (κυριακή) which means belonging to the Lord. It is therefore helpful to understand that the word church in Bible translations does not have the same religious implications as it does in normal English usage.

After Pentecost, the first church was naturally located in Jerusalem. It consisted basically of three groups of people. There were (1) the people that had followed Jesus, headed by Peter and the apostles; (2) Jews who had not followed Jesus but then converted, headed by James the brother of Jesus, and (3) Greek converts, headed by Stephen. After the killing of Stephen and the imprisonment of Peter, James increasingly became the *de facto* Christian leader in Jerusalem. When James was executed in 62 CE, conservative Jewish Christians were left without a clear leader.

The killing of Stephen resulted in many Christians fleeing Jerusalem and relocating to more Hellenized areas. This resulted in the Gospel being increasingly preached to Greeks. This trend increased exponentially with the conversion of Paul, who nurtured new Christian communities throughout Asian Minor, Greece, and eventually to Rome itself (though as a prisoner under house arrest). These local assemblies were run by appointed elders, but the general understanding was that the Church consisted of all believers. There was one catholic church (catholic with a lower-case C, meaning universal).



**The Stoning of Stephen,
by Van Dyck**
(Wikimedia Commons)

The rise of heresies forced Christian leaders to distinguish between true churches and false churches. True churches were led by bishops who were direct successors of the apostles and therefore could be trusted to preach the true teaching of Christ. The true church therefore consisted of all local assemblies headed by a bishop whose history of succession could be traced to the apostles. Overall church matters were decided by this group of bishops, and the true church was now described as catholic and apostolic.

As the number of local churches continued to grow, the overall church increasingly developed a hierarchy of authority that ultimately resulted in the Bishop of Rome being head of the universal church. The justification was that the Roman bishop was the successor to Peter, who was crucified in Rome. Jesus says to Peter, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it” (Mt 16:18). The church headed by the Bishop of Rome (i.e.,

the Pope) is therefore called the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church gradually began to consider itself the Kingdom of God on earth. Louis Berkhof attributes three major effects of this understanding:

(1) It required the everything be brought under the control of the Church: the home and the School, science and art, commerce and industry, and so on. (2) It involved the idea that all the blessings of salvation come to man only through the ordinances of the Church, particularly through the sacraments. (3) it led to the gradual secularization of the Church, since the Church began to pay more attention to politics than to the salvation of sinners, and the Popes finally claimed dominion also over secular rulers.¹⁴⁷

The Reformation resulted in Protestant churches that were no longer affiliated with the Roman Catholic church. It therefore became necessary for a Protestant understanding of the distinguishing characteristics of a true church. Martin Luther maintained the unity of the Church but recognized the difference between the invisible and visible church as discussed above. John Calvin agreed, but was more specific with regards to local churches. He writes, “The distinguishing marks of the church are the preaching of the word and the observance of the sacraments.”¹⁴⁸ Calvin’s position is codified in the Augsburg Confession of 1530, which states:

Also they teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, etc. Eph. 4:5-6.¹⁴⁹

To the present time, these conceptions of the visible church remain. The Roman Catholic Church understands itself as the true church and the Kingdom of God on earth, headed by the Pope who serves as the legitimate successor of Jesus. Protestants believe in the universal invisible Church of all true believers and local visible churches that teach and preach the true Gospel and properly administer the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion (some also include the proper exercise of church discipline).

10.2 Role of the Church

The objective role of the Church from a Roman Catholic perspective is to preside over the Kingdom of God on earth, to properly administer the sacraments, to properly interpret Scripture, and to properly interpret the

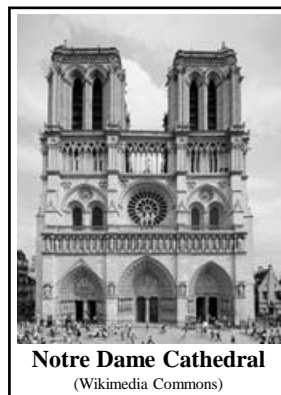
revelatory content of Church tradition. The objective role of the Church from a Protestant perspective is simply to properly teach the true Gospel and to properly administer baptism and Holy Communion.

But what about the specific role of the visible church in salvation? Jesus instructs Christians to “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to follow all that I commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20). Evangelism is therefore an important function of the church. But is the church necessary for a person to come to Christ? The answer to this question depends upon whether one speaks of the visible church or the invisible Church. Early Protestant thinking on this issue assumed the former, while later Protestant thinking assumed the latter. Steven Griffin writes, “Protestants like John Calvin and Martin Luther assumed that the Church was an objective medium of grace outside of which there was no ordinary possibility of salvation. Later protestants like Jonathan Edwards and Charles Hodge came to think of it as an essentially subjective, invisible quality shared by the truly converted.”¹⁵⁰

Recall that Luther was initially a Roman Catholic who wanted the church to reform. Roman Catholics in Luther’s day believed that sacraments performed by church priests were required for salvation. Luther and early Protestants initially understood that the church was necessary for salvation. Luther’s writes, “Faith is created by the Holy Spirit only through the means of grace. Those means are available only in the church.”¹⁵¹

But what about someone who has not been evangelized by the church? Today, most theologians agree that the non-evangelized can come to faith without church involvement (Catholics today included). Glenn Siniscalchi writes, “No serious theologian in the postconciliar era denies that the formally unevangelized can be saved.”¹⁵² And so, the predominant Protestant understanding today is that the church is involved in most people’s salvation through evangelism and guidance. People hear the gospel call from believers, often within a physical church or through the activities of a physical church. This is the ordinary way of salvation. But actual conversion requires personal faith that can potentially occur without church involvement.

A closer theological investigation reveals that salvation must be possible outside of the church as an institution because people experienced salvation prior to the church existing as an institution. Even if OT examples are excluded, Christ said to the penitent criminal who



was being crucified alongside of Him, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43). Ola Tjørhom explains, “Basically, our justification in Christ by grace through faith must be seen as theologically prior to ecclesiology. The church is a sign of and a service to the gospel of justification, and not the other way around.”¹⁵³

In addition to the core church functions of properly teaching Scripture, properly administering the sacraments, and properly administering discipline when necessary, there are other important functions of local churches including worship, ministry to believers, and ministry to non-believers. Of course, the command to worship God permeates the entire Bible. A good example is Heb 12:28–29, “Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”

Once one is saved, the Christian journey has just begun, and the church should minister to believers for their edification. It is critical for sanctification to take part in the community of believers, where Jesus promises to be present (Mt 18:20). Charles Hodge writes, “The intellectual and social life of man is not developed in isolation and solitude ... Thus also it is by the Church life of believers, by their communion in the worship and service of God, and by their mutual good offices and fellowship, that the spiritual life of the soul is developed.”¹⁵⁴ Examples of this church function include classes, workshops, and Bible studies.

It is also important for churches to minister to non-believers. At a minimum this will include non-believers that approach the church. But this function could also be very extensive and include international ministry organization and support. This function relates to the Great Commission as discussed above. Examples of this church function include outreach to non-believers to attend a service, calls to faith for unbelievers during worship services, mission trips, and much more.

There are also important components of a Christian life that can take place outside of a church organization but are often convenient and effective when part of a local church. Examples include care for the needy, Christian fellowship, and care/support. Care for the poor and needy is fundamental for Christians. This does not have to occur through a church, but a church can certainly be effective in this function. It also seems appropriate for those churches with the means to do so. Ps 41:1 reads, “Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble, the Lord delivers him.” Christians should also cultivate close relationships with other Christians. “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness” (2 Cor 6:14)? Christian relationships can be pursued outside of the church but is certainly appropriate for a church to provide

opportunities for members to meet and get to know one another. Examples include life groups, social events, youth activities, and much more. The care and support function relates to prayer requests, support for the sick and dying, life counseling, divorce counseling, and so forth. Christian care and support can occur outside of the church, but oftentimes the church is in the best place to be aware of and address these care and support needs.

10.3 Sacraments

The word sacrament does not appear in the Bible. Rather, the Bible uses the Greek word *mustérion* (μυστήριον) which means a mystery or a secret doctrine. Jerome translated this into the Latin word *sacramentum* for the Vulgate, which literally means an oath. The English use of sacrament is derived from the Latin rather than the original Greek. Nevertheless, the word sacrament has come to mean something that reflects both the Latin and the Greek. Sacraments are in large part a mystery as to their nature and efficacy. Christians participate in sacraments because they are instructed to do so even though much remains a mystery. Adult Christians that participate in sacraments also, in a sense, are pledging an oath of faith and obedience to God. Some denominations prefer to use the term ordinance instead of sacrament, such as Anabaptists, Baptists, and many Pentecostal churches.

There are many different theological definitions of sacrament. For a general discussion, it is therefore best to simply define today's meaning of sacrament by enumeration. For Roman Catholics, the sacraments are baptism, Eucharist, confirmation, penance, holy matrimony, holy orders, and extreme unction. For Protestant Christians, the sacraments are baptism and the Lord's Supper. A brief overview of how the major theological systems understand the sacraments is now provided.

Roman Catholic. Roman Catholics believe that two of the sacraments are necessary for salvation. Baptism is necessary for regeneration and penance is necessary for the forgiveness of sins that occur after baptism. Furthermore, the sacraments contain the grace which they signify. They operate directly on the recipient and do not involve the additional participation of the Holy Spirit. Sacraments are effective regardless of whether the recipient is a regenerated Christian as long as the recipient assents to the truth of the sacrament. Similarly, since the sacraments contain the grace which they signify, they work in the mode of *ex opere operato*, (Latin for in the work performed) which means that the spiritual state of the administrator of the sacrament does not impact the effect of the sacrament as long as the administrator has the intended function in mind.

Lutheran. Lutherans differ from Roman Catholics with regards to the sacraments in two main ways. First, Lutherans only recognize baptism and the Lord's Supper as sacraments. Baptism is the normal means of regeneration.¹⁵⁵ It gives the power of faith and future regeneration when administered to infants and directly bestows regeneration when administered to adults. Second, Lutherans believe that faith is required by the recipient for the sacrament to deliver its associated grace. Although the sacraments have supernatural power, this power can only be delivered to someone with sufficient faith, just as fire can only ignite a piece of wood if it is sufficiently dry.

Reformed. Reformed theology differs from Lutheran theology in two main ways. First, the power of a sacrament comes from the work of the Holy Spirit and not from the sacrament itself. Second, sacraments are a real means of grace but not an exclusive means of grace. They are mandatory in that we are commanded to practice them, but not mandatory for salvation. For example, the penitent criminal next to Jesus on the cross was promised eternal paradise without having been baptized. As with Lutheranism, the Reformed position is that sacraments are only effective if received by someone with saving faith.

Arminian and Zwinglian. Of the three fathers of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther had the highest view of the sacraments, John Calvin a middle view, and Huldrych Zwingli the lowest. For Luther, sacraments have inherent power. For Calvin, sacrament channel the power of the Holy Spirit. For Zwingli, sacraments have no power and are simply outward rituals symbolizing our internal spiritual condition. This is the position that has been adopted by the Arminians and Methodists. For example, the United Methodist *Book of Discipline* states, "Sacraments ordained of Christ are not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they are certain signs of grace, and God's good will toward us, by which he doth work invisibly in us."¹⁵⁶ Charles Hodge summarizes this low view of the sacraments as follows, "By their significancy and by association they might suggest truth and awaken feeling, but they were not channels of divine communication."¹⁵⁷

10.4 Baptism

Baptism is translated from the Greek word *baptizō* (βαπτίζω), which most often means to immerse or submerge, but can also mean to cleanse. The formal act of baptism does not occur in the OT, but there are many instances of water being associated with purification. Baptism is first seen in the Bible with John the Baptist. "John the Baptist appeared in the

wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins” (Mk 1:4-5; see also Mt 3:1-6; Lk 3:3-7; Jn 1:19-28).

Today, baptism is variously considered an initiation rite into the church, a washing away of original sin, and/or the mechanism by which a person is regenerated. There is much theological disagreement on this, and it is beneficial to examine the following key bible verses that address the nature of baptism:

- Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself” (Acts 2:39-39);
- And [Jesus] said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. The one who has believed and has been baptized will be saved; but the one who has not believed will be condemned. (Mk 16:15-16);
- Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life (Rom 6:3-4);
- For just as the body is one and yet has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit (1 Cor 12:12-13); and
- [B]aptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pt 3:21).



Acts states that baptism results in the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Mark says that those who have believed and been

baptized will be saved. Romans states that baptism results in the death of the old man (presumably when being submerged) and birth of the new man (presumably when rising out of the water). First Corinthians states that baptism makes us part of the body of Christ. And First Peter says that through baptism we are able to partake in the atoning work of Christ. These verses are strong evidence that baptism can be a powerful experience. But it is also true that the unbaptized penitent criminal on the cross was assured that he would be in paradise with Christ in paradise that day. It is therefore prudent to partake in baptism as we are instructed, but to be humble about its salvific effects. Major doctrines of baptisms are now briefly summarized.

Roman Catholic. Roman Catholics believe that baptism results in the washing away of original sin. Therefore, infants who die before baptism might not be saved, but also may not experience the same eternal punishment of an unbaptized adult.¹⁵⁸ The Roman Catholic Catechism states, “Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: ‘Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water and in the word.’”¹⁵⁹ Since Vatican II, Roman Catholicism has recognized the effectiveness of non-Catholic baptisms if they are duly administered and thereby recognize the validity of baptisms for most mainstream Protestant denominations.

Lutheran. The original position of Lutheranism stated in the Augsburg Confession reads as follows:

Of Baptism they teach that it is necessary to salvation, and that through Baptism is offered the grace of God, and that children are to be baptized who, being offered to God through Baptism are received into God’s grace. They condemn the Anabaptists, who reject the baptism of children, and say that children are saved without Baptism.¹⁶⁰

The Lutheran position has somewhat softened on the necessity of Baptism to be saved but maintains that this is the ordinary way. For example, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS), a conservative and orthodox branch of Lutheranism, believes that a person is saved by God’s grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ alone, where Baptism is one of the miraculous means of grace through which God creates and/or strengthens the gift of faith in a person’s heart. When an infant is baptized, God creates faith in the heart of that infant which must be nurtured by God’s Word or it will eventually vanish. The LCMS does not believe that Baptism is absolutely necessary for salvation, as it is not the absence of Baptism that

condemns a person but the absence of faith. Baptism is the normal way to come to faith, but there are others.

Reformed. Reformed theology holds that through baptism a person is admitted into the visible church through which the Holy Spirit effects regeneration and the remission of sins. Although baptism is extremely important, it is not absolutely necessary for salvation and those that are baptized are not necessarily one of God's elect. The Westminster Confession states the following:

Baptism is a sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ; not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church; but also, to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace; of his ingrafting into Christ; of regeneration; of remission of sins; and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life ... Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ; but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized ... Although it be a great sin to condemn or neglect this ordinance; yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it; or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated ... the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost.¹⁶¹

And so, the Reformed view is that baptism is a sign and a seal of the elements of conversion, but that real grace is also conferred that can best be summarized as spiritual cleansing or purification. Charles Hodge characterizes the Reformed position on baptism as containing these elements: it works *ex opere operato* in conjunction with the Holy Spirit; it is the ordinary means of conveying the merits of Christ's atoning work and the saving influences of the Holy Spirit; it is a means of grace to believers who receive it; it is a sign and a seal of the covenant of grace; and that "God, on his part, promises to grant the benefits signified in baptism to all adults who receive that sacrament in the exercise of faith, and to all infants who, when they arrive at maturity, remain faithful to the vows made in their name when they were baptized."¹⁶²

Arminian/Wesleyan. Recall that the Arminian and Wesleyan views of the sacraments are that they are simply outward rituals that do not confer any divine grace. This is true for baptism as well as for the Lord's Supper. The Methodist *Book of Discipline* states the following, "Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth. The Baptism of young children is to be retained in the Church."¹⁶³ In a typical Methodist baptism today, therefore, an infant baptism is essentially a celebration welcoming an infant into the church family along with an affirmation of the parent's faith and their commitment to raise the child as a Christian.

The section will end with discussions on two areas of debate with regards to baptism: infant baptism and total immersion.

Infant Baptism. Most major denominations practice infant baptism. The biggest exceptions are Baptist churches, although many independent evangelical churches also avoid the practice and instead perform infant dedications. Those that believe that baptism is necessary or ordinarily necessary for salvation will naturally perform infant baptisms.

Those that don't believe that baptism is salvific typically view it as both conferring grace and serving as an initiation into the Christian community. For the early church, baptism symbolized becoming a member in a manner similar to circumcision before it was deemed not necessary for Gentiles at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-31). Those who argue against infant baptism understand that the Bible does not prohibit infant baptism. Those who argue for infant baptism point out that the NT describes multiple cases where entire households are baptized, which likely involved infants (Acts 16:15; Acts 16:53; 1 Cor 1:16).

Total Immersion. The Baptist position (and many evangelicals as well) believe that the Bible teaches baptism by total immersion and that baptism in any other way is being disobedient to God. This position is based on assumption that the word *baptizō* in the NT is always referring to total immersion when used in a sacramental context. Other Christians believe that the mode of baptism does not matter as long as it properly symbolized spiritual cleansing and purification. Total immersion is fine, but so are pouring and sprinkling. They also point to the use of *baptizō* in verses like the following:

For the Pharisees and all the other Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thereby holding firmly to the tradition of the elders; and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they completely cleanse themselves (*baptisōntai*); and there are many other things which they have received as traditions to firmly hold, such as the washing of cups, pitchers, and copper pots. (Mk 7:3-4)

In this verse, as well as in many others, a form of *baptizō* is used that could not possibly refer to total immersion. Therefore, there is no reason to assume that it refers to total immersion in other places, especially since none of the accounts of baptism in the Bible stress the mode.

10.5 The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper has been universally practiced by all Christians for all time. This involves the communal eating of bread and drinking of wine (or grape juice) to, at a bare minimum, remember the death of Christ with the breaking of the bread symbolizing the breaking of Christ's body and the wine symbolizing His blood.

Unlike baptism, the Lord's Supper has multiple names that are commonly used such as Eucharist and Holy Communion. The Lord's Supper is from *kuriakon deîpnon* (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον), meaning an evening meal belonging to the Lord. "Therefore



The Last Supper, by da Vinci

(Wikimedia Commons)

when you come together it is not to eat the Lord's Supper (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον)" (1 Cor:11-20). Eucharist is from *Eucharistia* (εὐχαριστία), meaning thanksgiving. "[A]nd when He had given thanks" (ευχαριστήσας)" (1 Cor:11-24). Holy Communion is from the Latin *communio*, itself a translation of the Greek *koinonia* (κοινωνία), meaning to share in common. "[S]haring (κοινωνία) in the blood of Christ" (1 Cor:10-16).

In understanding the Lord's Supper as a sacrament, it is helpful to examine all of the verses that directly address the Lord's Supper. These include the following:

- Now while they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is being poured out for many for forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:26-28);
- While they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is being poured out for many (Mk 14:22-24);
- And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body, which is being given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup, which is poured out for you, is the new covenant in My blood (Lk 22:19-20); and
- [T]he Lord Jesus, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new

covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes (1 Cor 11:23-26).

Just from these verses, the following points are clear regarding the Lord’s Supper: (1) Jesus refers to the bread as His body and the wine as His blood; (2) Jesus refers to His blood as being a covenant that is poured out for the forgiveness of sins; (3) Christians are to continue this practice (“For as often as you...”); and (4) we are to partake in Holy Communion as a way to remember Christ (at a minimum).

It should be recognized that the first Lord’s Supper took place at the Paschal meal, where Jews remember and celebrate the Passover event (Ex 12) by sacrificing and then consuming a Paschal lamb. In instituting the Lord’s Supper, Christ, the Lamb of God, is substituted for the Paschal lamb. In this way, the Lord’s Supper substitutes the remembrance of Christ for the remembrance of Passover. But most theologies attribute more to Holy Communion than simply being a remembrance. This is primarily based on the following verse:

So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. The one who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. The one who eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, the one who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. This is the bread that came down out of heaven, not as the fathers ate and died; the one who eats this bread will live forever.” (Jn 6:53-58)

In addition to Jesus saying “this is My body” of the communion bread and “this is My blood” of the communion wine, he also attributes supernatural effects to those who eats His flesh and drinks His blood. But this verse from John is in response to the Pharisees questioning Jesus when referring to Himself as the Bread of Life, which is clearly metaphorical. Jesus is obviously not a literal loaf of bread. It seems likely that Jesus is also speaking metaphorically when responding to these doubts, and that eating His flesh and drinking His blood refers to internalizing His Gospel message. In any case, various theological systems view baptism in very different ways. This makes baptism perhaps the largest area of theological difference in any major doctrinal area. The following are summaries of the major theological views of the Lord’s supper.

Roman Catholic. Roman Catholicism famously believes that the bread and wine used in Eucharist literally become the body and blood of Christ, a process referred to as transubstantiation. Although the bread and

wind do not change their material properties, the smallest piece of bread and the smallest drop of wine are Christ in His entirety. The Catholic Catechism states, “At the heart of the Eucharist celebration are the bread and wine that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ’s Body and Blood.”¹⁶⁴ Catholics that consumes the bread and wine receive the fruits of Holy Communion. This includes a strengthened union with Christ, a renewal of the grace received at baptism, a cleansing of past venial sins, and a preservation from future mortal sins.

Lutheran. Lutherans believe that there is a real presence of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine of the Lord’s supper, referred to as the sacramental union. This is commonly referred to as consubstantiation, although many Lutherans object to this term. Someone who partakes in the Lord’s Supper both consumes the bread and wine in addition to the body and blood of Christ. Therefore, the Lord’s supper is much more than a symbolic ritual in Lutheranism. In addition to being a communal expression of faith, the actual consumption of Christ’s body and blood results in a strengthened union with Christ, spiritual sustenance, and renewal.

Reformed. Reformed theology teaches that there is the spiritual presence of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine of the Lord’s supper, but not a real presence in the sense of transubstantiation or consubstantiation. Although Reformed theologians differ on the specifics, they generally understand the Lord’s Supper as a sign, a seal, and a means of grace. In addition to being a sign of Christ’s death, the partaker participates in the crucified Christ, experiences the impact of Christ’s death, and experiences the union of believers with one another. It seals the partaker to Christ’s love, to the assurance of salvation, and to faith in the redemptive power of Christ. In terms of grace, partaking in the Lord’s Supper results in a closer fellowship with Christ and in spiritual strengthening. This is the same type of grace that is received by the Spirit through Scripture but adds to its effectiveness.

Arminian/Wesleyan. The Arminian view is that the Lord’s Supper is strictly a ritual to remember Christ. It has no supernatural efficacy. However, it was a practice commanded by Christ and is therefore obligatory for Christians to practice. Jacobus Arminius writes,

[B]y the legitimate external distribution, taking, and enjoyment of bread and wine, the Lord’s death is announced, and the inward receiving and enjoyment of the body and blood of Christ are signified ... The matter is, bread and wine; which, with regard to their essence, are not changed, but remain what they previously were ... The end is two-fold: The first is, that our faith should be more and more strengthened towards the promise of grace which has been given by God, and concerning the truth and certainty of our being engrafted into Christ. The second is, (1) that believers may, by the remembrance of the death of Christ, testify their gratitude and obligation to God; (2)

that they may cultivate charity among themselves; and (3.) that by this mark they may be distinguished from unbelievers.¹⁶⁵

The views of John Wesley on the Lord's Supper are essentially identical to Arminius. He viewed the Lord's supper as a sacrament instituted by Christ for the purpose of remembering His death. It is particularly important to regularly partake in the Lord's Supper because this was Christ's last instruction to his followers before His death. Wesley writes:

The first reason why it is the duty of every Christian so to do is because it is a plain command of Christ. That this is his command appears from the words of the text, "Do this in remembrance of me:" by which, as the Apostles were obliged to bless, break, and give the bread to all that joined with them in those holy things, so were all Christians obliged to receive those signs of Christ's body and blood. Here therefore the bread and wine are commanded to be received, in remembrance of his death, to the end of the world. Observe, too, that this command was given by our Lord when he was just laying down his life for our sakes. They are therefore, as it were, his dying words to all his followers.¹⁶⁶

10.6 Church Governance

This section is provided primarily for reference. It first discusses church governance as described in the NT, and then gives a short summary of the major church governance practices that exist today.

Church Governance in the NT. The Churches in the NT all seem to have had a governing group of individuals most commonly called elders. Elder is translated from *presbúteros* (πρεσβύτερος), which mean an older person. This function is also referred to as a bishop, from the Greek word *episkopos* (ἐπίσκοπος), meaning an overseer. The function is less commonly (in the NT) referred to as a pastor, from the Greek word *poimén* (ποιμήν), which means a shepherd. Elders were in charge of church government and were not necessarily teachers. Churches in the NT also had deacons, who were in charge of specific tasks or ministries. Deacon is translated from the Greek word *diákonos* (διάκονος), which means a servant or a minister.

Roman Catholic. Offices in the Roman Catholic church include deacon, priest, bishop, archbishop, cardinal, and pope. Deacons (also called seminarians) are those in their last phase of training for the priesthood and can perform duties similar to a priest. There are two types of priest, diocesan priests and religious priests. Diocesan priests are in charge of individual parishes, whereas religious priests are members of religious orders. Bishops are typically in charge of a local groups of parishes known as dioceses. Archbishops are typically in charge of a groups of dioceses known

as archdioceses. Some leading bishops and archbishops are also members of the College of Cardinals and are therefore called Cardinals. The most important duty of the College of Cardinals is to elect a new pope when needed. The pope, of course, is the head of the entire Roman Catholic church.

Episcopalian. The episcopalian model is similar to the Roman Catholic Model except without a pope. Rectors are the head of local congregations. Bishops are in charge of a group of Rectors, with the corresponding congregations called dioceses. And Archbishops are in charge of a group of bishops, with the corresponding dioceses called archdioceses. Archbishops, bishops, and rectors are all ordained episcopal priests.

Presbyterian. A local presbyterian church is governed by elders. The lead pastor will be one of the elders in addition to a specified number of people from the congregation. This group is called the session of the congregation. The members of the sessions in a region are also all member of the corresponding presbytery, which has governing authority over its member congregations. Some of the members of each presbytery are also members of the General Assembly, which has governing authority over its member presbyteries.

Congregational. A congregational church is one whose only authority derives from the congregation of its member. A congregational church may be a member of a larger association, but this association has no authority over its member churches. The members of a congregational church elect its governing members, called elders, and has the authority to remove its governing members. For small churches with only a single pastor, the pastor may be the only elder, but will be supported by a number of elected deacons. For larger churches, the governing board typically consists of the lead pastor and a specified number of additional elected elders.

Community. A community church typically refers to a local church that is set up as a non-profit business. As such, the organization is required to meet the legal requirements that apply to the location of the church. A community church will therefore typically be run by an elected board of directors. The board of directors then has the exclusive authority to hire and fire an executive pastor, who is the equivalent of a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in a for-profit



Mary Magdalene Praying,
by Scheffer
(Wikimedia Commons)

business. Like a congregational church, a community church is completely self-governed. It may be a member of a larger association, but this association has no authority over its member churches.¹⁶⁷

10.7 Prayer

Corporate prayer (also called prayers of the people¹⁶⁸) is a core function of the church. Therefore, prayer as it relates to the doctrine of the church is now discussed. But the topic of prayer includes more than just corporate prayer. Therefore, this section will address prayer in general, including corporate prayer, even though some of these issues are not directly related to the doctrine of the church.

Prayer can most generally be defined as an act of deliberate communication with God. This can occur in a private context (i.e., prayer by a single individual), in a social context (e.g., prayer by a small group of Christians such as before a family meal), or in a corporate context (e.g., prayer led by a pastor at a Sunday church service). Regardless of the context, prayer involves spending personal time with a personal God. A fundamental goal of all Christians should be to strengthen their personal relationship with God. As with all personal relationships, this requires spending quality time together. Without prayer, developing a close personal relationship with God is impossible. A strengthening prayer life is an indication of a strengthening relationship with God. A weakening prayer life is an indication of a weakening relationship with God.

Most Christians in the west associate prayer with words, either spoken aloud or spoken internally. This type of prayer is called kataphatic (or cataphatic). More specifically, Kataphatic prayer utilizes positive content such as words, images, and/or ideas. In contrast, apophatic prayer does not use any positive content. Rather, apophatic prayer seeks to empty the mind of words and ideas and to directly experience the immediate presence of God. For example, centering prayer is a type of apophatic prayer. A centering prayer seeks to empty the mind and to center oneself completely in the presence of God. It involves choosing a sacred word that serves a similar function as a mantra. Centering prayer then involves relaxing and quieting, mentally repeating the sacred word, and coming back to the sacred word whenever anything else enters your thoughts. Many western Christians are initially uncomfortable with apophatic prayer, but it is common in Orthodox Christianity, has a long history of practice, and is not to be thought of as something appropriated from Hinduism or Buddhism.

Whereas the purpose of apophatic prayer is to directly experience the immediate presence of God, there are many different purposes for

kataphatic prayer. There are different ways to classify these purposes, but a simple and helpful one is simply adoration, thanksgiving, repentance, and petition. These types of prayer roughly correspond to the acronym PRAY, which is a guide for one way to structure a prayer. P is for praising, corresponding to the first part of a prayer that focuses on adoration and thanksgiving. R is for repentance where sins are confessed, forgiveness is requested, and the forgiveness of others occurs. A is for asking, where God is petitioned for personal needs and/or the needs of others. And the PRAY prayer ends with Y, for yielding. This is where one attempts to listen to what God has to say in response to our prayer.

A similar guide to how to structure a prayer is the acronym ACTS. A is for adoration, C is for confession, T is for thanksgiving, and S is for supplication (humbly requesting something from God). Of course, a single prayer need not contain all of these elements, but a healthy prayer life will certainly contain them. Personally, I prefer the order of adoration, repentance, thanksgiving, petition, and hearing. But each Christian should find the structure of prayer that personally results in the closest feeling of intimacy with God.

With this introduction, it will be beneficial to examine some key Bible verses addressing prayer, allowing for a theological examination of the topic. This will be done for the topics of prayer life, prayers of comfort, prayers of repentance, prayers of petition, and general instructions on how to pray.

The following verses address prayer life in general:

- Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thes 5:16–18);
- Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving (Col 4:2); and
- This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us (1 Jn 5:14).

Christians are told to pray without ceasing. Therefore, a healthy prayer life will include regular prayers, prayers throughout the day, and a general mindset that is oriented towards God as much as possible. A classic short prayer that can be said often throughout the day is called the Jesus Prayer. A short version of the Jesus prayer is simply, “Lord Jesus, have mercy on me.” A somewhat longer version is, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” We are to be devoted to prayer, and not see it as an obligation but to pray with a thankful attitude that God welcomes our prayers and wants to spend time with us. Last, if we pray according to God’s will, we can be assured that God hears our prayers.

The following verses address prayers of comfort:

- Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray (Jas 5:13).
- Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and pleading with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God (Phil 4:6); and
- Keep watching and praying, so that you do not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (Mt 26:41).

When Christians are suffering, the Bible says that they must pray. It is not one option among many to deal with the suffering condition, but something mandatory. Similarly, prayer should be the primary way that a Christian deals with anxiety. Last, comfort can come through prayers that request strength to resist sinful temptations and wisdom to avoid tempting situations in the first place.

The following verses address prayers of repentance:

- If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:9);
- And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you for your offenses (Mk 11:25); and
- Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. A prayer of a righteous person, when it is brought about, can accomplish much (Jas 5:16).

Prayerful confession of sins is a requirement for forgiveness in the sense that unrepentant sins fail to admit that they are an offence to God and are acts of disobedience. Furthermore, requests for forgiveness should accompany the forgiveness of others. We should not expect God to forgive if we do not forgive. Furthermore, Christians are encouraged to not just confess their sins in private, but to do so in the presence of other Christians. This can be difficult, but sin can thrive when it exists as a secret.



Praying Hands by Dürer

(Wikimedia Commons)

When a sin that previously existed in the darkness is exposed to the light of other Christians, it can be more easily conquered with the prayers, support, and accountability that comes with a public confession (see Eph 5:11-13).

The following verses address prayers of petition:

- Therefore, I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted to you (Mk 11:24);
- And whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive it all (Mt 21:22);
- But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that person ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways (Jas 1:6-8);
- You ask and do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives, so that you may spend what you request on your pleasures (Jas 4:3); and
- First of all, then, I urge that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made in behalf of all people, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity (1 Tm 2:1).

It is clear that God will answer all prayers that are done in strong belief and without any doubt. But if prayers do not seem to be answered, it should not be understood as due to a lack of faith or excessive doubt. Rather, God will typically answer all sincere prayers with one of three responses: (1) OK, I will answer that prayer; (2) OK, I will answer that prayer in due time, but not now; and (3) I hear your prayer, but trust that I have a better idea of how to respond. Last, we are particularly called to pray for people in authority, not just for personal acquaintances.

The following verses are how Jesus instructs how to pray.

- [Jesus says,] And when you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they will be seen by people. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But as for you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. And when you are praying, do not use thoughtless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of

their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him (Mt 6:5–8); and

- [Jesus says,] Pray, then, in this way: “Our Father, who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Mt 6:9–15).

The first point that Jesus makes is to not use prayer to impress others of your piety. This instruction is naturally obeyed when praying in private, but can also be obeyed when leading a social or communal prayer. Jesus also gives us an example in the Lord’s Prayer, which seems to be intended to be prayed in groups since it begins with “Our Father.” Notice that the Lord’s Prayer starts with adoration and submission, followed by petition. It ends with repentance, including the forgiveness of others. Prayers can contain other elements such as thanksgiving, but Christians cannot go wrong when following the form of the Lord’s Prayer or even reciting the Lord’s Prayer as it appears in Scripture.

The Lord’s Prayer is addressed to the Father, and Jesus consistently addresses His prayers to the Father. It is therefore apparent that it is acceptable for Christians to address their prayers to the Father. But is this the only acceptable option? Praying directly to Jesus is demonstrated when Stephen prays before his death, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” Praying directly to the triune God is demonstrated when the Apostles prayed for wisdom when selecting a replacement for Judas, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all people, show which one of these two You have chosen” (Acts 1:24). There are no direct examples of prayers directed to the Holy Spirit, but the book of Jude refers to “praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20). It seems, therefore, that praying to any one of the persons of the triune God is equivalent to praying to any of the others as well as the triune God as a whole. But each is a separate Person, and it may be more comfortable for some to pray to the Person more particularly ascribed to what is involved in a particular prayer. For example, one might pray to the Father for general thanksgiving and forgiveness, to the Son for issues related to salvation, and to the Holy Spirit for issues related to sanctification and guidance.

A difficult issue in theology is the impact of prayer on God. Will God, in His infinite wisdom, really change what He would otherwise do based on our prayers of petition? The Bible teaches that God is unchangeable, and it also teaches us that our prayers will be answered. This issue is therefore one that cannot be fully understood by humans and must remain a mystery. But there is much anecdotal evidence for the power of prayer to

head and clinical evidence as well. Consider the following peer reviewed study that involved about 400 patients with coronary disease. The study randomly selected groups of about 200 and assigned remote prayer teams to members of one group and no prayer teams for the other. Both the patients and the physicians did not know which patients were assigned to prayer teams. The results were the following:

It was found that although the patients were well matched at entry, the prayer patients showed significantly superior recovery compared to controls ($p < .0001$). The prayed-for patients were five times less likely than control patients to require antibiotics and three times less likely to develop pulmonary edema. None of the prayed-for patients required endotracheal intubation, whereas 12 controls required such mechanical ventilatory support. Fewer prayed-for than control patients died, but the difference in this area was not statistically significant. The design and the results of the Byrd study are impressive, and even skeptical commentators seem to agree on the significance of the findings.¹⁶⁹

Further evidence of the power of prayer in healing is exhaustively treated by Craig Keener in his two-volume work *Miracles: The Credibility of New Testament Accounts*. Keener started his project to simply demonstrate that miracle *claims* like those in the NT are still common today. After carefully investigating many hundreds of accounts, he finds that some have no easy non-miraculous explanations. He finds fifteen cases where a supernatural explanation is the most plausible (assuming a supernatural explanation is not *a priori* excluded from consideration), nine more that are very probably supernatural or almost certainly supernatural. A few of these include:

- A blind man with cataracts is instantly healed with witnesses seeing his eyes visibly changing;
- A child with no vital signs for twenty minutes comes back to life after prayer, and later completes a master's degree;
- An infant with severe burns is healed after one day of prayer, leaving no scars; and
- A person with congenital deafness and a limp is healed during prayers with the leg measurably lengthening over several minutes.¹⁷⁰

And so there need be no tension for the Christian concerned with whether there is room for both science and miracles through prayers in the world. At least in Keener's investigations, many miracles were a result of corporate prayer efforts of local churches. God, of course, can perform miracles through prayer if He so chooses. And there is strong evidence that God, at least sometimes, does perform miracles through prayer.

10.8 Further Reading

Those interested in a more detailed treatment of the doctrine of the church are encouraged to read Part 5 of Louis Berkhof's book *Systematic Theology* with the understanding that Berkhof is primarily presenting and defending Reformed theology. Part 6 of Gregg Allison's *Historical Theology* (Ch. 25-30) presents a history of the doctrine of the church, including the development of all of the major theological positions. Easier reading can be found in Part 6 of Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (2nd ed., Ch. 44-53). He primarily follows Berkhof, but also adds much content from an evangelical perspective.

10.9 Study Questions

1. What is meant by the visible church and the invisible Church? What are some differences in how theologians understand the invisible Church?
2. What are the two primary roles of the Church from a Protestant perspective and how does this differ from the three primary roles of the Church from a Roman Catholic perspective?
3. Discuss the role of the local church in the salvation of individuals. Is the church necessary for salvation? Why or why not?
4. Describe the difference in understanding of the power of sacraments in Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Reformed, and Arminian theology.
5. Describe the role of the Baptism in Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Reformed, and Arminian theology.
6. Describe the role of the Lord's Supper in Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Reformed, and Arminian theology.
7. What is meant by transubstantiation and consubstantiation? Which theological systems ascribe to each?
8. What was the basic church governance structure as described in the NT? Is this structure always to be preferred today? Explain.
9. What is the difference in governance structure between a congregational church and a community church?
10. Explain the difference between kataphatic prayer and apophatic prayer? Is there a role for each in corporate prayer? Explain.

11. The Doctrine of Last Things

The study of the doctrine of last things is called eschatology. Eschatology is from the Greek word *éskhatos* (ἔσχατος) meaning last. Scripture uses this term to refer to the last days (*éschatai hemerai*; Is 2:2), the last time (*éskhatos ton chronon*; 1 Pt 1:20), and the last hour (*éschate hora*; 1 Jn 2:18).

Eschatology is typically sub-divided into general eschatology and individual eschatology. General eschatology addresses expected future events such as the second coming of Christ, the general resurrection, the last judgement, and the final condition of the saved and the unsaved. Individual eschatology addresses what happens to an individual after physical death such as the fate of the soul and the intermediate state between physical death and also the general resurrection.

11.1 Death and the Soul

Christianity teaches that a living person on earth consists of a physical body and a spiritual soul. Our bodies are subject to physical aging and inevitable death. But was it always so? Theological opinions vary widely on this question.

Some believe that the natural condition of mankind before the Fall is immortality, at least from the effects of aging and deterioration. This is based on man being made in the image of God, who is not subject to physical decay. Others believe that Adam and Eve were subject to physical aging but had access to the Tree of Life in the Garden and therefore had access to immortality. When they were banished from the Garden, they no longer had access to the Tree of Life and therefore began to age and deteriorate. Still others believe that all humans, including Adam and Eve, are subject to physical aging but God kept this from occurring until the Fall. Last, some believe that Adam and Eve were subject to physical aging and would have died of old age even if the Fall had never occurred.

When Scripture describes the punishments given to Adam and Eve as a result of the Fall (Gn 3:16-19), it never mentions that Adam and Eve will now be subject to aging and dying. It also states that Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden so they would not be able to eat from the Tree of Life. “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out with his hand, and take fruit also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” (Gn 3:22). It is not clear whether Adam and Eve only needed to eat from the Tree of Life to live forever after the Fall, or if this was always a requirement.



**Dante and Virgil in Hell,
by Bouguereau**
(Wikimedia Commons)

Many that believe that mankind was immortal before the Fall cite Paul’s famous verse, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gracious gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23). It is not clear whether Paul is speaking of being alive in the Spirit or being alive in a glorified body, but Paul often uses life and death to refer to a person’s spiritual condition. James writes something similar, “Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it has run its course, brings forth death” (Jas 1:15). But James is addressing the importance of resisting temptation in this verse and it is unlikely that he is addressing issues immortality.

And so, the issue of the original immortality of mankind remains unsettled with good arguments for many positions. There is a certain elegance in pre-Fall man having glorified bodies and, after the general resurrection, believers being restored to this glorified state. But it seems that if the Fall resulted in such a dramatic change in the human condition, changing from immortal to mortal, Scripture would have mentioned this alongside the other consequences such as pain in childbirth and a life of hard labor.

But all agree that since the Fall and up to the present, everyone eventually dies. When this happens, the soul is separated from the body. The fate of the soul is described somewhat differently in the OT and the NT, which is now discussed.

In the OT, the dead are said to descend into *sheol* (שְׁאוֹל). *Sheol* variously refers to the world of the dead, a grave, and a pit. When *sheol* is referring to the abode of departed souls, it corresponds to the Greek concept of Hades. The OT does not describe *sheol* as either paradise or hell, but essentially a neutral place where all souls go after death. However, the

OT does describe *sheol* as a place where the wicked go, and warns of being sent there (e.g., Prv 5:5; 7:27; 9:18; 15:24; 23:14). Some have tried to reconcile this by ascribing the NT concepts of paradise and Gehenna as two separate parts of *sheol*, with good souls going to paradise after death and wicked souls going to Gehenna. This view is supported by the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, where the rich man and Lazarus are separated in the underworld with the rich man in torment but with Lazarus in “Abraham’s bosom” (Lk 16:19-31). But this is a parable about how God views the poor and destitute, and it is not likely intended to describe the fate of souls after death. Furthermore, the OT does not contain any hints of divisions within *sheol*.

The NT reveals much more about the fate of the soul after physical death. First and foremost is that the souls of both the saved and the unsaved persist after death and into eternity. There are many verses that speak to the eternal fate of saved and unsaved souls, but both are clearly addressed by the following words of Jesus, “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Mt 25:46).

Although the case for immortality of the soul is very strong, some believe that the souls of the wicked are eventually annihilated. This view, called annihilationism (also referred to as extinctionism or destructionism), typically has God destroying the souls of the wicked after the Last Judgement, but some also believe that this destruction will occur upon physical death. The biblical basis for this view is that immortality is typically represented as a gift from God for believers. A good example is when Jesus says, “My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give them eternal life, and they will never perish” (Jn 10:27-28). In addition, sinners are often threatened with death and destruction. Paul writes, “These people will pay the penalty of eternal destruction” (2 Thes 1:9). Furthermore, we are told to fear the possibility of our soul being destroyed in hell. “And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mt 10:28). But despite these passages, the dominant teaching of the NT is the immortality of all souls.

11.2 Intermediate State

The period of time just after death until the general resurrection (the time when the soul is not associated with a physical body) is referred to as the intermediate state. This section will first discuss the Roman Catholic beliefs about the intermediate state and then discuss the major protestant views.

Roman Catholics believe that a saved person who dies and has repented for all of their sins will go immediately to Heaven, although this is very rare. More typically, a person dies with a certain number of unrepented venial sins and will therefore go to Purgatory after death. The cleansing fires of Purgatory will then gradually purify the soul until it is free from sin and can then enter Heaven. Although not official doctrine, certain Roman Catholic theologians over time have variously believed in the *Limbus Patrum* and/or the *Limbus Infantum*. The *Limbus Patrum* was where the souls of OT believers went and stayed until Christ descended to the dead to release them after His crucifixion. The *Limbus Infantum* is where the souls of unbaptized infants go after death and is a place where the eternal torture of Hell is absent, but so also is the beatific vision of God.



Purgatory, by Carracci
(Wikimedia Commons)

The predominant Protestant belief is that the souls of believers upon physical death immediately enter paradise and are in the presence of Christ. This is evident when Jesus says to the penitent criminal on the cross, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43). Most theologians believe that paradise is referring to Heaven in this passage.¹⁷¹ The intermediate state of the saved is the soul in Heaven without a body and the final state of the saved is the soul in Heaven with a glorified body. Similarly, the intermediate state of the unsaved is the soul in Hell without a body and the final state of the unsaved is the soul in Hell with a glorified body.

The Lutheran position is a bit more ambiguous. Wallace McLaughlin summarizes as follows:

Only few Scripture passages treat of the state of souls between death and resurrection. The Scripture directs the attention of men primarily to the last day and the following state of eternal blessedness and eternal damnation. But from a few clear passages of Scripture we know: a). The souls of the believers between death and resurrection are in a state of blessed enjoyment of God, with Jesus (Acts 7:59), with Christ (Phil. 1:23), in paradise (Luke 23:43); b). the souls of the unbelievers are in prison (1 Peter 3:19). A “soul-sleep” which excludes the enjoyment of God is to be rejected as contrary to Scripture teaching, for the Holy Spirit through St. Paul teaches that the state of the believing Christian after death is “far better” than in this life (Phil. 1:23), and the promise of being in paradise, which Jesus gives to the dying malefactor as one to be fulfilled “today,” certainly includes a blissful enjoyment of God.¹⁷²

There is no formal Arminian/Wesleyan/Methodist doctrine on the intermediate state except to reject the idea of Purgatory. This said, John Wesley himself believed that all souls after death temporarily go to the realm of the dead (i.e., Hades), the saved to the Bosom of Abraham and the unsaved to Gehenna. The unsaved are aware of their future bodily resurrection and eternal fate in Hell, and the saved can progress in their sanctification and look forward to their future bodily resurrection and eternal destiny in Heaven. Wesley based his views primarily on the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Lk 16:19-31).

This section ends with a brief discussion of the following often-overlooked passage that addresses heaven and paradise and their relationship. Paul writes:

I know a man in Christ, who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak (2 Cor 12:2-4).

Paul Yeulett explains this verse as follows. “In the cosmology with which Paul was familiar, the ‘first heaven’ was the realm of meteorology, the ‘second heaven’ that of astronomy, and the ‘third heaven’ was the dwelling-place of God and the angels who serve him. That realm is here equated with ‘paradise:’ where God is, there Christ is (Luke 23:43); and there, we can deduce, believers will be after death.”¹⁷³ This passage is strong evidence that the use of paradise in Lk 23:43 refers to Heaven.

11.3 The Second Coming of Christ

This section will now begin to address theological topics related to scriptural prophesy about future events. A bit of humility is advised. Charles Hodge is well worth listening to in this regard. He writes:

Prophecy is very different from history. It is not intended to give us a knowledge of the future, analogous to that which history gives us of the past. This truth is often overlooked ... With regards to the first advent of Christ, the Old Testament prophecies rendered it certain that a great Redeemer was to appear; that He was to be a Prophet, Priest, and King; that He would deliver his people from their sins, and from the evils under which they groaned ... Nevertheless, of all the hundreds of thousands to whom these predictions of the Hebrew Scriptures were made known, not a single person, so far as appears, interpreted them aright ... The utter failure of the Old Testament church in interpreting the prophecies relating to the first advent of Christ, should teach us to be modest and diffident in explaining those which relate to his second coming.¹⁷⁴

The topic of biblical prophecy is complicated, difficult, and vast. A full understanding can probably only be achieved by specialists. Regardless, the following sections will attempt to present the most prevalent beliefs among these specialists. In doing so, dispensational beliefs will be treated in a separate section as they differ significantly from the more prevalent opinions in this area.

The second coming of Christ (also called the second advent of Christ) is referred to many times in the NT. It is most commonly called the *parousia* (παρουσία), a Greek word that literally means a coming or a presence. *Parousia* is used in other contexts, but specifically refers to the second coming of Christ in many verses (e.g., Mt 24:3; 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thes 3:13; 2 Thes 2:1; Jam 5:7; 2 Pt 3:4; 1 Jn 2:28). Just after Christ's ascension, two figures in white clothing say, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). The author of Hebrews writes, "And just as it is destined for people to die once, and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him" (Heb 9:27-28). It is clear that we are to eagerly wait for the second coming of Christ. But what else can we know about this anticipated event?

The first place to look for a richer understanding of the second advent is Jesus's response to the question asked by His disciples, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age" (Mt 24:3)? Jesus responds by describing many hardships that will arise before his second coming, including the destruction of Jerusalem. "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down" (Mt 24:1-2). But Jesus also says that he will not return until the gospel message is preached to the whole world. "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Mt 24:14).

Mt 24:14 raises the question of the imminence of the second coming. Can Christ return at any time (i.e., is imminent) or must certain things first occur? Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 CE. But has the gospel of the kingdom been preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations? It seems that this has not yet occurred, as there are many nations where the open practice of Christianity is effectively banned. For example, the distribution of Bibles is prohibited in Afghanistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Maldives, Mauritania, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Yemen. Furthermore, the World Population Review characterizes the level of Christian persecution in fifty

countries as either extreme or very high.¹⁷⁵ It is possible that the presence of a few missionaries in every country could be considered preaching the gospel to every nation. But it seems more likely that Jesus is referring to something far more substantial. If so, the second coming of Christ is not imminent at this point in time.

Jesus also speaks of a time of great hardship before His second coming. This is described in detail in Mt 24:15-31, where this time is referred to the Abomination of Desolation. "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will again" (Mt 24:21). Assessments of the current state of the world differ, but if the state of the world today is not noticeably the worst in history, it would also be an indication that the second coming of Christ is not imminent at this point in time. In any case, all must keep in mind the clear teaching of Jesus on this matter. "But about that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone" (Mt 24:36).

Many think that there will be a mass conversion of Jews to Christianity before the second coming. The OT suggests that the house of David (i.e., Israel) will one day mourn for Christ, "And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and of pleading, so that they will look at Me whom they pierced; and they will mourn for Him" (Zec 12:10). Paul is more specific when he likens Jews to pruned branches that will one day be grafted back on to the olive tree that is Christ. "And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again ... a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:23-26). But when will this mass conversion occur? Many think that this must be before the second coming due to the following words of Jesus. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD'" (Mt 23:37-39).

It is also generally believed that the antichrist will make himself known before the second coming. Paul writes, "Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, regarding the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ ... For it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God" (2 Thes 2:1-4). There are many different views of the antichrist including a single person to appear

in the future, an institution, a power, or a corporation. For example, many Protestants have historically believed that antichrist refers to the office of the papacy. Roman Catholics, of course, strongly disagree and equate the antichrist to any person who exalts himself above God and suppresses religion, such as Hitler and Stalin. “The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh.”¹⁷⁶ Dispensational theology typically views the antichrist as a future specific individual. This said, speculation about the antichrist has little bearing on the rest of eschatology. There is much material for the interested reader to investigate, but this is the extent to which this issue will be presently addressed.

The last theological issue related to the second coming of Christ relates to concomitant events. The predominant theological view is that the second coming of Christ will be accompanied by the general resurrection of the dead, the final judgement, the end of the world, and the creation of the New Heaven and the New Earth. The substance of these issues will be discussed in separate sections below, but their timing with respect to the second coming is now assessed.

There is not a single passage that describes all of these events occurring at the same time. However, it is clear that the second coming will occur at the end of times, also called the last day. “But the one who endures to the end is the one who will be saved. This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come ... and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory” (Mt 24:13-30). It is also clear that the final judgement will occur on the last day. “The one who rejects Me and does not accept My teachings has one who judges him: the word which I spoke. That will judge him on the last day” (Jn 12:48). This agrees with the final judgement occurring at the same time as the second coming. “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, just as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, but the goats on



The Last Judgement, Michealangelo

(Wikimedia Commons)

the left” (Mt 25:31-33). It is also clear that the general resurrection will occur on the last day. “Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day’” (Jn 11:24).

At this point, the second coming of Christ is shown to be concomitant with the last day, the final judgement, and the general resurrection. The following verse also equates this with the Day of the Lord and indicates that the end of the world will also occur at this time, along with the creation of the New Heaven and the New Earth.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be discovered. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. (2 Pt 10-13)

The creeds all speak of Christ’s ascension into Heaven, His return, and His judgement of the living and the dead. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed states. “He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.” The Apostles Creed states “[T]here he will come to judge the living and the dead.” The Athanasian Creed has the most detailed treatment and states:

He is seated at the Father’s right hand; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. At his coming all people will arise bodily and give an accounting of their own deeds. Those who have done good will enter eternal life, and those who have done evil will enter eternal fire.

All of the major theological systems agree with the content of these creeds. In addition, Roman Catholic theologians typically view the second coming and its associated events as happening in an instant of time when the living die, and then all of the dead are resurrected, judged, and placed into their eternal fate. Reformed theologians typically view the second coming as described in this section. Lutheran and Arminian theologians do not generally elaborate on the second coming beyond the creeds, but Martin Luther preferred to view it as a beloved



Second Coming of Christ Icon

(Wikimedia Commons)

last day “when Christ would make an end to all corruption and strife and death.”¹⁷⁷

11.4 Millennial Views

The Millennial refers to the period of time after Satan is bound when Christ will reign over the earthly Messianic Kingdom for 1000 years. This is only referred to once in the Bible. “Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years” (Rv 20:6).

Before discussing specific theological views on the Millennial, it is worthwhile to examine the four main approaches to interpreting the book of Revelation in general. These are historicism futurism, preterism, and idealism.¹⁷⁸

Historicism. The historicism approach understands most of the book of Revelation as referring to past history. The first three chapters refer to first century churches. The next part of the book going up to and including the Millennium are describing the patristic, medieval, Reformation, and modern church ages. The Millennium is therefore not a literal thousand-year period, but a long period of time that continues to the present day. The only part of the book of Revelation that refers to the future starts in Rv 20:7 and includes the second coming of Christ, the general resurrection, the white throne of judgement, and the creation of the New Heaven and the New Earth.

Futurism. Futurists understand most of the book of Revelation as referring to future events that have not yet happened. The only part of the book that refers to historical events are the letters to the seven churches in the first three chapters. There are two sub-categories of futurism. The first is called historical premillennialism and understands that the Church will be present during the Tribulation. The second is called dispensational premillennialism and understands that the Church will be raptured away before the tribulation. Dispensationalism is treated in more detail in its own section below.

Preterism. Preterism is similar to historicism but believes that much of what is described in the book of Revelation has been fulfilled in the distant past. The seals, trumpets, and witnesses in Chapters 4-11 refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE. The dragon, beasts, bowls, and Armageddon in Chapters 12-19 refer to the fall of Rome in the fourth century. The Millennium is not a literal thousand-year period, but a long period of time that began after the fall of Rome and continues to the

present day. As with historicism, preterism holds that the only part of the book of Revelation that refers to the future starts in Rv 20:7 and includes the second coming of Christ, the general resurrection, the white throne of judgement, and the creation of the New Heaven and the New Earth.

Idealism. Idealism is similar to historicism in that the first three chapters refer to first century churches and the only future events that are described are the second coming of Christ, the general resurrection, the white throne judgement, and the creation of the New Heaven and the New Earth. However, the idealist does not believe that the rest of the visions necessarily represent a sequence of events that have happened throughout history. Instead, most of the book of Revelation symbolically represents the conflict between Christ and Christianity on one hand and Satan and his evil forces on the other hand.

With this general background on interpretive approaches, the specific issue of Millennium views will now be discussed. The biggest division is whether one believes that a future Millennium will actually happen. Those that do represent Millennialism (also called Chiliasm) and those that don't represent Amillennialism. Millennialism can be further divided based on whether Christ will appear before the Millennium, referred to as Premillennialism, or after the Millennium, referred to as Postmillennialism. To complicate things further, Postmillennialism can be further divided based on whether the Christ will appear before the Tribulation, referred to as Pre-Tribulation Premillennialism, or after the Tribulation, referred to as Post-Tribulation Premillennialism. These divisions correspond to four Millennial views: Post-Tribulation Premillennialism; Pre-Tribulation Premillennialism; Postmillennialism, and Amillennialism.

Post-Tribulation Premillennialism. Post-Tribulation Premillennialism is also called Classic Premillennialism. It believes that the Church will be present for the Tribulation. After the Tribulation, Christ will return to earth, resurrect all deceased believers, and then rule the earthly Messianic Kingdom for 1000 years.

Pre-Tribulation Premillennialism. Pre-Tribulation Premillennialism believes that Christ will appear in the clouds before the Tribulation, resurrect all deceased believers, and then transport all believers to Heaven so that they do not experience the Tribulation. After the Tribulation, all believers will be transported back to earth for the earthly thousand-year rule of Christ. This is the belief of dispensational theology.

Postmillennialism. Postmillennialism is the position that Christ's second coming will occur after the millennial period. Most holding this view understand the Millennial to be wonderful future time when Satan is bound. During the Millennium, Christ will be in Heaven, but will rule through the Spirit working through the Church. Because Satan is bound,

the Gospel can be preached without resistance, resulting in the conversion of all nations and people. At the end of the Millennium, Satan will be released for a short time and unleash an aggressive attack on the Church. But Christ will return to earth to finally defeat Satan, administer the Last Judgement, and create the New Heaven and the New Earth.

Amillennialism. Amillennialism is the belief that there will not be a future literal thousand-year period where Satan is bound. Rather, Satan is already bound as a result of Christ's death and resurrection, although evil forces are still at work in the world. Christ was victorious and the Gospel is therefore being advanced by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Church. The world is currently in the Millennial period in the sense of Satan being imprisoned, which will persist for a long period of time until Satan is released and Christ returns for His final victory. Christ will physically return to earth, defeat Satan and his evil forces, administer the Last Judgement, and create the New Heaven and the New Earth.

There has been exhaustive debate from every possible perspective with regards to millennial views. This said, Amillennialism has been the predominant view of all of the four major theological systems: Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Reformed, and Arminian. But eschatology in general and Millennialism in particular are not a theological or preaching focus within any of these systems or associated churches. The strongest rejection of millennialist view comes from Roman Catholicism. Its Catechism states:

The Antichrist's deception already begins to take shape in the world every time the claim is made to realize within history that messianic hope which can only be realized beyond history through the eschatological judgment. The Church has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism, especially the "intrinsically perverse" political form of a secular messianism.¹⁷⁹

The Lutheran rejection of Millennialism is almost as strong and associates it with a false Jewish understanding of the Messianic Kingdom. The Augsburg Confession states that "Our churches also condemn others who are now spreading Jewish opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the godly will take possession of the kingdom of the world, while the ungodly are suppressed everywhere."¹⁸⁰ The Evangelical Lutheran Synod explains this view as follows:

It seems this false doctrine [Millennialism] was rooted in a Jewish view of an earthly messianic kingdom which was common even in Old Testament times ... There are many objections to be raised in refutation of this false teaching so common among the Pentecostals, Baptists, Adventists, Assembly of God churches, as well as Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons ... Adhering to the principle "Scripture interprets Scripture,"

the Lutheran Church has believed the interpretation of the 1,000 years in Revelation 20 to be taken figuratively, the way that a “vision” (Rev. 9:17) is usually construed. The “1,000 years” very likely refers to the time span between Christ’s death where Satan was defeated and the time shortly before the very end when evil will have a brief rendezvous of enormous proliferation.¹⁸¹

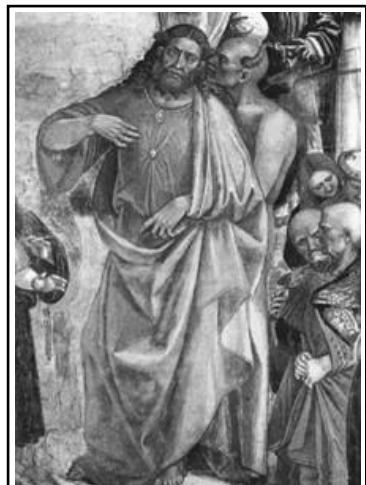
The Reformed rejection of Millennialism began with John Calvin, who referred to it as puerile fiction and a dishonor to Christ and his Kingdom.¹⁸² The Westminster Confession does not directly address Millennialism but does refer to a single day of resurrection that precludes premillennialism. Louis Berkhof presents the typical Reformed position (though not universal) on premillennialism and postmillennialism as follows:

The New Testament certainly does not favor the literalism of the Premillenarians ... The so-called postponement theory, which is a necessary link in the premillennial scheme, is devoid of all scriptural basis ... There is no positive Scriptural foundation whatsoever for the Premillennial view of a double, or even a three- or fourfold resurrection, as their theory requires ... There are some very serious objections to the Postmillennial theory ... The fundamental idea of the doctrine ... is not in harmony with the picture of the end of the ages found in Scripture ... The related idea, that the present age will not end in a great cataclysmic change, but will pass almost imperceptibly into the coming age, is equally unscriptural.¹⁸³

There is not strong evidence providing insight into the eschatological beliefs of Jacobus Arminius or John Wesley, but some suggest that their preaching tended towards postmillennialism. However, millennialism was clearly not an emphasis of either and the Methodist *Book of Discipline* is silent on the matter:

The Judgment and the Future State We believe all men stand under the righteous judgment of Jesus Christ, both now and in the last day. We believe in the resurrection of the dead; the righteous to life eternal and the wicked to endless condemnation.¹⁸⁴

The pre-Tribulation belief of dispensational theology is obviously in stark contrast to the predominant view of Amillennialism. This is not just a theological difference but a significant difference in emphasis. Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Reformed, and Arminian theologies do not emphasize prophecy or



**Antichrist and the Devil,
by Signorelli**
(Wikimedia Commons)

eschatology nor does preaching in their associated churches. Eschatology and prophesy is absolutely central to dispensational theology and both are strongly emphasized in dispensational preaching.

11.5 The Rapture

The doctrine of the Rapture is primary based on the following single verse, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who remain, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thes 4:16-17). The term “caught up” is translated from the Greek word *harpazó* (ἁρπάζω), which was translated by Jerome into the Latin word *rapimur*, a form of the Latin verb *rapturo*, from which the term rapture is derived. Rapture literally means to carry off, to snatch away, or to seize by force.

The classical exegesis of this passage is based on Paul’s message to the Thessalonians, who were expecting the quick return of Christ and were experiencing pastoral problems as time went on with no second coming. Since Christ’s return was delayed, the Thessalonians were concerned about the fate of believers who had died in the meantime. Paul therefore uses apocalyptic imagery to equate the eternal condition of dead and believers when Christ returns again in glory at the end of the world.

The idea that believers will be raptured away before a period of tribulation seems to be recent. Michael Svelgel writes, “As far as the documentary evidence indicates, the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture of the entire church being caught up prior to a full seven-year tribulation period began with John Nelson Darby.”¹⁸⁵ Darby (1800–1882) developed this view primarily based on his interpretation of Rv 12:5, “And she gave birth to a Son, a male, who is going to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her Child was caught up to God and to His throne.” Darby interpreted the Son being “caught up to God” as the pretribulational rapture of the Church. Darby’s view of the pretribulational rapture has been popularized through both



The Rapture, One in the Field, by Luyken
(Wikimedia Commons)

dispensational theology and popular media such as the *Left Behind* book series and film adaptations. But it is only taught by dispensational theology, is rejected by all other theological systems, and was not even conceived as an interpretation until the nineteenth century. All of this does not disprove the idea of a pretribulational rapture, but the amount of attention that this issue receives in both attacks and defenses is perhaps out of proportion. With this background on the Rapture, a more complete description of dispensational theology is now presented.

11.6 Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism is a theological system that is significantly different from either Roman Catholic theology or the mainstream Protestant theologies of Lutheranism, Reformed, and Arminianism. It is therefore treated separately here since its understanding of the doctrine of last things is somewhat unique.¹⁸⁶

Although many of the elements of modern dispensationalism have existed for centuries, dispensationalism as a theological system was first developed by John Nelson Darby (1800–1882 CE), who was the leader of the Plymouth Brethren. Dispensationalism was then given broad exposure through the *Scofield Reference Bible*. In addition, independent seminaries like the Moody Bible Institute and the Dallas Theological Seminary educated many dispensational pastors, a large number of whom went on to found dispensational churches.

The primary characteristics of dispensationalism can be summarized as follows: (1) an understanding that God has separate plans for Israel and the Church; (2) biblical interpretation that is literal, especially with regards to OT prophecies; (3) an understanding that the way God interacts with mankind periodically changes throughout the Bible, with each period called a dispensation; and (4) a much greater emphasis on unfulfilled prophecy than other theological systems.

Classic dispensationalism recognizes seven identifiable dispensations in the Bible: innocence, conscience, civil government, patriarchal rule, Mosaic law, grace, and the Millennium. Each of these dispensations can be characterized by its period of time in the Bible, the associated responsibilities of people to God, and the consequences imposed by God for people failing to meet their dispensational responsibilities.

Dispensation of Innocence. This dispensation is in effect from Gn 1:3 to Gn 3:6, the time when Adam and Eve are in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. Their dispensational responsibilities were to tend the Garden, maintain a close fellowship with God, and to refrain from eating from the

Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The consequences for failing to meet these dispensational responsibilities were curses, physical death, and spiritual death.

Dispensation of Conscience. This dispensation is in effect from Gn 3:7 to Gn 8:14, the time from the Fall until the end of the Flood. Dispensational responsibilities during this time were to follow one's moral conscience. The consequence for failing to meet these dispensational responsibilities was a worldwide flood that destroyed almost all of mankind.

Dispensation of Civil Government. This dispensation is in effect from Gn 8:15 to Gn 11:9, from the end of the Flood to the building of the Tower of Babel. Dispensational responsibilities were to govern well, especially with regard to the administration of capital punishment. The consequence for failing to meet these dispensational responsibilities was a forced scattering of people due to a confusion of languages.

Dispensation of Patriarchal Rule. This dispensation is in effect from Gn 11:10 to Ex 18:27, the time of the scattering up until Moses is given the Law. It is at this point where God's dispensations are redirected from all people of the world to a particular people: Abraham and his descendants. Dispensational responsibilities were to believe and obey God and to stay in the promised land. The consequences for failing to meet these dispensational responsibilities were slavery in Egypt and wanderings in the wilderness.

Dispensation of Mosaic Law. This dispensation is in effect from Ex 19:1 to Acts 1:26, the time when Moses is given the Law to just before the Holy Spirit descended upon believers at Pentecost. The dispensational responsibility was to keep the Law. The consequences for failing to meet this dispensational responsibility were various captivities by foreign nations.

Dispensation of Grace. This dispensation is in effect from Acts 2:1 to Rv 19:21, from when the Holy Spirit descended upon believers at Pentecost to just before the Millennium. This is also called the Church Age. According to dispensationalism, the Church on earth is temporary. It began at Pentecost and will be raptured away before the tribulation. Dispensational responsibilities are to believe in the redeeming power of Christ and to increasingly become more Christlike. The consequences for failing to meet these dispensational responsibilities are eternal damnation for unbelievers and loss of rewards for believers.

Dispensation of the Millennium. This dispensation is in effect from Rv 20:1 to Rv 20:15, from the start of the Millennium to the creation of the New Heaven and New Earth. According to dispensationalism, Christ will return to earth after a seven-year period of tribulation to reign over an earthly Kingdom for 1000 years. The Temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem,

there will be a mass conversion of Jews, and animal sacrifices will be practiced again. Dispensational responsibilities during this time will be to believe and obey Christ and to submit to His earthly rule. The consequences for failing to meet these dispensational responsibilities are eternal damnation for unbelievers and loss of rewards for believers.

It is easy to think that dispensational theology's most distinctive characteristic is biblical interpretation in the context of dispensations. But this is not the case. The most distinctive characteristic of dispensational theology is its strict distinction of Israel and the Church. According to dispensationalism, God has one plan for the Nation of Israel and another plan for the Church. The earthly plan for Israel is the literal fulfillment of promises made by God in the OT. The spiritual plan for the Church is to have it raptured away before the Tribulation.

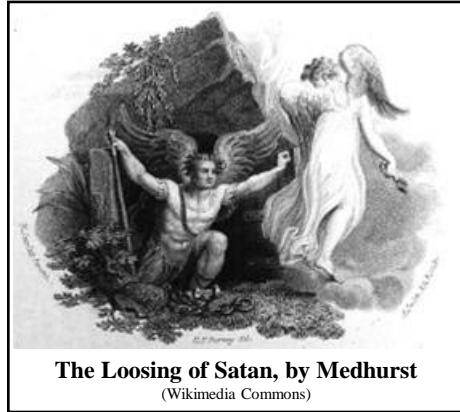
But perhaps dispensationalism is best known for its eschatology, which is why dispensationalism is covered in this chapter. Eschatological events according to dispensational theology include the following.¹⁸⁷

1. **Rapture.** The first eschatological event that will happen is the rapture of the Church, when Christ will appear in the clouds. Dead believers will be resurrected and then all believers will be meet Christ in the clouds and then be transported to Heaven to be with Christ forever. Dispensationalists believe that the Rapture can occur at any time (nothing has to happen first), and therefore tend to spend much effort in examining how current events could be an indication of a Rapture that is very near.
2. **First Judgement.** Soon after the Rapture, all church-age believers will be judged before the judgement seat of Christ. This judgement is not for salvation, as all church age believers are already saved. Rather, this judgement will be a public examination of each person's Christian life and determine their heavenly rewards.
3. **Western Alliance.** There will be the formation of a western alliance, probably led by the future antichrist. This western alliance invades Egypt.
4. **Battle of Gog & Magog.** There will be the formation of a northern alliance that invades Israel that is opposed by the western alliance. God will supernaturally intervene, allowing the western alliance to defeat the northern alliance.
5. **Beginning of the Seven-Year Tribulation.** The antichrist will sign a peace treaty with Israel which marks the beginning of the seven-year period of hardship known as the Tribulation. The Tribulation is also called Daniel's Seventieth Week, the Great Day of the Lord's Wrath, and Time of Jacob's Trouble.

6. **The Six Seals.** The six seals are opened, resulting in a conqueror on a white horse, war, famine, death, martyrs, and terror.
7. **The 144,000.** A world-wide ministry is undertaken by 144,000 witnesses.
8. **Escalation.** The antichrist's reign of terror intensifies. He sets himself up as God and demands worship. The false prophet, second in command to the antichrist, takes on an increased role and assumes control of global commerce. There is a severe persecution of Jews and all believers.
9. **Bowls of Wrath.** Angels pour out seven bowls of wrath corresponding to disease, death to sea creatures, blood in rivers, intensified sun rays, a darkened kingdom, a drying up of the Euphrates river, and a global catastrophe consisting of a major earthquake and intense hailstorms.
10. **End of the Seven-Year Tribulation.** Nations from the east unite and attempt to stop the antichrist. The armies from the east and west engage in a series of battles climaxing the battle of Armageddon. The antichrist and the false prophet are defeated and cast into the Lake of Fire.
11. **Second Judgement.** Christ will judge the world to see who may enter the Messianic Kingdom. This is referred to as the separation of the sheep from the goats.
12. **Millennial Reign of Christ.** Satan is bound for one thousand years and Christ rules over the earthly Messianic Kingdom from Jerusalem.
13. **Loosing of Satan.** At the end of the millennial period, Satan will be loosed and there will be one final battle with God. Satan and the false prophet will be defeated and thrown into the Lake of Fire and Brimstone where they will experience eternal torment.
14. **Great White Throne of Judgment.** Christ will judge all non-believers according to their deeds. These are the people whose names are not written in the Book of Life.
15. **New Heaven and New Earth.** The old Heaven and old Earth will be destroyed (or transformed), followed by the creation of a perfect and sinless new Heaven and New Earth. Christ will rule over the new Heaven and New Earth for all eternity.

Dispensational theology is often contrasted with covenant theology. Whereas dispensational theology interprets the Bible based on dispensations (like the seven listed above), covenant theology interprets the Bible based on different covenants between God and His people. The most common approach to covenant theology is to recognize two covenants: the

covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The covenant of works was in place between God and Adam and Eve before the Fall. The covenant of grace has been in place for all of mankind after the Fall. Some Reformed theologians add the covenant of redemption. This is a covenant between God the Father and God the Son where the Son agrees to redeem the elect by voluntarily assuming the penalty of their sins.



As stated above, the defining feature in dispensational theology is a strict distinction between the nation of Israel and the Church. Dispensational theologians typically call the opposing view, that some-or-all of the OT promises for Israel have been fulfilled in the Church, as replacement theology. That is, Israel was replaced by the Church in the NT. This is also known as supersessionism, since it holds that the Church has superseded Israel in terms of God's soteriological plan.

Dispensationalism as described above has been highly criticized. It is not the purpose of this book to attack or defend dispensationalism, but theologians should be generally aware of these criticisms. Charles Ryrie writes, "The opposition to dispensational teaching has come from many quarters, and the attacks have been quite varied in their intensity."¹⁸⁸ He goes on to describe dispensationalism being attacked as crude, superficial, taught by false teachers, heretical, deviant, unscriptural, a danger, and a modern invention. These *ad hominem* attacks do not prove dispensational theology wrong. But the aggressiveness of these criticisms demonstrates the extreme discomfort that many theologians have with dispensational teachings.

11.7 The Resurrection of the Dead

In the time of Jesus, the two major Jewish sects were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees believed in resurrection, angels, and spirits whereas the Sadducees did not. The Sadducees try to trick Jesus on this issue by asking him who a widow who has lost multiple husbands will be married to after being resurrected. Jesus responds by affirming resurrection and highlighting the Sadducees misunderstanding of the issue:

On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him ... But Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken, since you do not understand the Scriptures nor the power of God ... But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: ‘I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB?’ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Mt 22:23-32).

Jesus makes it clear that the resurrection of the dead will occur. It is also clear that this will happen on the last day. “Martha said to [Jesus], ‘I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day’” (Jn 11:24). But what will the resurrection of the dead entail? The Bible is mostly silent on this issue but does say that it will (1) be a bodily resurrection where the soul is reunited with an improved body; and (2) that this resurrection will occur for both the righteous and the wicked.

Paul is clear that all of the dead will be resurrected when he says, “[T]here shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked” (Acts 24:15). John writes, “[A] time is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come out: those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the bad deeds to a resurrection of judgment” (Jn 5:28-29). The book of Revelation is a bit more cryptic, but the following passage is typically interpreted as referring to the resurrection of all. “And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them ... And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rv 20:13-15).

It is also clear that our souls will be reunited with a physical body. This first happened with Christ’s resurrection, which is referred to as the firstfruits of resurrection (1 Cor 15:23). The implication is that resurrected bodies will be like that of Christ’s resurrected body: physical, the same physical body that we lived with in some sense, but a body that is much improved. Paul writes, “Behold, I am telling you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (1 Cor 15:51-52).

It is natural to question how a body can be resurrected if it is extremely decayed, cremated, or otherwise in a state where the atoms required for a new body are simply not present. This is a mystery, but it should be recognized that the atoms in every animal are regularly replaced. An old person has none of the original atoms of their younger self, and yet they are the same person. In the same way, our resurrected bodies will still be us, even though the material makeup may be different.

The quote by Paul above states that our resurrected bodies will be changed and imperishable. The reference to Christ as the Firstfruit also

implies that our resurrected bodies will in some way be like Christ's glorified body. It can be assumed that these are very good and desirable things, but one last verse provides a clearer picture of our resurrected bodies. "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our lowly condition into conformity with His glorious body, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself." (Phil 3:20-21). Our resurrected bodies will be glorious as Christ's resurrected body is glorious and be suitable for our citizenship in Heaven.

The Roman Catholic position is clear that everyone will be subject to resurrection. The proceedings of the Fourth Lateran Council state, "All of them will rise with their own bodies, which they now wear, so as to receive according to their deserts, whether these be good or bad."¹⁸⁹ The Lutheran position is almost identical. The *Augsburg Confession* reads, "It is also taught that our Lord Jesus Christ will return on the Last Day to judge, to raise all the dead, to give eternal life and eternal joy to those who believe and are elect, but to condemn the ungodly and the devils to hell and eternal punishment."¹⁹⁰

Although not part of any Lutheran confession, it is interesting to note that Martin Luther viewed the general resurrection as part of the ultimate victory of Christ. David Scaer writes, "Luther takes a total advantage of Paul's imagery of the church as Christ's body ... the combined imagery of the 'Head' and 'Firstfruits' suggests to Luther a birth in which the child's head comes out before the body."¹⁹¹ Luther was originally overwhelmed and terrified by the idea that God was going to judge and condemn the sinner at any moment.¹⁹² But understanding the general resurrection as part of Christ's victory allowed Luther to alleviate much of his anxiety.

The predominant Reformed position regarding the general resurrection is somewhat more detailed than the Roman Catholic and Lutheran. The *Westminster Larger Catechism* states:

We must first of all believe that at the last day there is going to be a resurrection of all the dead, both the righteous and the wicked. When that happens, those who are still alive on earth will be instantly changed, and the very same bodies of the dead that were buried will be reunited with their souls and raised up by the power of Christ. Through the Spirit of Christ and by virtue of his resurrection, as their head, the bodies of the righteous will be raised in power, spiritual and imperishable, and made in the likeness of Christ's glorious body. Christ will raise up in dishonor the bodies of the wicked, who offend him as judge.¹⁹³

And so, the Reformed position not only affirms the resurrection of all the dead, but that souls will be reunited with their "very same bodies" and

that these bodies will be glorified versions in the likeness of Christ's resurrected body.

The Arminian position similarly has greater detail than the Roman Catholic and Lutheran. The Arminian Confession reads, "This resurrection will happen at the second and glorious coming of Jesus Christ for the judgment of all, that is, when He will call all the dead to life ... For at that time, He will awaken out of the dust of the earth His faithful and holy ones who were indeed dead to eternal and blessed life, and give to them alone a glorious and incorruptible body."¹⁹⁴ The Methodist position, although historically based on Arminianism, is more similar in detail to the Roman Catholic and Lutheran. Its Confession reads, "We believe all men stand under the righteous judgment of Jesus Christ, both now and in the last day. We believe in the resurrection of the dead; the righteous to life eternal and the wicked to endless condemnation."¹⁹⁵

11.8 The Final Judgement

In Greek, the judgement seat of Christ is called the *bēma*. A *bēma* (βῆμα) was a platform used in tribunals from which orators addressed the citizens as well as the courts of law. In one use, a *bēma* was something an accused person walked up to in order to receive judgement. The word is used twice in eschatological context by Paul, once referring the judgement seat of God and the other of Christ. "But as for you, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or you as well, why do you regard your brother or sister with contempt? For we will all appear before the judgment seat (*bēmati*) of God." (Rom 14:10). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat (*bēματος*) of Christ, so that each one may receive compensation for his deeds done through the body, in accordance with what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10). Therefore, the Final Judgement is often referred to as appearing before the *bēma*.

There are several characteristics of the Final Judgement that are described in Scripture. It is a single event (not a drawn-out process), Christ is to be the judge, works will be a consideration, and perhaps fallen angels will be judged along with humans. Each of these characteristics is now addressed in more depth.

There are many verses that indicate the Final Judgement to occur on a specific day. Examples include "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom 2:5); "He has set a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:31); and "The one who rejects Me and does not accept My teachings has one

who judges him: the word which I spoke. That will judge him on the last day.” (Jn 12:48). Although the word “day” in Scripture does not always refer to a literal day, it is clear from the context of these passages that the Final Judgement will occur in a compressed and limited period and will not be a process taking years or centuries.

There are also many verses that identify Christ as the judge of mankind. Examples include “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor 5:10), “And [Jesus] ordered us to preach to the people, and to testify solemnly that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42), and “For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son” (Jn 5:22). But the verse that directly links the judging of Christ to the last day occur in Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill. “God is now proclaiming to mankind that all people everywhere are to repent, because He has set a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all people by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17: 30-31). Scripture is therefore clear that Christ is to be the judge at the Final Judgement.

There is mention of added blessings for good works in several places in Scripture (see the section on Rewards in Heaven below). But the only passage that directly links works to the Final Judgement is the following: “Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive compensation for his deeds done through the body, in accordance with what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:9-10). Although this is only a single verse, it is quite clear and is not in tension with any other verses. Therefore, it must be concluded that the Final Judgement will account for both good and bad works that were done in the body.

Although not an emphasis, Scripture suggests that the fallen angels that have been banished to hell will be brought back for judgement. It is certain that fallen angels will be judged at some point. Peter writes, “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, held for judgment” (2 Pt 2:4). It is also indicated that this judgement will occur on the “great day.” Jude writes, “And angels who did not keep their own domain but abandoned their proper dwelling place, these He has kept in eternal restraints under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6). But it seems that mankind will be judged before the angels, as those judged righteous will then participate in the judging of angels. Paul writes, “Do you not know that we will judge angels” (1 Cor 6:3)? It therefore comes down to how one defines the Final Judgement. If one understands the Final Judgement

as the judgement of all mankind only, it does not include angels by definition. If one understands the Final Judgement as the judgement of all mankind followed by the judgement of angels, it does include angels.

The Roman Catholic description of the final judgement does not mention angels, but does indicate that judgement will be based both on works and the acceptance or refusal of grace. “When [Christ] comes at the end of time to judge the living and the dead, the glorious Christ will reveal the secret disposition of hearts and will render to each man according to his works, and according to his acceptance or refusal of grace.”¹⁹⁶

The Lutheran description of the final judgement is less detailed than the Roman Catholic description. It does not mention angels, nor does it mention judgement based on works. The *Augsburg Confession* reads, “It is also taught that our Lord Jesus Christ will return on the Last Day to judge, to raise all the dead, to give eternal life and eternal joy to those who believe and are elect, but to condemn the ungodly and the devils to hell and eternal punishment.”¹⁹⁷

The Reformed position on the final judgement is quite a bit more detailed than the Roman Catholic or the Lutheran. The Westminster Larger Catechism addresses this in questions 88-90:

Q. 88. What is going to happen immediately after the resurrection?

A. Immediately after the resurrection, all created beings, angels and humans, will be finally judged ...

Q. 89. What will happen to the wicked on the judgment day?

A. On the judgment day, the wicked will be put on the left of Christ, and with the evidence against them clearly presented and fully recognized by them, they will be justly and terribly condemned, after which they will be expelled from the favorable presence of God and the glorious fellowship with Christ, his people, and his angels, and thrown into hell to be punished forever with unspeakable torments, both of body and soul, along with the devil and his angels.

Q. 90. What will happen to the righteous on the judgment day?

A. On the judgment day, the righteous will be caught up with Christ in the clouds and placed on his right, where they will be publicly acknowledged and acquitted. They will join Christ in the judgment of reprobate angels and men and be received into heaven ... Such is the perfect and complete fellowship the members of the invisible church will enjoy with Christ in glory at the resurrection and judgment day.¹⁹⁸

And so the Reformed position is that the righteous will be first acquitted and will join Christ in the judgement of the wicked, which includes the Devil and his fallen angels. Judgement will then result in the wicked being cast into hell forever. As with the Lutheran position, the Reformed position makes no mention of judging each person according to their works.

The Arminian stated position is a bit of a blend of the previously described positions. It does not mention the judgement of angels, but does associate judgement with works that were done in the body. The *Arminian Confession* states, “This resurrection will happen at the second and glorious coming of Jesus Christ for the judgment of all, that is, when He will call all the dead to life, first both the just and the unjust, and then those who remain alive, at the judgment seat of His Father. There the just reward or appropriate penalty will be assigned according to the quality and quantity of their works which they have done in the body, whether good or bad.”¹⁹⁹ The unique feature of this description is that it implies levels of both punishment and reward. Eternal torment of the wicked will be more or less severe based on works done in the body. Similarly, eternal blessedness will be more or less based on works done in the body.

11.9 End of the World, New Heaven and New Earth

There are not extensive passages in the Bible that specifically address the end of the world and the creation of the New Heaven and New Earth, but those that do are in agreement. The book of Revelation states, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea” (Rv 21:1). This agrees with the second letter of Peter:

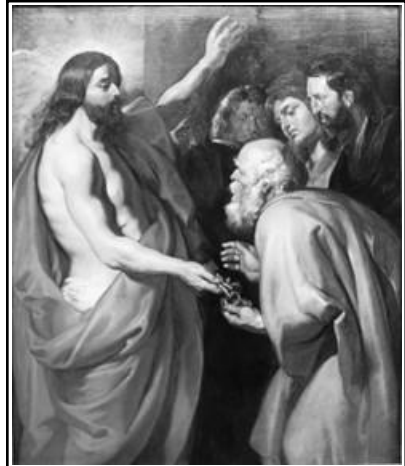
But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be discovered. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. (2 Pt 10-13)

And so the day of the Lord will consist of the following events. First is the second coming of Christ. Second is the resurrection of the dead into glorified bodies and the glorification of the bodies of the living. Third is the Final Judgement. Fourth is the destruction of the old heaven and the old earth. And fifth is the creation of the New Heavens and the New Earth.

There is surprisingly little formalized doctrine about the end of the world and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth. The Roman Catholic catechism addressed it in this manner:

Though already present in his Church, Christ's reign is nevertheless yet to be fulfilled "with power and great glory" by the King's return to earth. This reign is still under attack by the evil powers, even though they have been defeated definitively by Christ's Passover. Until everything is subject to him, until there be realized new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells, the pilgrim Church, in her sacraments and institutions, which belong to this present age, carries the mark of this world which will pass.²⁰⁰

And so, Roman Catholics acknowledge that there will be new heavens and a new earth but do not specifically address the destruction of the old heaven and the old earth. But both are completely absent from the Lutheran *Large Catechism* and the Reformed *Westminster Confession of Faith*. The *Arminian Confession* is the most complete on this topic and reads as follows:



**Christ Giving the Keys of Heaven
to St. Peter, by Rubens**
(Wikimedia Commons)

This manner of awakening and partial alteration will be immediately followed by that blessed glorification which is the completion of all the other acts, in which the Lord Jesus (after He descends from heaven with a shout of encouragement, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God to the aforementioned judgment) receives those who have [been] awakened by the angels through His power to be with Him in the air, and most powerfully transfers them from the universal corruption and total destruction of the whole world (being then entirely in flames) into the eternal and glorious habitations of heaven (which in Scripture are called the new heavens, the new earth and the future world) and will perpetually give them unspeakable glory and joy to enjoy together with Himself, with God, and with His holy angels.²⁰¹

It is unclear what is meant by equating heaven with the new heavens, the new earth and the future world. It seems that the Arminian interpretation is that heaven is unchanged except that it is the new residence for glorified Christians. This interpretation does not address how this is possible since "the heavens will be destroyed by burning" and the "first heaven and the first earth passed away." But all agree that the final abode of glorified Christians will be in Heaven in the presence of Christ. All do not agree, however, if equal eternal blessings will be the same for all. This issue relates to whether there are rewards in Heaven or not.

11.10 Rewards in Heaven

There are many passages in the Bible that speak of heavenly rewards. But most of these passages can reasonably be interpreted as the reward being eternal life in Heaven. But there are some passages that suggest that some may receive higher levels of heavenly rewards than others. Some other passages mention specific rewards that can be bestowed upon entering Heaven. The key passages that may suggest different levels of heavenly rewards include the following:

- “Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive compensation for his deeds done through the body, in accordance with what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:9-10);
- “Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.” (2 Jn 8); and
- “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to reward each one as his work deserves” (Rv. 22:12).

A literal interpretation of these passages reveals that (1) the final judgement by Christ will result in heavenly compensation based on what a believer has done on earth; (2) that undesirable actions by believers on earth may lead to heavenly rewards that are less than full; and (2) Christ will bestow heavenly rewards because a believer’s good works on earth results in rewards being deserved.

Many passages in the NT also speak to specific heavenly rewards. Perhaps the best known are the five crowns: the crown of life (Jas. 1:12; Rv 2:10), the crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4), the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8), the crown of pride (1 Thes 2:19), and the imperishable crown (1 Cor 9:25). There is also mention of a prophet’s reward (Mt 10:41), higher levels of responsibility (Lk 19:11-27), praise from God (1 Cor. 4:5), and reigning with Christ (2 Tim. 2:12; Mt 19:28-30; Lk 22:28-30).

All of the passages mentioning specific heavenly rewards can be interpreted as equal rewards given to all who enter Heaven (although they can be interpreted in other ways as well). Perhaps the one exception is the seeming assignment of different levels of responsibility alluded to in Lk 19:11-27. This passage is the parable of the ten minas, which ends with, “[E]veryone who has, more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them in my presence” (Lk 19:26-27). However, there are widely

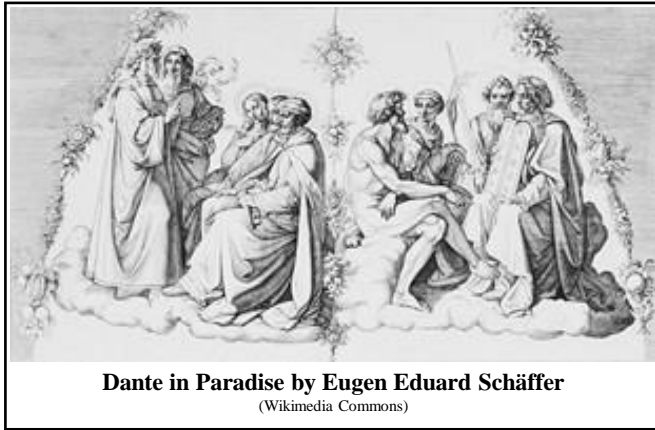
varying interpretations of this passage, and it is not at all clear that it is referring to heavenly rewards. Before the parable begins, it is explained that Jesus is responding to the people's understanding that the Kingdom of God was to immediately appear. Therefore, a common interpretation is that the master who goes away refers to Christ before the second coming. Simon Gathercole writes, "The parable of the minas is usually thought to reflect on and address the delay of the parousia."²⁰² But other interpretations point out that the master encourages money lending, and therefore refers to corrupt Roman practices rather than Christ. Gertrud Tönsing writes, "[S]ome interpreters point out that the master would not have been seen as a favorable character by Jewish listeners, as he encourages money lending—which is regarded as a corrupt practice according to Jewish Law."²⁰³



And so, there is no certainty as to there being degrees of reward in the Kingdom of Heaven, although it is clear that the good works of a believer matter do God. Martin Luther originally rejected the idea of heavenly rewards as this would imply that sinners can merit something from God. He later softened on this view and understood heavenly rewards to be unmerited but bestowed as an act of grace. Johann Heinz writes, "Throughout his career ... Luther held the biblical thought of reward. In the consecutive way of salvation, he defined reward as a consequence, granted as a gift and not as a personally achieved goal ... Reward is purely a reward of grace."²⁰⁴

There is a philosophical ethics issue that must also be considered with respect to heavenly rewards. If a person performs a good work due to the possibility of heavenly rewards, it become at least partially a selfish act. And a selfish act presumably will not result in heavenly rewards. Therefore Christians that believe in heavenly rewards must strive to disregard them completely making them theologically insignificant at best and morally complicating at worst.

One must be guided by Scripture in this area, but careful exegeses of key passages led Craig Blomberg to the following conclusion:



“I do not believe there is a single NT text that, when correctly interpreted, supports the notion that believers will be distinguished one from another for all eternity on the basis of their works as Christians. What is more, I am convinced that when this unfounded doctrine of degrees of reward in heaven is acted upon consistently—though, fortunately, it often is not—it can have highly damaging consequences for the motivation and psychology of living the Christian life.

There is a middle position with regards to degree of reward in Heaven that warrants consideration. As a Christian performs good works for the right reasons, they become increasing closer to God. This is part of the process of sanctification, which can be thought of as one’s epistemic distance from God becoming less distant. All believers might enjoy the same objective blessings in Heaven, but those who are more epistemologically close to God might experience these blessings in a different way. “In other words, heaven is really the same for everyone, but not everyone experiences it equally well.”²⁰⁵

I end this section with the teachings of various theological systems in this area. Roman Catholicism believes that the final judgement will render to all according to their works. “When he comes at the end of time to judge the living and the dead, the glorious Christ will reveal the secret disposition of hearts and will render to each man according to his works, and according to his acceptance or refusal of grace.”²⁰⁶ Lutheranism believes in rewards as act of grace as described above. Reformed theology is similar. “[A]ll persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.”²⁰⁷ Only Arminianism/Methodism is silent on this topic. The closest

that the *Book of Discipline* comes to address this topic is the following, “Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body, with all things appertaining to the perfection of man’s nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the last day.”²⁰⁸

11.11 Further Reading

Those interested in a more detailed treatment of the doctrine of last things are encouraged to read Part 6 of Louis Berkhof’s book *Systematic Theology* with the understanding that Berkhof is primarily presenting and defending Reformed theology. Also recommended is Part 4 of Volume 3 of Charles Hodge’s *Systematic Theology* (Ch. 1-4). Hodge also takes the Reformed position but presents major competing views (although with the intent of demonstrating why they are not to be preferred). Also, Part 7 of Gregg Allison’s *Historical Theology* (Ch. 31-33) presents a history of the doctrine of last things (called the doctrine of the future in this book), including the development of all of the major theological positions. Easier reading can be found in Part 7 of Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* (2nd ed., Ch. 54-57). He primarily follows Berkhof, but also adds much content from an evangelical perspective.

11.12 Study Questions

1. What does Genesis explicitly list as the consequences of Adam and Eve’s disobedience to God? How does this compare to the typical broader understanding of the impact of Adam and Eve’s sinful acts?
2. What is the difference between the Roman Catholic view and the typical Protestant view of what happens to a person’s soul immediately after death?
3. What concomitant events will accompany the second coming of Christ? Can the second coming of Christ occur at any time, or do certain things have to happen first?
4. Explain the differences between the beliefs of pre-Millennialism, post-Millennialism, and Amillennialism. Which view has been the dominant position of most theological systems?
5. What is meant by the Rapture and what is its biblical basis? What has been the traditional understanding of what Paul was trying to communicate in 1 Thes 4:16-17?

6. How does dispensational theology view Israel and the Church? How does this differ from more traditional theological systems?
7. What will happen to the dead when they are resurrected? Will this differ for people who were cremated versus buried? In this context, explain the relationship of a person's resurrected body to their original body.
8. If the souls of believers go to Paradise after death, what is the purpose of believers being judged at the Final Judgement. Similarly, if the souls of unbelievers go to Hell after death, what is the purpose of unbelievers being judged at the Final Judgement?
9. How do you think that the New Heavens and the New Earth will compare to the current Heaven and the current Earth? Where will believers in their glorified bodied reside?
10. What are some of the specific rewards in Heaven that are mentioned in the Bible? Do you think that these specific rewards are to be interpreted literally? Explain.

12. Christian Ethics

Why should people act ethically? For most, the answer is spiritual faith. They believe in a faith system that includes a moral code. They know by faith that everyone should generally try to be nice, unselfish, and helpful rather than mean, greedy, and unhelpful. They believe that they should try their best to be a good person. They feel bad when they fall short.

A theological treatment of ethics is essentially using the Bible as a standard for how one should act. But before studying theological ethics, it is beneficial to first examine the secular philosophy of ethics. A basic understanding of the philosophy of ethics can serve as a solid foundation for correct thinking on the subject. Any faith system can then be compared against this philosophical framework. This chapter therefore first presents the basics of philosophical ethics. It continues by presenting theological answers to philosophical questions. Biblical ethics are then examined from both an OT and a NT perspective. The chapter concludes with a section on ethical decision making, an example of how to perform a theological assessment of an ethical topic, and then presents some denominational ethical positions on a range of controversial ethical topics.

12.1 Philosophical Ethics

Are some moral choices better than others? For example, if you find a wallet full of money, is it more moral to try to find the owner rather than keep the money and buy yourself a luxury item? A similar question can be asked of political systems. During World War II, was the political system of Great Britain more moral than the political system of Nazi Germany? Is it possible for moral codes to improve over time? Slavery used to be an acceptable practice from the earliest days of civilization. Does today's condemnation of slavery represent a moral improvement?

When examining these questions, it is important to distinguish between moral behavior and social animal behavior. Social animals like humans benefit in numerous ways by living in groups. Acting in unselfish ways often strengthens the group, which results in individual benefits.

Social norms and social instincts have developed so that most individuals will try to avoid most antisocial behavior most of the time. Actions motivated by social norms and social instincts are good for society but, strictly speaking, are not moral because they seek selfish benefits. Examples of selfish motivations for following social norms are avoiding punishment, seeking societal approval, feeling good about yourself, avoiding guilty feelings, and so forth. If you do something in the pursuit of personal happiness or in the avoidance of personal unhappiness, you are acting for self-benefit regardless of whether your actions are good for society.

True moral choices in a secular sense are made because they are the right thing to do, without consideration of whether they will increase personal happiness (although they may) or reduce personal unhappiness (although they may do this as well). This brings us back the philosophical question about whether there are standards by which moral actions can be judged.

If the universe is deterministic, libertarian free will is impossible and moral standards are matter of opinion. Different moral systems can be logically consistent within themselves but completely at odds with each other. Different moral systems are free to use different criteria for assessing moral behavior, which is equivalent to defining a moral standard. If each moral system is free to define what moral behavior is, no absolute moral standard is possible. The best one can do is assess a moral choice against a particular moral system. According to Immanuel Kant, compassion for weak people by strong people is moral. According to Friedrich Nietzsche, compassion for weak people by strong people is immoral. According to Aristotle, moral behavior involves the pursuit of individual happiness. According to John Stuart Mill, moral behavior involves the pursuit of the aggregate happiness of everyone. In a deterministic world you can simply take your pick from a variety of moral systems.

Most of us have strong feelings about moral behavior. People shouldn't act selfishly. People shouldn't harm others for their own pleasure. People should try to help others, even if it is inconvenient. We approve of attempts at good moral choices even if they are not successful. We disapprove of attempts at bad moral choices even if they fail. Moral judgement is therefore about intent rather than outcomes. Your moral judgement is very



Adolf Hitler

(Wikimedia Commons)

different if someone hurts you intentionally rather than hurts you by accident. Your injury is the same, but your moral judgement is not. An action results from a moral choice, but the results of the action may or may not be what was intended.

If you believe that some choices are moral and that some choices are immoral, you must also believe that there is a true moral standard by which moral choices can be compared. This moral standard cannot be inherent in a deterministic universe because moral choices cannot be made in a deterministic universe (all choices are predetermined by definition). Any absolute moral standard must be based on something extramundane. This fact is summarized with the following assumption and the resulting conclusion that must hold if the assumption is true.

Assumption: Some moral choices are better than others.

Conclusion: There is a standard for moral behavior that is based on something extramundane.

If the world is deterministic, moral choices are impossible and moral standards are meaningless. You can believe in a deterministic world where moral standards are a matter of opinion, or you can believe in true moral standards that come from something outside of the physical universe.

A third logical position on moral standards is possible. This involves a non-deterministic world with no absolute moral standards. For example, the Zoroastrian religion believes that there are two equal and opposing supernatural powers corresponding to good and evil (i.e., dualistic cosmology). Each has its own moral code and people are given free choice to pick one of the other. As with determinism, moral standards become a matter of personal opinion.

The Law of Human Nature

We all have strong feelings that people should try to act in certain “good” ways and avoid acting in “bad” ways. We tend to approve when others act in good ways and disapprove when they act in bad ways. We also tend to feel good about ourselves when we do something good and feel guilty when we do something bad.

Most people feel that right and wrong behavior are not just a matter of opinion. If a person selfishly cuts in line, most people think, “That action was wrong, and that person shouldn’t have done it.” They do not tend to think, “That action was inconvenient for me.” These feelings about right and wrong behavior have traditionally been called the Law of Human

Nature; people know the general rules of right and wrong behavior by nature and do not need them to be taught. C.S. Lewis addresses the Law of Human nature as follows:

I know that some people say the idea of a Law of Nature or decent behavior known to all men is unsound, because different civilizations and different ages have had quite different moralities. But this is not true. There have been differences in their moralities, but these have never amounted to anything like a total difference ... Men have differed as regards what people you ought to be unselfish to – whether it was only your own family, or your fellow countrymen, or everyone. But they have always agreed that you ought not put yourself first. Selfishness has never been admired. It seems, then, that we are forced to believe in a real Right and Wrong. People may be sometimes mistaken about them, just as people sometimes get their sums wrong; but they are not a matter of mere taste and opinion any more than the multiplication table.²⁰⁹

One can either agree or disagree with Lewis, but his arguments are worth understanding. If there are absolute moral standards, are people generally aware of them? The Law of Human Nature says that they are. People can grow in their understanding and application of moral conduct, but everyone knows the basics. If everyone knows the basics, we can expect everyone to understand when they are making good moral choices and when they are making bad moral choices. This point is summarized with the following assumption and corresponding conclusion that must hold if the assumption is true.

Assumption: Most people inherently have the same basic ideas about moral and immoral choices.

Conclusion: Most people understand when they are making good moral choices and when they are making bad moral choices.

If the Law of Human Nature is true, people can fairly be held accountable for their moral choices (barring certain situations such as mental illness). They know when they make a bad moral choice, everyone is in general agreement that it was a bad moral choice, and it is just to hold them accountable for their bad moral choice.

Does Moral Behavior Matter?

Assume for now that that meaningful moral responsibility exists. If so, does moral responsibility mean that moral choices matter? Do our bad moral choices have any consequences beyond the avoidance of shame,

guilt, and punishment? Do our good moral choices have any consequences beyond good feelings, increased respect by others, and the general betterment of society? These earthly good and bad consequences are real and certainly have an influence on our behavior. But this “social contract” aspect of moral behavior is not the same as altruistic morality. Altruistic morality requires moral choices to be made without consideration of whether they are personally or socially beneficial. A true moral choice is made because it is the right thing to do.

Beyond possible earthly benefits, does it matter whether we obey the Law of Human Nature or not? If the universe is deterministic, moral choices cannot be made and moral behavior cannot matter beyond the good or bad that results to the individual and society. The only way that moral behavior can matter beyond this must be a result of something extramundane. If you believe that altruistic moral behavior matters, you must also believe that there is something extramundane that responds to your moral choices in a way that somehow matters to you.

Assumption: Your moral choices have an impact on you beyond their physical-universe consequences.

Conclusion: Something extramundane is responding to your moral choices in a way that matters to you.

At this point we have examined moral standards, moral awareness, and whether moral behavior matters. The last philosophical issue that needs to be addressed before discussing theological ethics is moral failings. We know that we should act in a certain way, but often fail to do so.

Moral Failings

People are not perfect. You are not perfect and probably do not expect perfection in others. This does not excuse the fact that everyone makes poor moral choices, probably daily for most of us. We know we should do something but are too tired. We know we should refrain from doing something, but it is too tempting. We know we shouldn't think bad thoughts but do so anyway. We know we shouldn't take our bad mood out on others, but we had a really tough day. When we make poor moral choices, we tend to minimize, rationalize, and make excuses. Lewis describes the situation as follows:

[L]ikely, this very day, we have failed to practice ourselves the kind of behavior we expect from other people ... That is to say, I do not succeed in keeping the Law of

Nature very well, and the moment anyone tells me I am not keeping it, there starts up in my mind a string of excuses as long as your arm. The question at the moment is not whether they are good excuses. The point is that they are one more proof of how deeply, whether we like it or not, we believe in the Law of Nature. If we do not believe in decent behavior, why should we be so anxious to make excuses for not having behaved decently? The truth is, we believe in decency so much – we feel the Rule of Law pressing on us so – that we cannot bear to face the fact that we are breaking it.

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Why do we so often fail to make good moral choices? In answering this question, it is helpful to examine the tension between our animal nature and our moral nature: the law of the jungle versus the law of human nature, survival of the fittest versus compassion for the weakest.

Higher animals have developed strong instincts related to personal survival and reproduction. Instincts that increase survival chances for primitive humans include seeking pleasure, avoiding pain, “fight or flight” when faced with danger, eating as much as you can when food is available, and so forth. Instincts that increase reproductive success for primitive humans include promiscuity for males and seeking the best mate possible for females. These instincts, still with us all today, are often in tension with moral choices. Here is one example for each of the traditional “seven deadly sins.”

Lust. I know that sexually pursuing someone other than my spouse is wrong, but my animal instinct makes me want to do this anyway.

Gluttony. I know that extreme over-eating is bad for many reasons, but my animal instinct makes me want to eat much more than I need.

Greed. I know that stealing someone else’s property is wrong, but my animal instinct tells me that my material gains are more important than their material losses.



Gluttony, by de l'Ange
(Wikimedia Commons)

Sloth. I know that excessive laziness is bad, but my animal instinct tells me to stay sedentary and not waste precious energy.

Wrath. I know that getting angry and physically confronting someone is wrong, but my animal instinct sometimes puts me into an aggressive fight mode.

Envy. I know that my sense of self-worth should not be based on what others have, but my animal instinct interprets my neighbor's positive traits and possessions as Darwinian success, making me want to have them.

Pride. I know that pride is the father of all sins, but my animal instinct tells me that I deserve everything good that happens to me. Furthermore, anything bad that happens to me is unfair.

Different people have different moral struggles to different degrees, but we all succumb to our animal instincts regularly and often. Why must our animal instincts so often conflict with the Law of Human Nature? The answer is a mystery but consider the following. If moral choices matter, then the difficulty of the moral choice also probably matters. It is not very impressive if someone makes an easy moral choice. The moral choice becomes increasingly impressive as its difficulty increases. Being faced with regular and difficult moral choices allows us to mature as moral creatures.

Summary of Philosophical Ethics

1. Moral *choices* can only be made if we have free will. If we have free will, our choices are not completely determined by the physical universe.
2. Moral *standards* can only exist if some moral choices are better than others. If some moral choices are better than others there must be an extramundane standard for moral behavior.
3. Moral *responsibility* can only exist if people making moral choices are aware of and generally agree upon right and wrong behavior.
4. Moral choices only *matter* if something extramundane is aware of them and is responding to them.
5. Everyone has moral *failings*. People often make poor moral choices even though they know they are making poor moral choices.

12.2 Theological Ethics

This section examines how Christian theology answers philosophical questions about ethics. It first discusses the Christian perspective of free will and moral accountability. It then addresses moral standards, the law of human nature, and the Christian understanding of moral failures.

Free Will

Most Christians (like most people) believe in free will. Free will is fundamental to any religion interested in morality since the inability to freely make moral choices renders moral choices irrelevant. Many stories in the Bible are about moral choices. This starts with the story of Adam and Eve and their choice to eat the forbidden fruit. It continues with Moses and his choice to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Much of the rest of the OT is about the Israelites choosing whether to obey or disobey God's commandments. In the Gospels, John the Baptist asks people to repent their sins. Jesus asks people to love God and to love one another. Paul's letters ask people to reject false teachings. Some quotes from the Bible that specifically call for people to choose include (emphasis added):

- I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have placed before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So *choose* life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding close to Him (Dt 30:19);
- But if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, *choose* for yourselves today whom you will serve (Jo 24:15);
- Who is the person who fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way he should *choose* (Ps 25:12); and
- Do not envy a violent person, and do not *choose* any of his ways (Prv 3:31).

The Bible (like most major religions) clearly teaches that people can make true moral choices. There are other theological implications related to free will such as its compatibility with the absolute sovereignty and omniscience of God, but these are outside of the topic of ethics. For these issues, the reader is referred to Section 6.6 on p. 99.

Moral Standards

A universal moral standard can only exist if some moral choices are better than others as determined by an extramundane standard. Christians, of course, believe that the extramundane standard of universal morality is determined by God. In the OT, God communicates His moral standard to prophets, who then communicate them to the rest of the Israelites.²¹¹ The book of Exodus describes one of God's instructions to Moses as follows:

And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "This is what you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel." (Ex 19:3-6)

With regards to moral standards, it is not important to believe that this event occurred exactly like it is written. The point is that, according to the OT, the ancient Hebrews received their moral standards from prophets who received them from God. All of the OT books of the major prophets have similar stories.

- Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" And He said, "Go, and tell this people" (Is 6:8-9);
- Then the Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth" (Jer 1:9); and
- Then [God] said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you." And as He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me. Then He said to me, "Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have revolted against Me to this very day. So I am sending you to those who are impudent and obstinate children, and you shall say to them, 'This is what the Lord God says'" (Ez 2:1-4).

The NT is a bit different since moral standards are based directly on the words of Jesus. In many places, Jesus instructs people to follow very strict moral rules such as going beyond what the Ten Commandments (Decalogue) require. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:27-28). Jesus sometimes also negates OT instructions to make moral points, such as when he says, "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I say to you, do not show opposition against an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other toward him also" (Mt 5:38-39).²¹²

A good summary of how moral standards are communicated in the OT versus the NT is in the beginning of Hebrews, "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but

in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb 1:1 NIV). In both the OT and in the NT, the source of Christian moral standards is God: God the Father through the prophets in the OT and God the Son directly to the people in the NT.

The Law of Human Nature

Christians believe that normal people are aware of the Law of Human Nature without it having to be learned. In the OT, standards of moral conduct were revealed to prophets and then organized into the Law. This began with God giving the Decalogue to Moses on Mount Sinai. In Jesus’s time, pious Jews learned the Law and observed it in obedience to God. Paul, a learned Jewish man himself, spent most of his ministry preaching to Gentiles (i.e., non-Jews). Many Jews at the time wondered how Gentiles could be obedient to God without having to learn and practice the Law. Paul addresses this issue in his Letter to the Romans:

[F]or it is not the hearers of the Law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the Law who will be justified. For when Gentiles who do not have the Law instinctively perform the requirements of the Law, these, though not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts. (Rom 2:13-15)

In Paul’s words, moral standards of conduct are “written” on people’s hearts. They do not need to learn a detailed legalistic moral code because they “instinctively perform the requirements.” Paul addresses this issue again when discussing ungodliness and unrighteousness, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them” (Rom 1:18-19). According to Paul, the Law of Human nature is not only evident within people, but this knowledge was put there by God.

Christians believe that everyone has an innate sense of right and wrong, and that the basic principles of right and wrong are the same for everyone. People can mature in their understanding and application of these basic principles, but



The Apostle Paul
(Wikimedia Commons)

people know when they make poor moral choices, and it is fair to hold them accountable for these poor moral choices.

Does Moral Behavior Matter?

Christians believe that moral behavior matters. Why moral behavior matters to Christians is somewhat complicated. The understanding of the ancient Hebrews as to why moral behavior matters is described in the OT. This understanding becomes somewhat distorted, which Jesus points out and corrects in the NT.

In the OT, good moral choices are often rewarded by God and poor moral choices are often punished by God. In fact, the majority of the OT is about the Israelites (as a whole) being punished and rewarded by God in the following general sequence of event:

1. The Israelites begin to disobey God's commandments, often by worshiping pagan gods and idols.
2. God punishes the Israelites by allowing them to be conquered by foreign invaders.
3. In their captivity, the Israelites regain their obedience to God.
4. God rewards the Israelites by allowing them to defeat the foreign invaders.
5. The cycle repeats many times.

In the OT, God emphatically does not like it when the Israelites worship pagan gods and idols. The prophet Ezekiel tells the Israelites his message from God, "I will also lay the dead bodies of the sons of Israel in front of their idols; and I will scatter your bones around your altars. Everywhere you live, cities will be in ruins and the high places will be deserted, so that your altars will be in ruins and deserted, your idols will be broken and brought to an end, your incense altars will be cut down, and your works wiped out. The slain will fall among you, and you will know that I am the Lord" (Ez 6:5-7).

The books of 1 Kings and 2 Kings tell the story of about 500 years of various kings ruling over Judah (the Southern Israelite Nation) and Israel (the Northern Israelite Nation). Most of these kings did not follow God's commandments and many were punished for it. Interestingly, some were spared punishment but were told that their descendants would be punished instead. An example is King Ahab, a very bad king. God instructs the prophet Elijah to confront Ahab:

“[B]ecause you have given yourself over to do evil in the sight of the Lord. Behold, I am bringing disaster upon you, and I will utterly sweep you away ... because of the provocation with which you have provoked Me to anger, and because you have misled Israel into sin.” ... Yet it came about, when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, “Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; I will bring the disaster upon his house in his son’s days.” (1 Kgs 21:20-29)

The theme of God punishing bad behavior and rewarding good behavior is a prominent theme in the OT. It emphasizes repeatedly that moral behavior matters in a very direct and personal way. However, making moral choices to gain rewards and avoid punishment is an immature morality that appeals to selfish instincts. Perhaps the Israelites at that time were not yet ready for an altruistic morality. There are, however, hints of a more mature morality to come. Consider the following OT verses:



- Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Stop doing evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, obtain justice for the orphan, plead for the widow’s case (Is 1:16-17); and
- “Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping, and mourning; and tear your heart and not merely your garments.” Now return to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in mercy and relenting of catastrophe (Jl 2:12-13).

The OT makes it clear that moral behavior matters for earthly reasons, but also hints at an altruistic future where people will “stop doing evil” and “learn to do good” because it is God’s desire for us.

Moral behavior matters in the NT as well, but with a somewhat different focus. The NT is more interested in heavenly issues than earthly issues. In the following excerpt from Mark, Jesus explains the consequences of immoral behavior. In the excerpt from Matthew, Jesus makes it clear that failure to do good will have a similar effect. In Luke, Jesus explains that

there are rewards for good moral choices, not just punishment for bad moral choices.

- [I]f your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire. And if your foot is causing you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life without a foot, than, having your two feet, to be thrown into hell. And if your eye is causing you to sin, throw it away; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not extinguished (Mk 9:43-48);
- Depart from Me, you accursed people, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me. Then they themselves also will answer, "Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or as a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?" Then He will answer them, "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for Me, either." These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Mt 25:41-46); and
- But love your enemies and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High (Lk 6:35).

Jesus taught that moral behavior matters. This teaching continues with the ministry of Paul, who echoes the teachings of Jesus on this matter in his letters to the Romans and Colossians.

- Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and restraint and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will repay each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality, He will give eternal life; but to those who are self-serving and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, He will give wrath and indignation (Rom 2:4-8).
- Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord and not for people, knowing that it is from the Lord that you will receive the

reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For the one who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and without partiality (Col 3:23-25).

In summary, moral behavior matters in Christianity. God will “repay each person according to his deeds.” In the OT, God tended to reward good moral behavior and punish bad moral behavior in earthly ways. In the NT, Jesus teaches us to act morally and to expect nothing in return, which is required for an act to be truly moral. However, if we do act morally for unselfish reasons, Jesus says that our “reward will be great.”

Moral Failings

A key aspect of Christian theology is about moral failings and the implications of our moral failings. This includes both specific moral failings (I did this bad thing) and our general moral health (I do bad things). The theme of moral failing starts at the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis, where Adam and Eve are instructed by God to not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They disobey this direct command from God, and people have been making poor moral choices ever since.

Recall the discussion on the Law of Human Nature, where our animal instincts are often in tension with moral choices. Paul recognizes this tension in his letters, referring to our “desires of the flesh” and “fruit of the spirit.” In his letter to the Galatians, Paul summarizes these competing forces as follows:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the desire of the flesh is against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, in order to keep you from doing whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, indecent behavior, idolatry, witchcraft, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Gal 5:16-23)

Paul characterizes deeds of the flesh (i.e., immoral acts) as “evident.” Paul would agree that there is a Law of Human Nature that we do not need to be taught. Paul would also agree that keeping the Law of Human Nature is not easy, and results in frequent moral failings for everyone. In his letter to the Romans, he discusses this issue as it relates to the difference

between Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). Many of the Jews viewed themselves as morally better than the Gentiles since they followed the Law. Paul is quick to point out in his letter to the Romans that everyone has moral failings:

- Therefore you have no excuse, you foolish person, everyone of you who passes judgment; for in that matter in which you judge someone else, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things (Rom 2:1);
- What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin (Rom 3:9); and
- [A]ll have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23).



The Confession, by Cariplo
(Wikimedia Commons)

Christians refer to moral failings as sin (a sin is a transgression against God, such as disobeying his moral code). A core belief of every Christian is that we are all sinners. Our moral selves are broken and are in dire need of repair. We shouldn't judge others for sinning because we do the very same things. Sin has power over everyone. God has written a standard of moral conduct on our hearts, and we choose to sin anyway. We all therefore fall short of the glory of God.

To understand Christian ethics, one must recognize that (1) everyone understands the basic differences between right and wrong, (2) we have the ability to make free moral choices, (3) we often sin by failing to make good moral choices, and (4) these sins are willful acts of disobedience against God.

Summary

Christians believe that people have free will and can therefore make true moral choices. Christians believe that certain moral choices are better than others, as determined by an absolute moral standard set by God. Christians believe that everyone is generally aware of this absolute moral standard and can therefore be held accountable for moral choices. Last, Christians believe that God is aware of and cares about our moral choices. Moral

choices should be made in obedience to God, but with the understanding that God will ultimately “repay according to each one’s deeds.”

12.3 Ethics in the Old Testament

The natural starting point for learning about Christian ethics is the Decalogue. The book of Exodus tells of God revealing the Decalogue to Moses on top of Mount Sinai. The book of Deuteronomy tells of Moses summoning the people of Israel and telling them of these Decalogue. The Decalogue as revealed to Moses reads as follows:

Then God spoke all these words, saying, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other god before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them nor serve them; ... You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. For six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God; on it you shall not do any work, ... Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be prolonged on the land which the Lord your God gives you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male slave, or his female slave, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” (Ex 20:2-17)

About half of the Decalogue specifically relates to God: don’t worship false Gods, respect the name of God, set aside specific times to worship and honor God. The next part is about behaving in a certain way: honor your parents. The third part is about not behaving in certain ways: do not murder, do not have sexual relations with another’s spouse, do not steal, do not commit perjury (bear false witness). The last part of tells us not to “covet,” which is about how we think rather than how we act. These four components of Ten Commandments ethics can be summarized as follows:

Ethical Components of the Decalogue

1. Recognize God as the one true God;
2. Certain behaviors are ethical; you should practice them (e.g., honor your parents);
3. Certain things are not ethical; you should not practice them (e.g., murder); and
4. Certain types of thinking are not ethical; you should try not to think in those ways (e.g., coveting other people’s possessions).

The first three of these components are standard fare in ethics. A system of ethics requires an extramundane source of moral standards. The Decalogue recognizes God as this source. Moral behavior also requires making good moral choices and avoiding poor moral choices. The Decalogue gives specifics in both areas. Morality also involves making moral choices for the right reasons: doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do. According to the Decalogue, you should do the right thing because God commanded you to do it; He alone decides what is moral and what is not moral.

The fourth ethical component listed above goes beyond what a minimal system of ethics requires. It instructs us to avoid thinking in certain ways. The Decalogue adds a touch of the “thought police” to its ethical system. Christians believe that your thoughts are part of your ethical self. Choosing to think immoral thoughts is wrong, just as choosing to perform immoral actions is wrong. One of the proverbs summarizes this point, “For as he thinks within himself, so he is” (Prv 23:7).

Recall that four of the seven deadly sins relate to thoughts rather than actions: lust, greed, envy, and pride. Pride has been called the “father of all sins” because it leads to all other sins. St. Augustine puts it this way, “It was Pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes men as angels.”²¹³ From a Christian perspective, pride results in a person playing god rather than humbly submitting to God. When you play god, you set your own earthly moral standards and discard the divine moral standards. Pride leads to self-worship, which violates the first commandment of the Decalogue. The moral dangers of pride are so great and the moral importance of humility so vital that they are emphasized over and over throughout the Bible. Some OT examples are:

- He leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way (Ps 25:9);
- Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling. It is better to



**Moses and the Ten Commandments,
Plymouth Guildhall**
(Wikimedia Commons)

be humble in spirit with the needy than to divide the spoils with the proud (Prv 16:18-19);

- But when [Uzziah] became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was untrue to the Lord his God (2 Chr 26:16); and
- There they cry out, but He does not answer because of the pride of evil people (Job 35:12).

Nothing logically requires a system of ethics to include ways of thinking, but nothing logically precludes this either. From a practical perspective, having moral thoughts aids in making good moral choices and in resisting bad moral choices. Compare a man who fantasizes regularly about his neighbor's attractive wife and a man who consciously tries to avoid these types of thoughts. Who is more likely to resist temptation if presented with the opportunity? Fantasizing about something sinful amounts to celebrating the sin in your mind rather than condemning it. We all have immoral thoughts just as we all make immoral choices. Christian ethics requires us to try to avoid immoral choices as well as to avoid immoral thoughts. That immoral thoughts occur to everyone is not a sin. But dwelling and indulging in these thoughts, for the Christian, is sinful just as carrying out the act would be sinful.

Although the OT address moral thinking, most of the OT centers around the detailed rules of the Law. Much of the Law relates to moral rules, but much of it relates to things like ritual purification, settling disputes, and so forth. Thankfully, the OT provides a summary of its moral code in two short verses. Deuteronomy commands us to love God with all your heart. Leviticus commands us to love your neighbor as yourself. The specific verses are (emphasis added):

- And you shall *love the Lord your God* with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength (Dt 6:5); and
- You shall not take vengeance, nor hold any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall *love your neighbor* as yourself; I am the Lord (Lv 19:18).

A logical moral system does not need to have a requirement to love everyone, only that people make good moral choices. However, if everyone treated everyone else with genuine love, detailed ethical rules would be unnecessary. The Bible simply states that you should love your neighbor because it is God's wish. From a practical perspective, the requirement to love everyone seems like a good way to both improve people's moral choices and improve their moral thinking at the same time.

The Christian emphasis is on our moral selves rather than our moral actions. Christian morality requires one to try and “be good” in addition to “doing good.” Good moral choices should result from a good moral nature, not the other way around.

The golden rule states that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us. The Bible agrees in the sense that our actions towards others should be guided by sincere love in the same way that we should want other’s actions towards ourselves guided by sincere love. If we love others, we will act towards them in ways that we feel are best for them. If they love us, they will act towards us in ways that they feel are best for us.

Despite the Biblical commands to love God and to love others, the moral emphasis in the OT is on rules. This first appears in the Decalogue and is then greatly expanded into the Law. The OT recognizes the importance of avoiding immoral thoughts such as coveting and pride. It also summarizes the spirit of its ethical system as loving God and loving others. However, the focus of the Israelites was on following the Law. The Biblical moral emphasis takes a dramatic turn from legalism to altruism in the NT.

12.4 Ethics in the New Testament

Much of the NT addresses the excessive focus of the Israelites on following the details of the Law, referred to as legalism. This often involves Jesus addressing a legalistic Jewish sect called the Pharisees. Jesus criticizes them for focusing on outward actions and appearances rather than on the important parts of the Law that relate to loving God and loving others. Mathew describes one of these encounters as follows:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the Law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may also become clean. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. So you too, outwardly appear righteous to people, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (Mt 23:23-28)

Jesus makes it clear that ethics should be based on your internal moral self, not what is outwardly presented. Jesus states, “Take care not to practice your righteousness in the sight of people, to be noticed by them;

otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven” (Mt 6:1). According to Jesus, it is what is inside your heart that counts. Immoral behavior and bad moral choices are the consequences of a broken moral self. Immoral behavior is fixed by addressing the immoral heart. Jesus explains it this way:

That which comes out of the person, that is what defiles the person. For from within, out of the hearts of people, come the evil thoughts, acts of sexual immorality, thefts, murders, acts of adultery, deeds of greed, wickedness, deceit, indecent behavior, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile the person. (Mk 7:20-23)

In Christianity, moral thinking is more than just a pragmatic aid to help in making good moral choices. Your thoughts are an indication of *who you are* as opposed to *what you do*. Christianity wants you to *be* a good person, not just *act* like a good person. This includes focusing on good thoughts just as much as avoiding bad behavior. In Philippians, Paul addresses the positive side of good thoughts as follows:

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, think about these things. As for the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Phil 4:8-9)

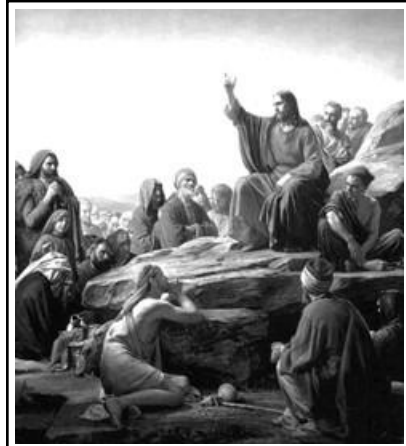
Within the general theme of the internal moral self, the NT re-emphasizes the OT message about the danger of pride and the need for humility before God. A few of these verses are:

- So whoever will humble himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Mt 18:4);
- For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted (Lk 14:11); and
- God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble (Jas 4:6).

Recall that the OT summarizes its rules for morality by loving God and loving others, which emphasizes altruism and internal morality instead of legalism and external morality. In the Gospels, Jesus confirms that these two commandments are the foundation of Christian morality:

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And [Jesus] said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Upon these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets. (Mt 22:35-40)

This teaching of Jesus appears in the Gospels of Mark and Luke as well (Mk 12:29-31; Lk 10:26-27). Paul states the same thing: “For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal 5:14). James agrees: “If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well” (Jas 2:8). Christian morality is primarily about loving God and loving others. On this point there is no room for debate.



Sermon on the Mount, by Bloch

(Wikimedia Commons)

Loving God and loving others are Christian requirements that differs from many other religions. Consider the philosophy of karma as it relates to rebirth, which is associated with Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Loving God and loving others are not relevant to karma. Good acts increase your karma and bad acts reduce it. When you die, these religions believe that you are reincarnated into something better or worse based on your karma. According to these religions, good moral choices result in a better future life. In contrast, Christianity teaches us to make good moral choices because we love God, not because of future personal gain. Paul makes this clear: “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility consider one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil 2:3-4).

Christian morality requires us to love our neighbor. This is sometimes easy and sometimes hard. Loving those who love us is usually easy. Loving those who have wronged us is very hard for most of us. Nevertheless, Christianity makes it clear that you should love everyone no matter what. In Matthew, Jesus says the following:²¹⁴

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may prove yourselves to be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Even the tax collectors, do they not do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Even the Gentiles, do they not do the same? Therefore you shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Mt 5:43-48)

Loving your neighbor requires you to avoid doing mean things to them. Christian morality also requires that you proactively do good for others when possible. James writes, “So for one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, for him it is sin” (Jas 4:17). It is not sufficient to refrain from doing the wrong thing. Christian morality requires us to do the right thing when we know it is the right thing to do.

Is the requirement to love people, even if they hate you and intentionally do horrible things to you, fair and just? From an earthly perspective it does not seem like these people deserve our love. Why would we reward someone with our love when they are horrible? On this question we can learn something from God. We sin against God and yet the Bible insists that He loves us unconditionally. God expect the same from us towards others. Sometimes God’s love is “tough love,” and sometimes “tough love” is appropriate for us as well. But Christianity is clear on the issue of love versus hate. Hate is an internal cancer that eats away at your moral soul. Love is associated with godliness to such a high degree that the Bible sometimes equates the two. “Beloved, let’s love one another; for love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 Jn 4:7-8).

12.5 Flesh versus Spirit

God exists and wants us to love Him and to love others. He also wants our moral choices to be meaningful, and therefore gives us free choice to either love or not love. Why did He make it so hard for everyone to love everyone else? Why did he make it so hard to consistently make good moral choices? God’s motivation for this is a mystery, but the struggle to make good moral choices is often described in the Bible as the conflict between desires of the flesh and desires of the spirit. Our earthly selves (flesh) are selfish and follow the law of the jungle. Our heavenly selves (spirit) are selfless and follow the law of God. Paul describes contrast between flesh and spirit as follows: “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the desire of the flesh is against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, in order to keep you from doing whatever you want” (Gal 5:16-17).

Peter describes the situation as a war between opposing forces: “Beloved, I urge you as foreigners and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul” (1 Pt 2:11). In Christianity, the earthly world is a battleground between good and evil. Evil desires are constantly

at battle with our efforts to become better people. Each day we are soldiers fighting against earthly temptations. We are not just thoughtful individuals trying to become better people. Paul advises us to prepare for battle by donning the metaphorical battle gear of God:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Eph 6:10-17)

Paul's arsenal for us to fight against the spiritual forces of evil include truth (evil is rooted in lies), righteousness (God is on your side), faith (God is with you in difficult times), salvation (God will help you fight), and the Word of God (rely on Scripture for strength and reassurance).

In the battle of flesh versus spirit, it is of critical importance for us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, our moral choices obey our animal instincts, which often violates God's moral standards. The more we are filled with the Holy Spirit, the more we will *want* to act morally and avoid the desires of the flesh. The more we are filled with the Holy Spirit, the more likely it is that the desires of the Spirit will prevail over the desires of the flesh when battling over a moral choice. Paul explains, "[T]he love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom 5:5).

The NT is filled with stories about people being filled with the Holy Spirit. The best example is Jesus himself. Mark describes what happens to Jesus after being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan river:

[John the Baptist] proclaimed, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to bend down and untie the straps of His sandals. I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon Him; and a voice came from the heavens: "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased." (Mk 1:7-11)

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is not limited to Jesus, although Christians believe happened to Jesus perfectly. The Apostles are described as being filled with the Holy Spirit: "And when they had prayed, the place

where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31). The Apostles then help others to be filled with the Holy Spirit. This starts with the Samaritans: “Then they began laying their hands on [the Samaritan people], and they were receiving the Holy Spirit” (Acts 4:31). This continues with the Gentiles: “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had also been poured out on the Gentiles” (Acts 10:44-45).

According to John the Baptist, Jesus has the power to “baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” Jesus first shows this to be true with his disciples: “So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be to you; just as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (Jn 20:21-22). The power of God to fill us with the Holy Spirit is another core aspect of Christian morality. We have a sinful nature and cannot satisfy the will of God no matter how hard we try. However, Christianity teaches that if you have sincere faith, God will fill you with the Holy Spirit, directly enlisting His love in the battle to make good moral choices. We surrender to our weakness and God makes us strong.

The Holy Spirit of Christianity does not just fill us with love and help us to love others. It helps us battle specific desires of the flesh. On several occasions Paul provides us detailed list of what our minds are battling against:

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a depraved mind, to do those things that are not proper, people having been filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, and evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unfeeling, and unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also approve of those who practice them. (Rom 1:28-32)

Most of the items on Paul’s list are clear impediments to making good moral choices. There are some, however, that many do not typically associate with immorality. Examples include envy (similar to the earlier discussion of “covet”), gossip, arrogance, untrustworthiness, and unfeeling. Paul is saying that the absence of these things are not just traits of a nice person, but moral imperatives. Those who practice the opposite are “worthy of death.” Paul provides a similar list in Galatians:

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, indecent behavior, idolatry, witchcraft, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal 5:19-21)

Do these lists make sense as part of a moral standard? In Christianity, morality is more about who you are than what you do. If a moral system instructs you to be good rather than to act good, then these lists make perfect sense. If a moral system is only concerned about actions, many items on these lists would not be necessary. Peter presents a short but interesting list of his own: “Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler” (1 Pt 4:15). Woe to those troublesome meddlers!

Just as there are specific examples of desires of the flesh, there are specific benefits that come from being filled with the Holy Spirit (often called “fruit of the Spirit”). If we fill ourselves fully with the Holy Spirit, Paul explains what will happen to us: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22-23). Paul lists love as the first fruit of the Spirit, but also assures us that the Holy Spirit is the way to true joy and peace in our lives. If your spiritual battles are with patience, kindness, or self-control, Christianity teaches that the Holy Spirit is the answer. “To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, loving, compassionate, and humble” (1 Pt 3:8).

The simplest way to describe an ethical Christian is a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit, loves God with all their heart, is mostly filled with good thoughts, and tries to live their life through acts of love. Good moral choices naturally result from this love and this state of mind since the Holy Spirit is strong enough in them to win most moral struggles. The result is a joyful and peaceful life that is pleasing to God. These people still face moral battles on a regular basis but rely on the Holy Spirit within them to do the fighting rather than their own willpower.

Does this make sense? From a Darwinian perspective perhaps not. If all there is to biology are “selfish genes” that will do anything to reproduce as much as possible, the law of the jungle seems reasonable. However, there is much established science that excessive material things do not lead to a happy life. Human happiness is closely associated with loving relationships, acts of generosity, and active involvement in religious communities. If one is interested in a happy and fulfilling life, Christian ethics makes perfect rational sense.

Since Christian ethics is so concerned with Love, this section will end with two famous Bible passages about love. The first is from 1 Corinthians

and is a wedding favorite. The second is from Jesus, who raises the moral bar to very high level when it comes to loving others (emphasis added).

- If I speak with the tongues of mankind and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give away all my possessions to charity, and if I surrender my body so that I may glory, but do not have love, it does me no good ... *But now faith, hope, and love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love* (1 Cor 13:1-13); and
- Just as the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you; remain in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and remain in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. *This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.* Greater love has no one than this, that a person will lay down his life for his friends (Jn 15:9-13).

12.6 Ethical Decision Making

Rational ethical decisions are hopefully made according to some type of criteria. Ethical options are considered and the one that is most likely to achieve your ethical objective will be the one that is chosen. In the philosophy of ethics, approaches to ethical decision making are typically categorized as deontological, teleological, and areteological. Definitions of these ethical approaches and typical Christian usage are now provided.

Deontology. Deontology refers to ethical decisions based on rules and principles. In Christianity, deontology is primarily about making ethical decisions based on the two greatest commandments: to love God and to love others. These rules are typically supplemented with additional specific rules that are based on scriptural teachings.

Teleology. In an ethical context, teleology refers to ethical decisions based upon a desired goal. An example of a secular teleology is utilitarianism, which strives to achieve the greatest good for the most people. In Christianity, teleology typically strives to give the most glory to God and/or to have the closest possible relationship with God.

Areteology. Areteology (also called virtue ethics) refers to ethical decisions based on becoming a more virtuous person. In Christianity,

areteology is making ethical decision with the goal of becoming more Christ-like.

Most people use a combination of rules and goals and virtue pursuit when making ethical decisions. But one approach often is often viewed as the most important with the others providing support. A deontological approach will use goals and virtue pursuit to help in following moral rules and principles. A teleological approach will use rules and virtue pursuit to support the achievement of ethical goals. A areteological approach will use rules and goals to support becoming a more virtuous person.

Another approach that is somewhat subjective is to give different levels of importance to rules, goals, and virtues. A person may give the most important weight to virtue building, but if an ethical decision that would only develop virtue a small amount would severely violate certain principles, these principles may influence this particular decision more than virtue building. The same could be true of a person that views rules as typically the most important thing but might sometimes make moral decisions based on virtue building or goal achievement. Similarly, a person that views goal achievement as typically the most important moral consideration might sometimes make decisions based on virtue building or rules.

Deontological Ethics

Deontological ethics are based on rules. The strong form of deontological ethics is based on rules that have their own authority and are not justified based on any other principles. Robin Gill describes the strong form of deontological ethics as follows:

It is a feature of deontological arguments—derived from the Greek for “necessary” or “imperative”—that by nature they are absolutist. One cannot argue beyond them. So, if one maintains that murder is wrong and is asked to give a reason, a deontological response would be: “Because it is against the law of nature,” or “Because it is against God’s will,” or “Because it breaks the Sixth Commandment,” or even “Because it is simply wrong.” Such responses merely refer the other person to some norm or absolute beyond which there can be no further argument.²¹⁵

The weak form of deontological ethics is based on general principles that have their own authority, with corresponding rules that are developed based on these principles. A hybrid form of deontological ethics has principles, rules derived from these principles, and rules that have their own authority independent of these principles.

A positive aspect of rule-based ethics is that it does not require any predictions about how an ethical decision will impact the future. One

simply follows the rules and accepts the outcome, whatever it may be. A negative aspect of rule-based ethics is that rules may sometimes conflict. In this case, it may be necessary to rank the importance of some rules above others in a hierarchy. This will still result in some rules necessarily being broken in certain circumstances.

Although rule-based systems may seem straightforward, it is not always clear about how a rule should be applied in certain circumstances. You may have a rule to never lie, but does this mean that parents cannot let their children experience the magic of Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny? You may have a rule never to murder, but does this apply to war-time bombing where a certain number of civilian collateral deaths is unavoidable?

Of course, Christian deontological ethics are primarily based on rules that appear in the Bible. The obvious examples are the Ten Commandments and the double command to love God and neighbor. But there are many other rules in both the OT and NT where it is unclear how to apply them in modern context or whether they should apply at all. Virtually all Christians agree that the rules surrounding the sacrificial system of the OT no longer apply today, including dietary restrictions. Some examples of OT rules that do not apply today include:

- “If two men, a man and his countryman, have a fight with each other, and the wife of one comes up to save her husband from the hand of the one who is hitting him, and she reaches out with her hand and grasps that man’s genitals, then you shall cut off her hand; you shall not show pity (Dt 25:11-12)”;
- “It is a permanent statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places: you shall not eat any fat or any blood” (Lv 3:17);
- “When a woman has a discharge ... Anyone who touches her bed shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening. Whoever touches any object on which she sits shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening.” (Lv 15:19-22); and
- “You shall not cross-breed two kinds of your cattle; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor wear a garment of two kinds of material mixed together” (Lv 19:19).

If one agrees that some of the OT rules may no longer apply, how is one to decide? Some distinguish between the moral laws of the OT and the ceremonial laws of the OT. It is then argued that moral laws still apply but ceremonial laws do not. Still others add a third category of judicial/civil law, where specific guidance is given for a range of societal situations. It

is also typically argued that these judicial/civil laws also no longer apply today. But it is not always clear which laws are in which categories, and therefore which laws should still be followed under a deontological system. Similar issues arise in the NT. Some examples of NT commands that many argue no longer apply include the following:

- “Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or expensive apparel” (1 Tim 2:9);
- Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for it is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved (1 Cor 11:4-5); and
- “As in all the churches of the saints, the women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak ... it is improper for a woman to speak in church” (1 Cor 14:34-35).

Most Christians interpret these NT commands by Paul as cultural in nature. Since our cultural norms are different now, these verses (it is argued) should not be literally interpreted. But who is to make the determination about which NT commands are to be interpreted culturally and which are to be understood literally? The following section performs an in-depth examination of how this difficulty exists for NT teachings about sexual morality.

A final point about deontological ethics is related to the motivation of Protestants in particular to follow biblical rules. If a person is saved and believes that salvation cannot be lost, following biblical rules for their own sake does not seem to be essential. We can follow biblical rules to be closer to God, but this is teleology. We can follow biblical rules to become a better person, but this is aretology. Is there any deontological motivation to follow biblical rules?

The theological position of antinomianism answers in the negative. Antinomianism is the belief that Christians are freed from the Law including the requirement to follow the Ten Commandments because no earthly actions, including sinful acts or good works, will affect salvation. Antinomianism makes a good point, but perhaps misses the bigger point. Jesus says, “The one who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and the one who loves Me will be loved by My Father” (Jn 14:21). Jesus additionally states, “I came so that they would have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10). Clearly Jesus wants us to keep His commandments, but as an act of deontological love rather than deontological

obedience. Furthermore, God gives us these rules because He wants the best for us.

Teleological Ethics

Teleological ethics makes moral choices based on objectives. With this approach, optimal ethical decisions will require a single objective from which options can be compared. For example, a secular teleological goal might be the most happiness for the most people (called utilitarianism). A Christian teleological goal might be showing the most love for the most people (called agapism). But in a practical sense, it is almost impossible to rank moral choices based on a single objective. Therefore, teleological ethics typically involves the identification of multiple objectives that are all subjectively weighed against each other when performing ethical assessment.

In ethics, the object of an objective is called a good. The purpose of teleological ethics is to pursue goods. This can be difficult to apply in specific ethical situations because there are typically many goods that must be considered and weighed against each other. The moral framework called situation ethics argues that it is impossible to assess a moral situation according to absolute moral standards and therefore only the particulars of the specific situation should be considered.

Because it is nearly impossible to objectively assess a large number of goals in a specific ethical situation, teleological ethics is often applied to longer-term ethical goals for one's life. One can set goals for Christian development, education, career, family, mission work, personal health, and so forth. With these goals in place, a plan can then be developed so that life decisions can generally advance one towards achieving these goals. A realistic plan will also identify whether achieving all of the goals are reasonable, or whether some of the goals should be considered "stretch goals" that would be nice to achieve but may not happen. As long as all of these goals are ethical in a Christian sense, making decisions to achieve these goals will generally result in an ethical Christian life. Of course, goals can always be reexamined, reprioritized, and changed. This perfectly acceptable as long as these changes are believed to be part of God's plan for you after prayerful consideration. It is also important to examine whether a transition from the old plan with the old goals to the new plan with the new goals is realistic and will not be unacceptably disruptive to you or to others.

When setting life goals, Christians must consider the following hierarchy of importance. Of highest import is that your life goals will give glory to God. "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do,

do all things for the glory of God.” (1 Cor 10:31). Next is to consider others before yourself. “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility consider one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil 2:3-4). It is perfectly fine to better yourself, but this should always be done in the context of being better able to give glory to God and being better able to serve others. A good test is to examine whether other Christians will see you as a Christian to be respected, liked, and admired and whether non-Christians will be given a positive impression of Christianity through you.

An example of living a life to give glory to God and to serve others is the Social Gospel Movement, which started in the early 20th century in the United States and Canada. This movement tries to advance in society the vision in the Lord’s Prayer that says, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10). The Social Gospel Movement therefore tries to apply Christian ethics to a range of social problems such as poverty, substance addiction, crime, racial tensions, and educational inequality. Many of the participants in this movement are postmillennialists and therefore believe that the second coming of Christ cannot happen until social evils on earth are eradicated.

Another consideration when setting life goals is how you can best serve as part of the body of Christ. This will typically involve an assessment of your spiritual gifts, developing these gifts, and putting these gifts to good use. It is equally important to recognize where you are not gifted and to not place too much hope and effort into these areas. Paul writes:

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines. Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body. (1 Cor 12:4-12)

Paul uses the analogy of life being a race with the objective of winning. To win, of course one must run in a way that allows you to win. In life, to achieve your objective, you must do the things necessary for these objectives to be achieved. Things that do not work towards your objectives are aimless. Paul writes, “Do you not know that those who run in a race

all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win ... Therefore I run in such a way as not to run aimlessly” (1 Cor 9:24-26). Paul also likens life to a fight. At the end of your life, will you be able to say what Paul says, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tm 4:7). If yes, you can expect at Judgment Day to hear the words from your Lord, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Mt 25:23 *ESV*).

Areteological Ethics

Areteological ethics, as previously discussed is primarily concerned with making moral choices that will improve one’s character in terms of virtues. This is why areteological ethics is sometimes called virtue ethics. For a Christian, areteological ethics will motivate a person to make moral choices that will result in one becoming more Christ-like. Christ, after all is perfect in all of His virtues. In common parlance, Christians are to ask when faced with a moral choice, “What would Jesus do?”²¹⁶

But it is not always clear what Jesus would have done in a particular situation and it is certainly true that Jesus is able to do things beyond human capabilities. Therefore, it is typically better to think of specific virtues that are to be pursued when taking an areteological approach to ethical decision making.

As discussed earlier, Christian ethics is primarily about being a good person rather than acting like a good person. A choice is morally good if it is motivated by love and is not good if it is motivated by something else. Although theoretically correct, relying on love when making moral choices is problematic because of its generality, similar to efforts to become more Christ-like. This becomes clear when examining moral dilemmas. Is it moral to steal food to feed your hungry family? Is it moral to lie to someone to prevent distress? Is it moral to kill one person to save thousands? In each moral dilemma, love can be used to justify either action. The same is true for many moral choices that commonly occur. Should you provide honest feedback when it might hurt someone’s feelings? Should you give preferential treatment to your children over other people’s children? Should you support your spouse when you think that they acted wrongly towards someone else? Examples are endless. And so, many moral choices are not as simple as doing the loving thing. Instead, it is often helpful to think of moral choices as doing the virtuous thing.

A virtue is a dispositional characteristic that supports good moral choices. A vice is a dispositional characteristic that inhibits good moral choices. The classical way to enumerate aspects of virtue are with three

“theological virtues” and four “cardinal virtues.” Theological virtues involve cooperation with the Holy Spirit and include faith, hope, and charity. The cardinal virtues date from antiquity, are secular in nature, and include prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude. C.S. Lewis writes:

[T]here are seven virtues. Four of them are called Cardinal virtues, and the remaining three are called Theological virtues. The Cardinal ones are those which all civilized people recognize: the Theological are those which, as a rule, only Christians know about ... The word cardinal has nothing to do with Cardinals in the Roman Church. It comes from a Latin word meaning the hinge of a door. These were called cardinal virtues because they are, as we should say, pivotal. They are prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude.²¹⁷

The theological virtues are listed by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (1 Cor 13:11-13 KJV).

Before addressing each specific virtue, a general comment is warranted. Performing a virtuous act is not the same thing as being a virtuous person. Christianity is primarily concerned with the type of person that you are rather than the type of behavior that you exhibit. C.S. Lewis continues:

Someone who is not a good tennis player may now and then make a good shot. What you mean by a good player is a man whose eye and muscles and nerves have been so trained by making innumerable good shots that they can now be relied on. They have a certain tone or quality which is there even when he is not playing, just as a mathematician’s mind has a certain habit and outlook which is there even when he is not doing mathematics. In the same way a man who perseveres in doing just actions gets in the end a certain quality of character. Now it is that quality rather than the particular actions which we mean when we talk of a ‘virtue’.²¹⁸

And so, the goal of virtue ethics is to become a person where acting virtuously is natural, habitual, and automatic. Like sanctification, this is progressive and will never be perfected in this life. But intentionally and consistently acting in virtuous ways, though not ends in themselves, will gradually transform us from less virtuous creatures into more virtuous creatures.

Faith

The book of Hebrews famously reads, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). Faith is translated from the Greek word *pistis* (πίστις), which literally means to have been persuaded that something is true, to have confidence that something is true, and to trust that something is true. When reading the NT, it is therefore often helpful to think of faith/trust whenever the work faith is encountered. In this sense, the verse above is describing faith as trust in divine truths for which there is no objective evidence.

Hebrews goes on to state, “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb 11:6). And so, faith is needed for justification and faith is needed to please God. But in what sense can faith be understood as a virtue? Christians presumably have faith that Christian doctrine is true because of the weight of the evidence. There is seemingly nothing virtuous about believing whatever the evidence suggests you should believe. Therefore, faith as a virtue must suggest something beyond mere intellectual assent.

Recall that a virtuous person is someone who instinctively and automatically responds to situations in a virtuous manner, and that this characteristic develops over time with practice. With regards to faith, this principle means that a virtuous person will respond to tests of faith by taking comfort in faith rather than doubting faith.

Nearly everybody, and probably everybody, has periodic doubts about their faith. These can arise in a variety of ways such as intellectual doubts, doubts arising from personal tragedy, doubts arising from the tragedy of others, doubts arising from global events, doubts arising from a seeming lack of God responding to prayer requests, and so forth. A virtuous response to these doubts will be to return to faith in God and to surrender any illusion of personal control to the will of God. An unvirtuous response will be to indulge in doubt and to try to take personal control over the situation. As with other virtues, faith as a virtue will develop through practice. When doubts happen, it will initially take effort to respond in a virtuous way. Over time, a virtuous response to doubt will become easier and increasingly automatic. Paul refers to this as the obedience of faith. “[The Gospel] now has been disclosed, and through the Scriptures of the prophets, in accordance with the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen” (Rom 16:26-27).

As a theological virtue, it is important for this aspect of faith to be understood as a divine gift that allows one to access the strength of the indwelling Holy Spirit. “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8).

Hope

Christian hope is for the future coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead into glorified bodies, and the divine granting of an eternal state of blessedness in the presence of God in a New Heaven and a New Earth. These things are promised by God, and God is always faithful in delivering on His promises. “Let’s hold firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Heb 10:23). This hope is felt when life is good, knowing that a good earthly life is no comparison to what awaits. But this hope is also felt when life is difficult, knowing that we are on this earth for but a brief moment when compared to eternity. “We celebrate in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also celebrate in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom 5:2-5). Notice that our virtuous hope comes through the Holy Spirit, which is necessarily the case since hope is a theological virtue (see also Rom 15:13).

Virtuous hope, like faith discussed above, is a character trait that is cultivated by practice and repetition until it becomes automatic and natural. A Christian’s hope will be tested by a variety of life circumstances, both through an over-attachment to earthly pleasures and doubts about one’s eternal future. As one’s virtuous hope develops one increasingly finds comfort in saying *maranatha* (an Aramaic word that means “come oh Lord!”). This is comforting because when He appears we will be holy as He is holy. “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope set on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 Jn 3:2-3).

Charity

The Greek word *agapé* (ἀγάπη) is translated as love in most Bible versions but is famously translated as charity in many passages in the KJV.²¹⁹

Agapé is the highest form of love and can be thought of as a selfless love and how God loves each of us. When discussing charity as a theological virtue it is understood to mean the *agapé* form of love.

Of course, Jesus famously instructs that *agapé* love is the greatest commandment:

And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him: "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE (*agapaō*) THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE (*agapaō*) YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' Upon these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets." (Mt 22:35-40)

It is easy to love those who love us, but this is not the essence of charity as a virtue. It is much more aligned with the typical understanding of charity, where goodwill reaches out to those in need. Jesus distinguishes easy love versus charitable love as follows:

You have heard that it was said, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AND HATE YOUR ENEMY." But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may prove yourselves to be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Even the tax collectors, do they not do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Even the Gentiles, do they not do the same? Therefore you shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Mt 5:43-48)

In the last verse, the word perfect is a translation of the Greek *teleios* (τέλειος), which means complete. It does not mean without defect. Louis Lotz writes, "In Jesus' day the word 'perfect' meant to be full grown, to be mature, to reach the end of development."²²⁰ As such, this verse refers to progressive sanctification including the maturation of our ability to consistently have charitable love towards others. "This perfection is the condition of being fully mature, all grown up, of having reach the end and goal of human life under God. It means being children of God, sharing in the divine nature that is marked by stunning and indiscriminate acts of generosity to all."²²¹

The process of being made perfect involves the maturation of charity as a virtue. As with faith and hope, the practice of charity will initially require substantial effort and will become more natural over time. The Christian must beware that the opposite is also true. Acting in uncharitable ways towards others, if indulged, will also become more natural over time. C.S. Lewis writes:

The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you “love” your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more ... Good and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance. The smallest good act today is the capture of a strategic point from which, a few months later, you may be able to go on to victories you never dreamed of. An apparently trivial indulgence in lust or anger today is the loss of a ridge or railway line or bridgehead from which the enemy may launch an attack otherwise impossible.²²²

And so, the process of cultivating charity as a virtue involves performing acts of charitable love for your enemies and the avoidance of performing acts of uncharitable love for your enemies. This includes both thoughts and deeds. Over time, charitable love will become increasingly habitual towards others, even if you do not like them.

The concept of charitable love is perhaps best demonstrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). Jesus had just told a lawyer to love your neighbor as yourself, and the lawyer then asks, “Who is my neighbor?” This question is asked in the context of Leviticus, where God instructs the Israelites: “You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may certainly rebuke your neighbor, but you are not to incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor hold any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord” (Lv 19:17-18). Neighbor in this context seems to refer to fellow Israelites. It is likely that the lawyer’s question is to clarify the scope of neighbor in this Levitical passage. In the parable, Jesus does not give the wounded man an ethnic identity and therefore clearly indicates that we should love all people, not just those who are ethnically close. Furthermore, it was a Samaritan that acted as a loving neighbor, indicating that the command to love one’s neighbor is not just for the nation of Israel but for all people, even those who are mistrusted and even hated. Jeannine Brown writes, “[A] number of scholars argue that later Jewish tradition narrowed the definition of ‘neighbor.’ Against this restrictive backdrop, Jesus (it is argued) expands the scope of who is the neighbor and his point is thus considered ethical: a call to universal love. In this line of argumentation, the importance of the Samaritan is precisely that he is not a Jew.”²²³

In becoming Christlike, it can sometimes be helpful when making an ethical determination to ask, “What would Jesus do?” This question is commonly answered, “He would love first.” In this sense, developing a capacity for charitable love can be considered a core aspect of Christian virtue ethics.

Cardinal Virtues

Prudence is the first of the cardinal virtues. It has been called the *auriga virtutum* (the charioteer of the virtues) because it can be used to guide the other virtues. In common parlance, prudence is simply practical common sense. The book of Proverbs is largely concerned with common sense and instructs, “Every prudent person acts with knowledge, But a fool displays foolishness” (Prv 13:16). The Roman Catholic Catechism expands on this concept:

Prudence is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it ... It is prudence that immediately guides the judgment of conscience. The prudent man determines and directs his conduct in accordance with this judgment. With the help of this virtue we apply moral principles to particular cases without error and overcome doubts about the good to achieve and the evil to avoid.²²⁴

A prudent person will understand how most reasonable people will act in a certain situation that is both ethical and likely to result in an acceptable outcome. As with other virtues, making prudent decisions will initially require a certain amount of thought and effort and will eventually become second nature. Consider a grandmaster chess player who often plays a chess move simply because that is what good chess players do for a given board position. Similarly, a prudent person will make certain decisions because they are simply what an ethical person does in a particular situation. But a chess grandmaster also knows when a board position is such that simple rules do not apply and a much more in-depth calculations are warranted. Similarly, a prudent person will understand when certain situations call for an assessment that goes beyond common-sense rules.

Justice is the second of the cardinal virtues. As God is a righteous and just God, He wants us also to be righteous and just. “To do righteousness and justice is preferred by the Lord more than sacrifice” (Prv 21:3). As a virtue, justice means more than simply delivering appropriate sanctions to wrongdoers. It generally relates to all aspects of fairness, honesty, and the keeping of promises. It is therefore the virtue that is primarily responsible for regulating relationships. The Roman Catholic Catechism distinguishes between justice towards God and justice towards your neighbor. Justice towards God is referred to as the virtue of religion. Justice towards other is “distinguished by habitual right thinking and the uprightness of his conduct toward his neighbor.”²²⁵ Last, justice requires fairness in judgement. “You shall not do injustice in judgment; you shall not show partiality to the poor nor give preference to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people; and

you are not to jeopardize the life of your neighbor. I am the LORD” Lv 19:15-16).

Fortitude is the third of the cardinal virtues. It is related to courage and perseverance when faced with difficulty and challenge. It is the virtue that is often required in conjunction with the practice of other virtues. The Roman Catholic Catechism characterizes fortitude as follows. “Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions. It disposes one even to renounce and sacrifice his life in defense of a just cause.”²²⁶ As with all virtues, fortitude needs to be cultivated and developed through practice. Having fortitude will initially seem impossible in certain situations. But over time, fortitude can become an automatic and natural behavior, even in the most difficult of situations. “Be strong and let your heart take courage, All you who wait for the Lord” (Ps 31:24).

The fourth and last of the cardinal virtues is temperance. In modern usage, temperance is often associated with drinking alcohol in moderation and not to excess. But as a virtue, temperance involves self-control in all aspects of passion such as to avoid excess. This could be anything from the overconsumption of food, spending too much time and money on hobbies, or obsessively following political news. Temperance generally does not require total abstention, but this may be appropriate to avoid your actions becoming a stumbling block to others. Paul writes, “But take care that this freedom of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak ... Therefore, if food causes my brother to sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to sin” (1 Cor 8:9-13). The Roman Catholic Catechism characterizes temperance as follows. “Temperance is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable. The temperate person directs the sensitive appetites toward what is good and maintains a healthy discretion.”²²⁷ Or as one of the Delphic maxims states, “Nothing in excess.”²²⁸

12.7 Example: Sexual Immorality

It is beyond the scope of this book to theologically examine a large number of Christian ethical issues. There are a wide range of views on almost every issue and is it not the purpose of this book to pick sides. Rather, its intent is to give the reader an ability to undertake ethical assessments in a

theologically sound manner. This said, an example is now provided. The topic of sexual immorality is selected since many churches are not theologically consistent in this area. The topic of sexual immorality is also of particular import since it has caused significant divisions within Christian denominations and between individual Christians as well.

This section focuses primarily on homosexual marriages and remarriages after divorce, as the Bible uses strong language for each. In doing this, the term affirming is used for the view that homosexual marriages and/or remarriages after divorce are not necessarily sinful. The term non-affirming is used for the view that homosexual marriages and/or remarriages after divorce are sinful. This section tries its best to examine what a consistent theological approach requires when considering both homosexual marriage and marriage after divorce under the single topic of sexual immorality.

Many Christian denominations do not affirm homosexual marriages (e.g., Baptist, United Methodist, Roman Catholic, Lutheran-Missouri Synod) while others do (e.g., Episcopal, Presbyterian USA, Evangelical Lutheran). For example, the United Methodist *Book of Discipline* states the following: “The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.”²²⁹ In contrast, the Presbyterian USA constitution was amended in 2011 to allow for partnered homosexuals to be ordained.²³⁰ Immediately after this amendment was passed, the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians was created for churches for churches that chose to secede over the issue.

Differences with regards to remarriage after divorce are less evenly split but are still significant. Most denominations sanction divorce in situations involving adultery or sexual immorality, and several also do so for irreconcilable estrangement (e.g., United Methodist, Presbyterian USA).²³¹ But as a practical matter, divorced and remarried couples participate in most churches in a manner equal to first-marriage couples and are not assessed as to the circumstances behind their divorces. In 2004, about thirty percent of all marriages involved at least one spouse who was remarried.²³² Assuming the proportion of families in churches is similar, it is understandable why many churches remain silent on the issue of remarriage after divorce.

Situations regarding both homosexual relations and remarriage after divorce can be ethically nuanced. To avoid these nuances, this section defines two archetype couples that attempt to avoid the need to consider situational specifics. The first archetype is the “gay couple” and the second is the “remarried couple.” The archetype gay couple is two people of the same sex, both who have same-sex sexual attraction and who do not have other-sex sexual attraction. These two people are legally married,

monogamous, and believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The archetype remarried couple is a man and a woman, both of whom were previously married and divorced. Neither divorce involved sexual infidelity, abandonment, or abuse of any kind. The first marriages were Christian marriages, as are the second marriages. All involved believe that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior.

Although this section examines arguments as they apply to these defined archetype couples, Christians should be under no illusions that they represent all or even most homosexual situations. This is particularly true for men. “[In a large study] 28% of white homosexual males reported having 1,000 or more homosexual partners ... while only 17% reported having fewer than 50 homosexual partners ... In addition, 79% of white homosexual males reported that more than half of their sexual partners were strangers.”²³³ From a Christian perspective, this indicates a high prevalence of maladaptive behavior among male homosexuals that is not to be compared with our archetype gay couple. The situation for female homosexuals is less extreme but still important to note. A 1978 study found that “one-time or brief sexual liaisons occurred but were uncommon.”²³⁴ But a 2002 study estimated that 45% to 55% of married heterosexual women engage in sexual relationships outside of their marriage.²³⁵ These statistics show that dogmatics that apply to the archetype gay couple do not necessarily apply to many other homosexual situations.

The primary biblical justification for divorce is sexual immorality. A 2013 study found that in almost ninety percent of divorces, at least one person suspects the other of infidelity, but only thirty-one percent of couples agree on this point.²³⁶ It therefore seems that a large number of divorces occur when one person suspects the other person of cheating, but the accused denies that this is the case. In this study, by far the most prevalent reason for divorce agreed upon by both spouses is a lack of commitment to the marriage. Therefore, to the extent that biblically justified divorces relate to the possibility of biblically justified remarriages, dogmatics that apply to the archetype remarried couple may not necessarily apply to other remarriage situations.

Literal Exegesis

There are a number of Bible verses that directly addressing homosexuality (Gen 19:4-8; Lev 18:22; Lev 20:13; Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:8-11; Jude 6-7). A plain literal reading of these verses indicates strong Biblical disapproval of male/male intercourse. In the OT, this act is called an abomination (Lev 18:22), detestable and punishable by death (Lev 20:13).

In the NT, this act is called unnatural and shameful (Rom 1:26-27). The NT also includes homosexuality in several lists of sins (1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:8-11). Furthermore, the NT characterizes both the act and the passion for the act as unnatural.

Female homosexuality is not directly addressed in the OT. In the NT it is simply referred to as being unnatural (Rom 1:26-27). Conservative exegetes typically understand Paul's use of "unnatural" as being contrary to the Genesis account of God's created order consisting of male and female, and of sex being designed for procreation. Therefore, both same-sex attraction and same-sex acts are, by this understanding, reflective of a distorted view of God and God's creation.

There are also a number of Bible verses that directly address divorce and remarriage (Dt 24:1; Mal 2:16; Mt 5:31-32; Mt 19:3-9; Mk 10:2-12; Lk 16:18; Rom 7:2-3; 1 Cor 7:39). A plain literal reading of these verses indicates that anyone who marries after being divorced or marries someone who is divorced is guilty of adultery. This is true for men who divorce and remarry and for men who marry a divorced woman (Lk 16:18). This is also true for a divorced woman who remarries (Mt 5:31-32; Mk 10:2-12).

Much has been debated about Matthew's exception clause: "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery" (Mt 3:9). This verse allows for divorce in situations of sexual immorality, and many interpret this to mean that remarriage is allowed in these situations, sometimes for the non-offending party, and sometimes for both parties as the God-bond of marriage is deemed to have been broken. However, Jesus clearly states in Lk 16:18, "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery."²³⁷ No exceptions about remarriage after divorce are mentioned, and Scripture should be used to interpret Scripture when the meaning of a verse is unclear.

Arguments that Not All Homosexual Acts are Sinful

There are several arguments that attempt to show that not all homosexual acts are necessarily sinful. These almost always address loving monogamous homosexual couples in a committed relationship like our archetype gay couple. These approaches can generally be classified as scriptural inapplicability, category mistake, and legalism.

A scriptural applicability argument is based on the possibility of biblical verses not necessarily applying to all situations, such as modern

Western context. For homosexual acts, the scriptural inapplicability argument maintains that Scripture, when referring to homosexual acts, is not referring to loving monogamous homosexual relationships as they exist in the modern West, as this type of relationship was unknown in ancient times. Preston Sprinkle explains as follows:

Lifelong, exclusive, equal same-sex partnerships are virtually unknown to human history and anthropology outside the contemporary West. Same-sex sexual activity is common, but it almost never takes this cultural form ... The forms which were common in the first century were sexual relationships with significant power differentials – upper-class men over lower-class men, boys, eunuchs, slaves; wealthy “johns” exploiting the poverty of those pressured into prostitution through economic need; aristocrats grown tired of the ordinary, searching for more exotic pleasures, and supplied by those looking to profit from human trafficking. These were the more common forms of same-sex sexuality in Paul’s day.²³⁸

A category argument is based on the possibility of Biblical verses not being understood and used for their intended function. For homosexual acts, the category mistake argument maintains that the primary biblical reason for marriage and sex is procreation, which is no longer the case. “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it” (Gn 1:28). After Christ’s atoning sacrifice, Christians look forward to the general resurrection and no longer need to view marriage and sex as primarily procreative. The category argument therefore maintains that sexual intimacy in the Bible is for the purposes of procreation whereas sexual intimacy today is for bonding between committed monogamous couples, including gay couples.

Many Christians today understand sexual intimacy as an expression of natural affection between two loving and monogamous partners rather than being strictly procreative. This equally applies to fertile couples, infertile couples, and couples who simply choose not to have children. This is a strong argument since no mainstream Christian position holds that infertile people should not enter into marriage. If sexual intimacy is to express natural affection between two loving people, the category argument applies to the archetype gay couple just as much as it applies to an infertile couple.

The legalism argument maintains that the OT Law must not be legalistically applied but viewed through the lens of justice and mercy as Jesus often did during His ministry. The vast majority of Christians today, including theologians, do not view all of the OT Levitical commands as binding. Examples include circumcision, food purity rules and the entire sacrificial system. Similar arguments can be made with regards to certain NT proscriptions such as wearing head coverings in church (1 Cor 11) and

wearing gold jewelry (1 Tim 2:9). A clear rule that appears in the Bible therefore does not necessarily still apply today. If people are born with same-sex attraction and commit to a monogamous relationship akin to traditional marriage, the legalism argument asserts that both justice and mercy dictate that the Levitical law against homosexual acts should be relaxed.

Arguments that Not All Remarriage After Divorce is Sinful

There are several arguments that attempt to show that not all marriages after divorce are necessarily sinful. I will avoid the issue of divorce due to sexual immorality in this discussion and limit it to our archetype remarried couple. As with homosexuality, arguments can be classified as scriptural inapplicability, category mistake, and legalism.

The scriptural inapplicability argument maintains that Scripture, when referring to remarriage after divorce, is not referring to the same marriage situation as we experience in the modern West. Marriage in biblical times was when “fathers arranged marriages, premarital dating was minimal, there was no effective contraception, adultery mandated divorce, and men married women close to half their age and were deemed their head and superior.”²³⁹ Divorce therefore served to protect women, which is not the primary reason for divorce in modern times. Scripture verses related to divorce and remarriage, the scriptural inapplicability argument maintains, are therefore not directly applicable to marriages as they are today.

The category mistake argument challenges the unalterability of Jesus’s absolute statements in Mark and Luke. Matthew presumably had access to Mark’s gospel when, under inspiration, he added the sexual immorality exception. Similarly, Paul adds to Jesus’s core sayings by addressing acceptable divorce conditions between a Christian and an unbeliever, although Paul attributes this addition to himself. “But to the rest I say, not the Lord ... if the unbelieving one is leaving, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases” (1 Cor 12:7-15). If Matthew and Paul can identify exceptions that address issues of justice and mercy, the strict language in Mark and Luke are shown to be alterable through the addition of exceptions and perhaps in other ways. If Mark and Luke can be altered by Matthew and Paul, the category mistake argument maintains that additional exceptions may be possible that could allow for remarriage after divorce.

The legalism argument is similar to that described for homosexuality. The OT Law must not be legalistically applied but viewed through the lens of justice and mercy. With respect to remarriage after divorce, all

recognize that many first marriages are ill-considered and unhealthy. All also recognize that divorced people often find more suitable spouses the second time around and that often the second marriage is Christ-centered. The legalism argument therefore asserts that both justice and mercy dictate that the Levitical law against remarriage after divorce should be relaxed.

Theological Consistency

If one is to be theologically consistent, the same approach should be used when assessing scriptural verses related to homosexuality and scriptural verses related to remarriage after divorce. The options now considered are literal, historical context, alterability, and anti-legalism. Each of these options is examined to see if they would allow for dogmatic consistency in treating the archetype gay couple and the archetype remarried couple differently.

The section on literal exegesis shows that both of our archetype couples, when assessed through a plain literal reading of Scripture, are living in a state of sexual immorality. Since the living condition of both are the same, a theologically consistent application of a literal and plain reading of the Bible should result in both couples being treated in a similar manner.

If historic context is considered when interpreting verses, it should be recognized that the situational issues of both remarriage and homosexuality today are such that strong biblical language may no longer be applicable in both situations. Women no longer need protection from divorce, and marriage is more about personal fulfillment than procreation. Similarly, homosexuality is no longer about exploiting the oppressed and the young, and gay marriage is now entered into for precisely the same reasons as many marriages. A theologically consistent approach should therefore either accept that strong biblical language with respect to remarriage and homosexuality are either no longer applicable to either or are still applicable to both.

If alterability is considered when interpreting verses, the results are similar to the historical context argument. This difference is that instead of denying the applicability of verses, additional meaning is inferred based on today's context. This would allow "irreconcilable differences" to be included as a reason for acceptable divorce and remarriage and "loving monogamous homosexual relationship" to be included as a non-sinful lifestyle. A theologically consistent approach should therefore either find alterability unacceptable for both remarriage after divorce and for homosexuality or find biblical alterability acceptable for both.

Some may find it appropriate for mercy and justice reasons to override excessive legalism. For divorce and remarriage, mercy and justice would allow for people to exit unhappy marriages and enter into happy Christian marriages. For homosexuality, mercy and justice would allow for homosexual couples to live in a happy Christian marital bond in the same manner that is allowed for divorced and remarried couples. A theologically consistent approach should therefore deem relaxing legalistic prohibitions either acceptable or unacceptable for both remarriage after divorce and for homosexuality.

Like all theological issues, the analysis just presented is subject to debate and many will disagree. For example it can be argued that the category argument would not apply if verses related to remarriage are viewed to be modifiable whereas verses related to homosexuality are not. However, this category-based argument may be uncomfortable for conservative Christians as it essentially requires Scripture to be supplemented by adding non-mentioned exceptions to allow for acceptable remarriage after divorce.

Pastoral Accommodations

And so, it is difficult to be dogmatically consistent while simultaneously affirming the archetype remarried couple and not affirming the archetype gay couple. But this is precisely what many churches do in practice. What is their reasoning in doing so? Mark Ellingson examined this question with regards to the ordination of homosexual clergy and concludes the following. “On the whole the disagreements among the churches over homosexuality and the ordination of practicing homosexuals are not theologically related.”²⁴⁰ He goes on to say that most heterosexuals have an innate sense that homosexuality is biologically unnatural apart from any biblical or theological reasoning. “Common sense seems to suggest that homosexuality is not natural sexual behavior. Insofar as the primary reason why creatures have sexual organs is to propagate themselves, sexual relationships between members of opposite sexes would seem to be the normative behavioral pattern.”²⁴¹ In this sense, most church members would be comfortable sitting next to the archetype remarried couple, but many would not be comfortable sitting next to the archetype gay couple. The double-standard will therefore often be based on sociology rather than theology.

The sociological concept for violating a comfortable social norm is called pollution. Simply put, many Christians would view the presence of the archetype gay couple in church as socially polluting, but few would view the archetype remarried couple in the same way. Pamela

Brubaker writes, “Although adultery is morally condemned in most Western cultures, it is not seen as a violation of natural law ... displays of fear, hatred, and prejudice toward homosexuals are best understood as pollution fears ... pollution fears do not require logic or scientific evidence as war-rants.”²⁴²

The issue of natural sexual behavior can be examined theologically. As discussed previously, this is typically by identifying man, woman, sexual intimacy between a man and a woman, and procreation as part of God’s design and the natural order of things. But this theological approach is typically *not* how church leaders make decisions, as a theological approach towards the archetype gay couple may reveal a simultaneous non-theological approach towards the archetype remarried couple. Rather, Harvey Hill concludes, “Clergy generally approach the issue pragmatically in terms of how it might affect their congregations.”²⁴³ With regards to the archetype remarried couple, pragmatic considerations often result in acceptance without specifically addressing the church’s dogmatic position. One of these pragmatic considerations is the sheer number of divorced and remarried couples in a typical congregation. Preston Sprinkle summarizes, “A gradual growth of openness to remarriage after divorce in Protestant traditions is not a denial of the belief in the permanence of marriage ... instead, they are pastoral accommodations, ways of making space in the life of the church for the messiness of human realities.”²⁴⁴ This messiness often involves having more than a quarter of married couples in the congregation not being in their first marriage.

Many churches that pragmatically accommodate the archetype remarried couple do not pragmatically accommodate the archetype gay couple as this approach has devastated many churches. Consider the Presbyterian USA denomination, which changed its constitution in 2015 to affirm gay marriage. Since doing this, more than 700 churches have seceded (about 9%). On the flip side, the United Methodist Church refusal to relax its conservative positions on LGBTQ issues has resulted in over six thousand churches seceding (about twenty percent). Action in either direction with respect to LGBTQ issues has not turned out well. Hence, inaction/avoidance/accommodation is understandable, if theologically questionable.

It gets even messier if one considers Paul’s instructions with regards to sexually immoral people. “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people ... I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people ... Purge the evil person from among you” (1 Cor 5:9-13). Paul is specifically addressing the church in Corinth about people in that church engaging in sexually immoral acts. Paul does not

even instruct the church to try to get the sexually immoral people to change their ways. Rather, he simply says, “Let him who has done this be removed from among you” (1 Cor 5:2). In most churches today, the Christian thing to do is (in most cases) to try to get sinners to stop sinning no matter what sin is involved, including sexual immorality. But Paul is clear as to the consequences of someone continuing to remain sexually immoral. They are to be removed from the congregation and all associations are to be terminated. To allow attendance of church members who are viewed to be living a sexually immoral lifestyle is scripturally questionable to say the least. Strong arguments can be made that this would apply to the archetype gay couple, the archetype remarried couple, unmarried couples in a sexual relationship, and those who regularly use pornography. A plain and literal view of these issues results in a hard teaching, as few Christians would want to expel all such people from their congregation.

12.8 Denominational Positions on Ethical Issues

This section presents the ethical positions of some different Christian denominations on various social issues. This includes Roman Catholic, Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS), Presbyterian USA, and United Methodist. Although there is only one official Roman Catholic position on ethical issues, there will be differences in the various denominations of Lutheranism, Presbyterianism, and Methodism. For example, LCMS will differ on many issues when compared to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Presbyterian USA will differ from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. And Methodist USA will differ from the Evangelical Methodist Church. Nevertheless, the denominations considered are very prominent and should provide the reader with a range of perspectives. Although the specific denominational positions may be of interest, the key point is that large and important Christian organizations often come to very different conclusions when theologically examining ethical issues.

Abortion

Roman Catholic. Roman Catholicism teaches that life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception. Therefore, both abortion and infanticide are heinous sins. A person known to have had an abortion will be excommunicated.

Lutheran (LCMS). The LCMS teaches that it is contrary to God's Word and never an acceptable option unless the life of the mother is at stake.

Presbyterian USA. The Presbyterian USA discourages abortions but does not condemn them. It lists possible justifying circumstances as severe physical or mental deformity, conception as a result of rape or incest, or conditions under which the physical or mental health of either woman or child would be gravely threatened.

United Methodist. The United Methodist church states that it is reluctant to condone abortion. It rejects abortion as a method of birth control or gender selection and opposes late-term abortions unless the life of the mother is in danger or there are severe fetal abnormalities. It does not specifically object to early-term abortions, implies that they may be acceptable due to unspecified tragic life situations, and supports the legal availability of abortions.

Climate Change

Roman Catholic. In his second encyclical, Pope Francis highlights the grave situation of a number of environmental issues including pollution, anthropogenic climate change, a lack of clean water, and a loss of biodiversity. He writes, "climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day."²⁴⁵ He recognizes the tension between low-cost energy in developing nations through fossil fuels and environmental consequences and advises to pursue short-term solutions while making a long-term transition to renewable energy.

Lutheran (LCMS). The LCMS does not have an official position on climate change.

Presbyterian USA. The Presbyterian USA believes that anthropomorphic climate change is threat that Christians have a moral obligation to address. In 1981, the PCUSA acknowledged the importance of transitioning away from a fossil fuel-based economy. In 2006, the PCUSA called on all church members to lower their carbon footprint in order to combat the effects of climate change. A 2008 PCUSA report views the potential impact of climate change as catastrophic and calls for a transition to renewable and away from dependence on fossil fuels.²⁴⁶ In 2018, the PCUSA stated its support for comprehensive, mandatory, and aggressive emission reductions and for a moratorium on new coal-fired power plants.

United Methodist. The United Methodist church teaches that an increase in atmospheric greenhouse gases over past decades already has resulted in a steady rise in sea levels, growing acidification of the world's oceans, increased droughts and famines, and the intensification of extreme weather events. It believes that this trend needs to be reversed by through increased investments in the research, development, and distribution of alternatives to fossil fuels, including, but not limited to, solar, wind, geothermal and hydrogen-based energy sources.

Death Penalty

Roman Catholic. Roman Catholicism does not object to capital punishment.

Lutheran (LCMS). In its 1980 report on capital punishment, the LCMS states that capital punishment is in accord with the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.²⁴⁷

Presbyterian USA. The Presbyterian USA objects to all capital punishment and has called for an immediate moratorium on all executions in all jurisdictions that impose capital punishment.

United Methodist. The United Methodist church objects to all capital punishment.



Divorce and Remarriage

Roman Catholic. Roman Catholicism does not permit divorce. Its position is that marriage is indissoluble.²⁴⁸ However, canon law allows marriages to be annulled, which is the recognition that there was never a valid marriage in the first place. The determination as to whether a marriage can be annulled is made in the ecclesiastical court. Because Roman Catholicism does not permit divorce, it necessarily does not permit remarriage after divorce. In 2016, Pope Francis published an exhortation that states, “Because of forms of conditioning and mitigating factors, it is possible

that in an objective situation of sin ... a person can be living in God's grace, can love and can also grow in the life of grace and charity, while receiving the Church's help to this end."²⁴⁹ This was directed towards people remarried in civil courts but still attend Catholic services and wish to partake in the Eucharist. This document has received much pushback from Catholic theologians and is not part of the official Catholic canon.

Lutheran (LCMS). The LCMS position on this issue is presented in detail in a 1987 report.²⁵⁰ It states that a person who divorces his/her spouse for any other cause than sexual unfaithfulness and marries another commits adultery. Additionally, anyone who marries a person so discarding his/her spouse commits adultery. The report says that remarriage for the unoffending spouse is acceptable. It goes on to say that divorce for unscriptural reasons, and remarriage involving such persons, are contrary to God's will and that it is the duty of Christian pastors to confront the persons involved in such situations with the gravity of their sin.

Presbyterian USA. The Presbyterian USA does not discuss any positions on its website related to either divorce or remarriage. However, in 1952 the PCUSA General Assembly moved to amend sections of the Westminster Confession that broadening the grounds for divorce. Furthermore, the PCUSA Confession of 1967 framed marriage in terms of compassion rather than discipline allowing for compassionate consideration for divorce and remarriage.

United Methodist. The United Methodist church discourages divorce but allows divorced people to participate in lay and church leadership, including clergy. Remarriage after divorce is viewed as acceptable.

Euthanasia and Suicide

Roman Catholic. Roman Catholicism is categorically opposed to all forms of euthanasia and suicide. In the early eighties, the Roman Catholic Church removed suicide from its list of mortal sins, but still considers it a grave matter that wrongly asserts dominion over God's creation.

Lutheran. The LCMM teaches objects to medical personnel having any part in actively inducing death, even at the patient's request or at the request of the family. It does not have an official position regarding the eternal state of individuals who have committed suicide.

Presbyterian USA. The Presbyterian USA does not discuss any positions on its website related to either euthanasia or suicide. However, a paper adopted by the 121st General Assembly (1981) states that euthanasia and suicide are extremely difficult to defend morally, but there are certain extreme circumstances when it may be morally defensible.²⁵¹

United Methodist. The United Methodist church opposes both euthanasia and suicide. However, it points out that final judgment is by God. It therefore rejects attempts to deny the ministries and services of the church to those who die by euthanasia or suicide or to their grieving families and other loved ones.

Gambling

Roman Catholic. Roman Catholicism believes that games of chance or wagers are not in themselves sinful but become morally unacceptable when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for his needs and those of others.²⁵²

Lutheran (LCMS). A 1996 LCMS report does not characterize gambling as inherently sinful, but that it does have a great potential for abuse.²⁵³ It recognizes that Scripture does not specifically address gambling but does address about various issues that arise in the context of gambling and the promotion of gambling.

Presbyterian USA. In 2000, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian USA reaffirmed its opposition to organized and institutional forms of gambling,

United Methodist. United Methodists reject the practice of gambling because it focuses society's attention on the acquisition of monetary goods at the exclusion of all else and enriches a small minority at the expense of the larger majority.

Gun Control

Roman Catholic. Roman Catholicism supports the right of individual self-defense, including the use of lethal force when necessary. It does not specifically address firearms but implies that responsible gun ownership is acceptable if this is the best form of self-defense. Despite this, the unofficial opinions of various popes and bishops seem to favor restrictions on firearm ownership. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XV) observes that there is a legitimate diversity of Catholic opinions in this area.

Lutheran (LCMS). The LCMM does not have an official position on gun control.

Presbyterian USA. The Presbyterian USA is in favor of aggressive gun control at the federal, state, and local levels. This includes importation,

manufacture, sale, and possession of guns and ammunition by the general public.

United Methodist. The United Methodist church is in favor of gun control legislation at the local and national levels. This includes universal background checks, ensuring that all guns are sold through licensed retailers, and establishing a minimum age of 21 years for a gun purchase or possession, and prohibiting those convicted of violent crimes, those under restraining order due to the threat of violence, and those with serious mental illness that may be a danger to themselves or others from purchasing a gun.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Roman Catholic. The official position of Roman Catholicism is that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered, contrary to the natural law, and under no circumstances can be approved.²⁵⁴ It therefore opposes both same-sex marriage same-sex civil unions. Roman Catholicism also believes that a person is born with a biological sex. Any gender identity that does not agree with a person's biological sex is a disorder, but the person should always be treated with compassion and love.

Lutheran (LCMS). The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod believes the Bible teaches homosexual behavior is contrary to God's Word and will, and the LCMS seeks to minister to those who are struggling with homosexual inclinations. Homosexual acts are understood as inherently sinful and homosexual clergy are not permitted.

Presbyterian USA. The Presbyterian USA recognizes that it has changed its position on sexual orientation and gender identity and is apologetic to its former traditional beliefs. Currently it celebrates LGBTQ church members and also allows for the ordination of openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual clergy.

United Methodist. The United Methodist church enacted a major change in its policy towards homosexuality at its General Conference in 2024. It has removed from the *Book of Discipline* all language that restricts or singles out non-heterosexual people for disparate treatment, which can now be characterized as neutral in this area. Homosexual clergy are now allowed, and clergy are free to either participate or to not participate in same-sex marriage ceremonies. This said, the *Book of Discipline* still states, "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching."²⁵⁵

12.9 Further Reading

There are a wide range of approaches used in books about Christian ethics. A good short introduction to ethical decision making is Robin Lovin's *Christian Ethics*. An evangelical assessment of Christian ethics as they relate to a variety of specific ethical issues can be found in Wayne Grudem's *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning*. A more scholarly work that addresses how a Christian can best live as part of the Kingdom of God in modern society is *Kingdom Ethics*, by Glen Stassen and David Gushee. Last, an assessment of a variety of ethical issues from the perspectives of St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Martin Luther is provided in Robin Gill's *A Textbook of Christian Ethics*.

12.10 Study Questions

1. Write a short summary of philosophical ethical issues in terms of free will, moral standards, and moral accountability.
2. What is the Law of Human Nature? How does this law relate to ethics in both a philosophical sense and in a Christian sense?
3. Is it possible for people to make free moral choices if God has prior knowledge of what these free moral choices will be?
4. What is the primary standard for moral behavior in the Old Testament? Should a distinction be made between divine rules about moral behavior and divine rules regarding purity such as dietary restrictions? Explain.
5. What is the primary standard for moral behavior in the Old Testament? How should commandment "thou shall not murder" be interpreted in light of this NT moral standard of behavior?
6. How should a Christian understand the desires of the flesh versus the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?
7. How are the desires of the flesh and the activities of Satan and his forces related?
8. What are the three main approaches to ethical decision making? What is your primary approach and why is this the case?
9. Discuss the issue of theological consistency with regards to the OT commands for capital punishment (Ex 21:12-16; Lv 24:17-20; Nm 35:16-18; Dt 22:25-27) and the OT command to love your neighbor as yourself (Lv 19:18).
10. Do you think that homosexual marriage is consistent with Christianity? Do you think that remarriage after divorce is consistent with

Christianity? Is there a biblical basis for a church treating these two situations differently? Explain.

13. Apologetics

Christian apologetics is the rational defense of Christianity. The term is derived from the Greek word *apología* (ἀπολογία), which means to speak in defense of something. It is not to be thought of as offering someone a regretful acknowledgement for some aspect of Christianity that they might find offensive. Rather, Christian apologetics demonstrates that Christian doctrine is rational, can be believed by reasonable people, and is not the unreasonable caricature commonly ascribed to it by anti-Christian secularists. This is the “defense” part of apologetics. But there is also an offensive component. Douglas Groothuis writes, “Christian apologetics is the rational defense of the Christian worldview as objectively true, rationally compelling, and existentially or subjectively engaging.”²⁵⁶ That is, the broader scope of Christian apologetics is to demonstrate its superiority to other worldviews and faith systems.

Although Christian apologetics is closely related to theology, it also draws heavily from philosophy and, to a lesser extent, evangelism. Theology is required so that apologetics correctly understands what to defend and how to defend it. Philosophy is required to address general metaphysical issues with respect to Christian answers as compared to both secular and non-secular alternatives. Evangelism is required such that apologetic arguments can be framed in a way to be most effective to those with anti-Christian views, to those with honest questions about Christian doctrine, and to those unfamiliar with Christian doctrine.

There are some Christians who object to the entire discipline of Christian apologetics, typically because they feel that nobody has ever become a Christian because of rational arguments. They feel that conversion is an emotional response to the work of the Holy Spirit and that engagement time with non-Christians is best spent focusing on a gospel invitation. But this is a very limited perspective. Many non-Christians are not open to the Christian message because they suspect that certain aspects of Christian doctrine are either unreasonable or are contrary to a currently held belief. Common examples are the atheist’s belief that God does not exist and the agnostic’s uncertainty as to whether God exists. Typically, the atheist and

the agnostic will not be open to the gospel message until they are convinced that a God exists that is compatible with the Christian understanding of God. In this situation, the role of apologetics is to first put forward philosophical arguments for the existence of God.

There are many other examples of where apologetics can be useful and even essential in removing mental roadblocks that people may have with respect to believing Christian doctrine. A person may think that Christianity is sexist and results in the oppression of women. Another may think that Christian beliefs are not compatible with modern science. Still others may believe that Christianity is responsible for or complicit in historical atrocities such as racism, slavery, and imperialism. It is the job of apologetics to counter preconceived notions in these and other areas such that actual Christian doctrine is understood rather than false doctrine. Ron Kubsch summarizes, “[O]ne must recognize that apologetics, while it can uncover the weaknesses and errors of other systems of thought and can help dispel obstacles to accepting the Christian faith, cannot produce belief. Faith is a gift of God, and for this reason our apologetic efforts should be marked by a joyous equanimity.”²⁵⁷

Furthermore, Scripture is clear that Christians should be ready to rationally explain and defend their faith. The first letter of Peter specifically uses *apología* in this context. “[S]anctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense (*apología*) to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, but with gentleness and respect” (1 Pt 3:15). Notice the emphasis on the importance that is placed on gentleness and respect, as an aggressive or disrespectful apologetic approach will typically result in a defensive and unreceptive response in addition to the representation of Christians as obnoxious and sanctimonious.

Perhaps the best scriptural example of effective apologetics is Paul’s speech to the Athenians on Mars Hill. Paul is addressing people with polytheist beliefs. The Athenians have altars to many gods, including an altar to an “unknown god.” This altar exists in case there is a god of which the Athenians are unaware. But Paul uses it to introduce the Christian God:

Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, “To an unknown god.” Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything that is in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made by hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might feel around for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, “For we also

are His descendants.” Therefore, since we are the descendants of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by human skill and thought. So having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now proclaiming to mankind that all people everywhere are to repent, because He has set a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all people by raising Him from the dead. (Acts 17:22-31)

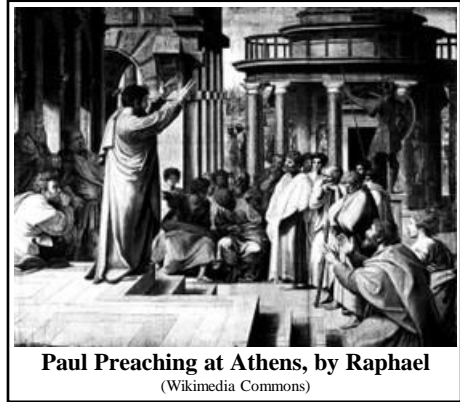
Notice how Paul approaches his apologetic task. He first complements the Athenians by recognizing them as a religious people. He then finds a possible connection between their religion and Christianity in that their unknown god could possibly be the Christian God. Paul has also taken the time to understand Greek religion and Greek culture, even to the extent of quoting Greek poetry. Paul

understands that his credibility in arguing for Christianity over the Greek religion is greatly increased if he is seen as knowledgeable about both. Last, he highlights the resurrection, which at the time was a verifiable event that shows Christianity to be far more than just a philosophy.

Paul’s speech on Mars Hill did not result in the instant conversion of all who had listened. But his speech did spark the curiosity of many. “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to scoff, but others said, ‘We shall hear from you again concerning this.’ So Paul went out from among them. But some men joined him and believed” (Acts 17: 32-34). The approach of Paul is highly relevant today, especially as communities become increasingly multi-cultural. Tanita Maddox specifically describes how this apologetic approach can be useful when engaging with younger generations.

Paul observed the Athenian culture, built rapport, used common language with his audience, found common ground as a cultural doorway for his message, and redefined the audience’s understanding of the relationship between God and humans. The same steps can be applied to gospel proclamation go Generation Z for effective and relevant evangelism.²⁵⁸

When defending the reasonableness of Christianity, it is important to know precisely what you are defending. It will generally not be possible to start with nuanced theological arguments or denominational



Paul Preaching at Athens, by Raphael

(Wikimedia Commons)

distinctions, but it is still important to defend the core of orthodox Christian beliefs. C.S. Lewis refers to this as “mere Christianity.” Mere Christianity can be summarized with the following points:

1. God exists, has always existed, is a personal God, is a moral God, and cares about the moral behavior of people.
2. God created the universe. He is not part of the universe but sustains it.
3. As part of creating the universe, God created mankind as spiritual creatures.
4. People know that they should behave according to God’s moral code but fail to do so. This failure separates people from their proper relationship with God.
5. People are powerless to fix their sinful nature on their own.
6. God the Father sent His only Son to suffer, die, and rise again. This atoning act has the power to fix a person’s broken relationship with God through faith and trust in its redemptive power along with sincere repentance.
7. Once someone has sincerely repented and accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior, they are spiritually reborn, forgiven of their sins, adopted in to God’s spiritual family, have the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of them, and can be assured of eternal blessedness in the presence of God.

The remainder of this chapter will address the areas of Christian apologetics that are the most common barriers to non-believers having an open mind with regards to various elements of mere Christianity. It starts with the existence of God and the related topic of the problem of evil. It continues with the historical Jesus, followed by His death and resurrection. This is followed by an apologetic examination of Islam, pantheism, and post-modernism. The chapter concludes with a summary of worldviews and how they relate to apologetic engagement.

13.1 The Existence of God

A recent Gallup poll found that 81% of Americans still answer “yes” to the question of whether they believe in God (although this number is declining). This number drop to 61% when asked if they are convinced that God exists.²⁵⁹ Since skepticism about the existence of God often makes a person much less receptive to the Gospel message, arguments for the existence of God are a necessity for any Christian apologist. It is almost

always easier to first argue for the existence of God and then to argue for the particulars of Christianity.

None of the arguments for the existence of God will convince a committed atheist, but many people simply have not thought much about why so many people, often intelligent and informed people, believe that God exists. This section will cover the main arguments for the existence of God including ontological, cosmological, design, moral, and personal religious experience.

Ontological Argument

The ontological argument for the existence of God is the most famous and has been heavily analyzed and debated ever since its formulation by St. Anselm of Canterbury in the 11th century.²⁶⁰ In its most common form, the ontological argument defines God as a being of which nothing greater can be conceived. Given this, there are two possibilities. First, this being exists both in reality and in our mind. Second, this being only exists in our mind. The ontological argument then asserts that a being that exists is greater than a being that does not exist. Therefore, if this being only exists in our mind, there is a conceivable being that is greater, a being that both exists in our mind and exists in reality. Since this is a logical contradiction, a being of which nothing greater can be conceived must exist. This version of the ontological argument is logically formulated as follows:

Ontological Argument

- P1. God is understood as a being than which nothing greater can be conceived.
- P2. A thing exists either in understanding only or in both understanding and reality.
- P3. It is greater to exist in both understanding and reality than in reality only.
- C1. Therefore, if God exists only in understanding, then something greater can be conceived, namely, a God that exists in both understanding and reality.
- C2. Therefore, God cannot exist only in understanding.
- C3. Therefore, God must exist in both understanding and in reality.

This formulation is formally and logically valid. If one accepts the three premises, one must also accept the three conclusions. The remainder of this section will address this version of the ontological argument, but it should be known that Anselm had an additional formulation based on the

concept of God as a maximally perfect being rather than something than which nothing greater can be conceived.

Since the logic of the ontological argument is sound, its conclusions can only be challenged by challenging one-or-more of the premises. Premise two is non-controversial, leaving the first and third premises as the focus of whether the conclusions should be believed.

The first possible criticism of P1 is that humans cannot conceive of God, as God is ineffable and we can only know God to the extent that He reveals Himself to us. Though true, the ontological argument only requires that we understand God as defined in P1. Douglas Groothuis explains the requirements of this understanding as follows: “A Perfect Being is a being who possesses every property it is better to have than to lack and who possesses this array of compossible excellent properties to the utmost degree (or to their intrinsic maximum value).”²⁶¹ It can be argued that humans cannot conceive of a being with these characteristics, but this argument is somewhat weak compared to other arguments.

The most famous and serious criticism of the ontological argument is from Immanuel Kant. Kant argues that the ontological argument requires existence to be a predicate for God. That is, the ontological argument requires using the concept of “God exists.” But Kant reasons that existence cannot properly be used as a predicate for God since existence adds nothing to the concept of God. One can think of many abstract concepts that exist only in the mind but not in reality. In the same way, God could simply be an abstract concept that does not exist in reality. Formally, Kant asserts that “exists” in “God exists” is not a genuine predicate. If existence is not a genuine predicate in the ontological argument, the argument fails.²⁶² But Groothuis argues that existence can properly be understood as a genuine predicate in the ontological argument, “since the matter of God’s existence is a legitimate *question*, like the ontological status of the animals in the children’s story ... These things are possibly existing things, so existence is an appropriate and meaningful predicate concerning their ontological status.”²⁶³ Although perhaps philosophically interesting, diving this deep into the grammar of logical arguments is typically not useful in an apologetic sense.

A more accessible critique of the ontological argument comes from the Benedictine monk Gaulino, who uses the logic of the ontological argument to “prove” the existence of a perfect island, because it would not be perfect if it only existed in the mind. Gaulino writes:

If ... someone wishes thus to persuade me that this island really exists beyond all doubt, I should either think that he was joking, or I should find it hard to decide which of us I ought to judge the bigger fool – I, if I agreed with him, or he, if he thought that he had proved the existence of this island with any certainty.²⁶⁴

Anselm's response to Gaulino is that the ontological argument cannot properly be applied to finite things since something infinite is always greater than something finite, and an infinite island cannot be conceived. The obvious reply is that humans cannot properly conceive of an infinite God either. For all of these complexities, it is not clear whether the ontological argument has ever changed anyone's opinion about the existence of God (to my knowledge). It is nevertheless important for the Christian apologist to have familiarity with the ontological argument due to its well-known nature.

Cosmological Arguments

Cosmological arguments are based on the observable fact that the universe exists rather than nothing existing. Why is there anything at all? And why is there something that exists that can ask the question of why anything exists? Is it possible that the universe is the total of all reality and requires nothing else, or it is possible/probable/certain that a reality beyond the universe is required to explain the universe?

Aristotle was an early example of someone using a cosmological argument to demonstrate the existence of God. Since motion exists in the universe, there must be an unmoved mover, also called a prime mover, that is the original cause of motion. Aristotle equates the prime mover to God.

Thomas Aquinas builds upon Aristotle by giving five reasons that God must exist.²⁶⁵ The first is the proof from motion in the universe, which is identical to Aristotle's argument. Second, Aquinas offer a proof from efficient causality. This argument is similar to that of motion but recognizes that normal things need to be caused by other things. But to avoid infinite regress, there must be an uncaused cause, which is God.²⁶⁶ Third, Aquinas offers a proof from possibility and necessity. A possible being might or might not exist whereas a necessary being must exist. Since something cannot be created from nothing, there must be at least one necessary being (i.e., a being that has always existed), which is God. Fourth, Aquinas offers a proof from the degrees of perfection. When something has a characteristic, it has this characteristic to a certain degree (e.g., beauty, intelligence).²⁶⁷ There must be something that has the maximum amount of this characteristic, from which lesser degrees of the characteristic are derived. There must therefore be something with the maximum degree of being, from which all others of lesser being are caused. This something is God. Fifth and finally, Aquinas offers a proof from governance of the universe.

This is essentially an argument from design, which is addressed in its own section below.

The remainder of this section will focus on the causality proof for the existence of God. Although presented by both Aristotle and Aquinas, it was more formally developed by Muslim theologians in the middle ages in what is known as the kalam cosmological argument:

Kalam Cosmological Argument

P1. Whatever begins to exist must have a cause.

P2. The universe began to exist.

C1. Therefore, the universe must have a cause.

C2. The cause of the universe is God.

P1 is rarely challenged. Some incorrectly think that quantum physics allows particles to be created out of nothing, but this is a misunderstanding of a universe permeated by quantum and electromagnetic fields. Therefore, the kalam cosmological argument sinks or swims based on P2. This is an apologetic gift since nearly all cosmological scientists agree that the universe had a beginning. Stephen Hawking writes:

All the evidence seems to indicate, that the universe has not existed forever, but that it had a beginning, about 15 billion years ago ... The Second Law [of Thermodynamics] states that disorder always increases with time ... it indicates that there must have been a beginning. Otherwise, the universe would be in a state of complete disorder by now, and everything would be at the same temperature. In an infinite and everlasting universe, every line of sight would end on the surface of a star. This would mean that the night sky would have been as bright as the surface of the Sun. The only way of avoiding this problem would be if, for some reason, the stars did not shine before a certain time ... the universe, and time itself, had a beginning in the Big Bang, about 15 billion years ago.²⁶⁸

And so, the best scientific evidence agrees with the Bible in that the universe had a beginning and therefore must have a cause. This cause does not necessarily have to be omnipotent, just powerful enough to create the universe. However, the fact that this cause exists outside of space and time and exercised its power in an amazing creative act is fully consistent with the Christian God.

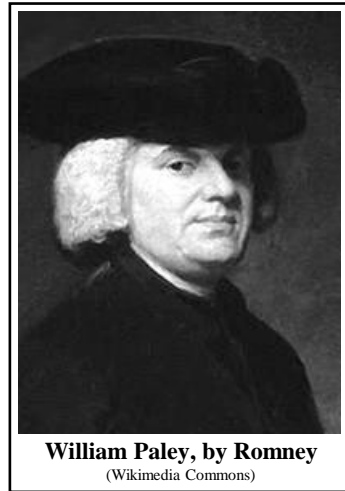
Design Arguments - General

Design arguments for the existence of God are not logical deductions but inferences based on observation. Consider, for example, you are walking through a field and come across a pocket watch. You will automatically

assume that the watch had an intelligent designer and maker due to the distinct characteristics of the watch as compared to things that arise from natural processes. William Paley famously makes this argument in his *Natural Theology*:

But suppose I had found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place ... the inference, we think, is inevitable: that the watch must have had a maker; that there must have existed, at some time, and in some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer; who comprehended its construction and designed its use.²⁶⁹

This conclusion that the watch had an intelligent designer seems like common sense. But a rigorous empirical test for intelligent design exists and considers an object in terms of contingency, complexity, and specificity.²⁷⁰ An object is contingent if its existence cannot fully be explained by natural laws. An object is complex to the extent that it is unlikely to have come about by random chance. An object has specificity if the pattern of contingent and complex factors must have been specified ahead of time. An object that has contingency, complexity, and specificity is said to have “specified complexity” and can be reasonably inferred to have an intelligent designer.



Consider the pocket watch example. We know of no natural laws that would result in a pocket watch being created without the help of an intelligent designer. The pocket watch is therefore contingent. The pocket watch is also highly intricate, consisting of finely calibrated gears, springs, and other mechanisms that are extremely unlikely to have been created due to random chance. The pocket watch is therefore complex. Finally, all of the elements of the pocket watch work together to keep accurate time, which is a goal that must have been specified before it was designed. The pocket watch therefore has specified complexity and can reasonably be inferred to have an intelligent designer.

Does the universe have specified complexity? This question can be examined on both the macro scale of galaxies and the micro scale of biological cells. The following sections will look at the macro design argument of cosmological fine tuning and the micro design argument of irreducible complexity.

Design Arguments - Cosmological Fine Tuning

This section will address whether the macro-universe as we scientifically understand it is best explained by an intelligent designer. As such, it will contain some scientific material that may be obscure to some without a scientific background. But a detailed scientific understanding of all aspect of cosmological fine tuning is not necessary for its use in Christian apologetics, especially since apologetic engagement will rarely involve scientific specialists. Furthermore, the science behind fine tuning is so compelling that simply making this argument to scientific specialists can be very effective even if their understanding of the material is much broader and deeper than yours. Walter Bradley (a PhD science professor) writes:

One of the remarkable discoveries of the past twenty years is that a functional universe suitable for complex, conscious life requires that the many universal constants in nature must be very nearly what we now know them to be ... scientists now know that relatively small changes in any of the universal constants produce a dramatically different universe that is not hospitable to life of any imaginable type.²⁷¹

The universe as we know it is scientifically understood based on fundamental laws of nature, fundamental constants that appear in these laws, and the initial conditions of the universe at the time of the “big bang.” Although the fundamental laws of nature are beautiful to mathematicians and scientists and can be used as a design argument for an intelligent creator, they are ultimately explanations of observed data and will therefore not be further discussed here as they require higher mathematics. It is, however, sufficient and effective to base cosmological fine-tuning arguments on fundamental constants and initial conditions.

An important initial condition of the universe is its initial expansion rate. If expansion was just slightly faster, the universe would have expanded so fast that it would have been effectively empty before planets capable of sustaining life could have formed. If expansion was just slightly slower, the universe would have collapsed upon itself before planets capable of sustaining life could have formed. Stephen Hawking writes:

If the rate of expansion one second after the big bang had been smaller by even one part in a hundred thousand million, million, the universe would have recollapsed before it ever reached its present size. On the other hand, if the expansion rate at one second had been larger by the same amount, the universe would have expanded so much that it would be effectively empty now.²⁷²

Now consider the strength of the four fundamental forces of nature: gravity, electromagnetism, the weak nuclear force, and the strong nuclear force. If the force of gravity were changed by one part in ten thousand

billion billion billion, a planet that could support intelligent life could not have formed. If the electromagnetic force were slightly stronger or weaker, atomic bonds could not form and therefore the complex molecules required for life could not exist. A change in the strength of the weak nuclear force by about 1 part in 10,000 relative to the strength of the strong force would have prevented supernova explosions which allow heavier elements to find their way to planets. Without these supernova explosions key heavy elements would be unavailable for life. If the strong nuclear force were ten percent weaker, the only element in the universe would be hydrogen. If the strong nuclear force were four percent stronger, the lifetime of stars would be too short for life to develop on associated planets. These examples only scratch the surface of cosmological fine-tuning. "There are literally hundreds of examples of fine tuning that seem to be essential to enable the universe to have that many features that are essential for complex, conscious life."²⁷³

In terms of design inference criteria, fine tuning is strong evidence that the universe (1) cannot fully be explained by natural laws; (2) is extremely unlikely to have occurred through random chance; and (3) must have been designed ahead of time in order for intelligent life to occur. The universe therefore has specified complexity and it is reasonable to infer that it has an intelligent designer.

Many atheist scientists are very uncomfortable with this conclusion but admit that the fine tuning of the universe could not be a result of random chance. They have therefore suggested a variety of alternatives to an intelligent designer. The most popular of these are the anthropic principle, God-in-the-gaps criticism, and multiverse theory.

The anthropic principle (also known as the observation selection effect) essentially says that we should not be surprised that we observe a universe that is fine-tuned for intelligent life because we would not be here to observe the universe if this were not the case. Although true, the anthropic principle is not an explanation. Consider jumping out of the tenth story of a building that is on fire and surviving the fall. You are only able to observe that you are still alive because you survived, but this does not explain why you were able to survive. The anthropic principle, if incorrectly applied, would have you believe that surviving the fall shouldn't be surprising since you are alive to observe your survival. But being alive does not serve any explanatory function whatsoever, as it also does not with regards to the fine tuning of the universe.

God-in-the-gaps is a general criticism of ascribing divine explanations to gaps in scientific knowledge. Accordingly, these divine explanations will inevitably be replaced as scientific knowledge advances. Randy Isaac describes this type of criticism as follows:

Arguments for the existence of God that are based on design often specify an aspect of our natural world that cannot be explained by our current understanding of the laws of nature. Such a gap of knowledge is construed as evidence for the existence of a supernatural being. Critics of this approach label these arguments as “God-of-the-gaps” fallacies that diminish the case for a Creator God as the gaps are filled in with increasing knowledge. Confident that all such gaps will someday be filled via the scientific method, many people reject design arguments for God. However, gaps of knowledge do exist in nature and the scientific community acknowledges that many cannot be filled, even in principle.²⁷⁴

With respect to fine tuning, God-in-the-gaps assumes that science will eventually develop a “theory of everything” that shows how all of the fine-tuning could not be otherwise. Although God-in-the-gaps criticism may have some validity with respect to specific phenomena, it somewhat misses the mark with regards to fine tuning. This is because the fine-tuning argument is based on what we know about the universe rather than what we do not know. Isaac writes:

Naturalistic knowledge leads us to infer the existence of the supernatural Creator not because of its inherent limitations but because of the very possibility of such knowledge. The exquisite beauty and elegance of the portion of the universe that we can explain, whether by simple observation or by Maxwell’s equations or Schrödinger’s equations, overwhelmingly display the power and glory of God to everyone.²⁷⁵

Highly educated physical scientists are generally not stupid. Most are fully aware of the weaknesses of the anthropic principle and God-in-the-gaps criticisms with regards to cosmological design arguments in favor of an intelligent designer. An increasing number who are committed to their atheism are therefore ascribing to a multiverse theory. Multiverse theory assumes that there are a large number of universes, potentially infinitely many, each with their own physical laws and fundamental parameter values. Although physical laws and fundamental parameter values conducive to intelligent life are extremely rare for a specific universe, it is much more likely to occur in one of many universes. But the multiverse theory is pure speculation, is unsupported by any evidence, and is not even capable of being supported by evidence. The multiverse theory is theoretically unverifiable, cannot make any testable predictions, and is therefore best described as a religious belief of secular atheism. Douglas Groothuis sums this situation up well, “The many universes multiverse theory is nothing more than metaphysical speculation, and very poor speculation at that ... It is invoked without logical basis simply to avoid a Designer.”²⁷⁶

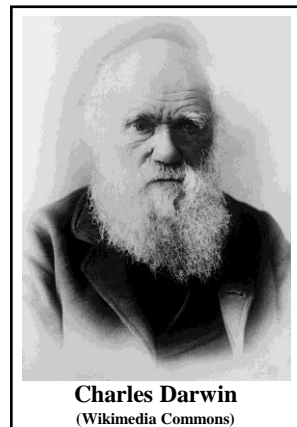
Design Arguments - Irreducible Complexity

A system is irreducibly complex when it consists of multiple parts where the removal of a part will prevent the system from functioning. This definition can refer to any system, but in apologetics is most often applied to biological molecular machines. An irreducibly complex biological system is strong evidence that random mutations, natural selection, and evolution cannot explain all of biology. Darwin himself admits as much, writing “If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down. But I can find out no such case.”²⁷⁷

Although irreducible complexity in molecular machines is, in itself, a neutral scientific concept, it challenges the Darwinist worldview that un-directed natural selection and evolution can explain all biological phenomena. To be clear, irreducible complexity does not claim that natural selection does not explain anything or even many things, just that it cannot explain things with irreducible complexity. This is a direct challenge to those of whom Darwinism is effectively a secular atheistic religion and is therefore viciously attack by this group. Douglas Groothuis explains how the Christian apologist must understand Darwinism:

But Darwinism is far more than a biological theory. It is integral to the secular worldview of the Western intellectual elite that wants to marginalize religious faith as having no claim on knowledge. The natural sciences and humanities are dominated by this naturalistic and secular worldview, and so they either ignore Christian claims or attack them forthrightly. Disputing Darwinism is, therefore, central in dislodging this secularist mindset that affects so much of elite intellectual life.²⁷⁸

Darwinism as the term is used today refers to the natural selection of characteristics that are conducive to survival and reproduction. If something has traits that help it survive and reproduce, these traits are more likely to be passed down to future generations as compared to traits that do not help it survive and reproduce. Different traits occur due to random mutations of the genetic code, leaving no room for God to play any part in the process. It should be emphasized that Charles Darwin had no knowledge of microbiology or DNA when formulating his original theory, but random genetic mutations are



now an integral part of evolutionary theory. This theory is technically called neo-Darwinian synthesis but will simply be referred to as Darwinism hereafter.

Before examining the challenge of irreducible complexity to Darwinism, it should be noted that Darwinism is an incomplete and unverified theory. Darwinism predicts that all evolutionary changes must happen gradually over long periods of time and that these small changes can eventually result in large aggregate changes and the corresponding origination of new species. The fossil record contradicts this prediction. Instead of species gradually appearing over long periods of time, the fossil record shows that living species are very stable for long periods of time, followed by the emergence of many new species over relatively short periods of time. This pattern of species formation is called punctuated equilibrium and is strong evidence against speciation due to the accumulation of small genetic changes over long periods of time. Furthermore, the origination of a new species has never been observed. Animal breeders have been modifying species by breeding desirable traits for thousands of years. With respect to dogs, this has resulted in everything from the chihuahua to the Great Dane. These two breeds are certainly very different, but they are still the same species.

The concept of irreducible complexity as it relates to molecular machines became a massive scientific debate after the 1996 publication of Michael Behe's book *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*.²⁷⁹ Behe is an American biochemist, professor of biochemistry at Lehigh University, and obtained his PhD in biochemistry from the University of Pennsylvania. Behe contends that irreducibly complex biological systems cannot result from random genetic mutations and natural selection, similar to the opinion of Darwin himself. Behe describes the cellular issue of irreducible complexity as follows:

So it appears that irreducibly complex biological systems would present a considerable obstacle to Darwinian evolution. The question then becomes, are there any irreducibly complex systems in the cell? Are there any irreducibly complex molecular machines? Yes, there are many. In *Darwin's Black Box*, I discussed several biochemical systems as examples of irreducible complexity: the eukaryotic cilium; the intracellular transport system; and more.²⁸⁰

The molecular machine example of irreducible complexity that has become best known to non-specialists is bacterial flagellum. This system is the equivalent of the propulsion system for a boat with an inboard motor. Bacterial flagellum allows cells to move through power generated by a rotary chemical motor similar to an electric motor, complete with a rotor and a stator. The stator is held in place at the bottom by an MS ring and at

the top by an LP ring. A rod extends through the LP ring into a bent hook, which spins with the motor and rod. A filament extends out of the hook, resulting in a screw drive geometry when the hook spins. Furthermore, the entire bacterial flagellum system has a complex control system that instructs the motor when to spin in the forward direction, when to spin in the reverse direction, and when to not spin. Figure 13-1 shows how the bacterial flagellum appears as a structure of proteins (left) and the corresponding functional schematic (right).

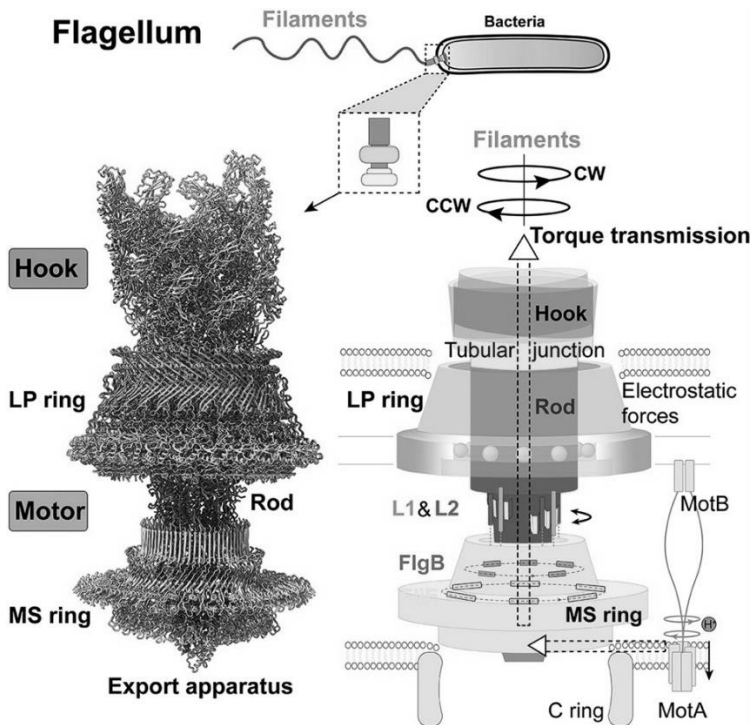


Figure 13-1. Bacterial Flagellum²⁸¹

The bacterial flagellum is irreducibly complex since it consists of many parts that would prevent the bacterial flagellum from functioning if not present. Without the stator and/or the rotor, there would be no power source. Without the MS and L rings, the stator would not stay in place when the rotor spins. Without the rod, power could not be transferred to the hook. Without the hook, screw-drive like propulsion could not occur.

And without the filament, converting the rotary motor power to linear propulsion would be impossible. As such, incremental changes due to natural selection cannot explain the existence of bacterial flagellum.

Some Darwinists have speculated that component parts in a system that is irreducibly complex could have evolved independently. For the bacterial flagellum, this would involve the independent evolution of the stator, the rotor, the rings, the rod, the hook, the filament, and the control system. Even if this incredibly unlikely scenario were true, it still does not solve the problem of irreducible complexity. This is because an intricate assembly process is required to integrate all of the parts into a working system, and this assembly process could not have evolved independently. Behe explains:

Studies have shown that 30-40 proteins are required to produce a functioning flagellum in the cell. About half of the proteins are components of the finished structure, while the others are necessary for the construction of the flagellum. In the absence of almost any of the proteins—in the absence of the parts that act as the propeller, drive shaft, hook, and so forth—no functioning flagellum is built ... The information for assembling a bacterial flagellum, however, (or, indeed, all other biomolecular machines) resides in the component proteins of the structure itself. Recent work shows that the assembly process for a flagellum is exceedingly elegant and intricate. If that assembly information is absent from the proteins, then no flagellum is produced. Thus, even if we had a hypothetical cell in which proteins homologous to all of the parts of the flagellum were present (perhaps performing jobs other than propulsion) but were missing the information on how to assemble themselves into a flagellum, we would still not get the structure. The problem of irreducibility would remain.²⁸²

There are currently no viable evolutionary explanations for irreducibly complex biological machines. But atheist scientists simply assume that such an explanation must exist since irreducible complexity points to an intelligent designer, which is dismissed as impossible by these people. Franklin Harold, a former professor of biochemistry and molecular biology sums up this position by writing, “We should reject, as a matter of principle, the substitution of intelligent design for the dialogue of chance and necessity; but we must concede that there are presently no detailed Darwinian accounts of the evolution of any biochemical system, only a variety of wishful speculations.”²⁸³ Note that the secular position is that intelligent design as an explanation of irreducible complexity should be rejected “as a matter of principle,” not because of any fact-based argument. Furthermore, recent cellular research has revealed numerous other issues beyond irreducible complexity that cannot be explained by Darwinian evolution. Jerry Bergman writes:

[P]rogress in the area of cell biology research in the last decade has made the problem much worse than Behe claimed. Examples include the revolutions in epigenetics,

protein folding, splicing variations that produce many gene transcripts from one gene, the ENCODE research project,²⁸⁴ revelations about the “guardian of the genome” (the p53 protein), the telomerase systems, chaperones, histone regulation, and even recent discoveries about mitosis and meiosis functions.²⁸⁵

And so, Darwinian evolution is a reasonable explanation for adaptive modification within species, but not for much more. Its popular representation by atheist scientists as an explanation for all biological phenomena is simply a secular religion being presented as science, which it is not. These same atheist scientists attack irreducible complexity and an intelligent designer as a possible explanation as Christianity invading science and a violation of church and state. Well, let the science lead where it may, and it has led to the strong conclusion that irreducibly complex biological systems cannot be explained by Darwinian evolution.

Moral Arguments

In my experience, ontological arguments are not very effective apologetic tools. Cosmological and design arguments are much better and tend to make people more open to the possibility that a personal creator God exists. Moral arguments seem to do the best in actually convincing people of a personal God that cares about the moral behavior of people. It was the moral argument that resulted in C.S. Lewis converting from atheism to deism (and later to Christianity). Lewis writes:

My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? . . . Of course I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too—for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my fancies. Thus in the very act of trying to prove that God did not exist—in other words, that the whole of reality was senseless—I found I was forced to assume that one part of reality—namely my idea of justice—was full of sense.²⁸⁶

The moral argument for the existence of God is presented in detail in the chapter on Christian ethics. The argument forces a choice between moral absolutism and moral relativism. If you believe that some actions are more moral than other actions, that some actions are always wrong, that some governments are more moral than other governments, and that moral improvement is possible, you must believe in an absolute moral law-giver that exists apart from the physical universe. Otherwise, cultures, societies, and even individuals can simply choose their own preferred system

of ethics. When presented with a proposed secular opinion related to morality, the skeptical response can always be, “Says who?”

Arthur Leff, an agnostic professor at Yale Law School famously incorporated this “cosmic sez who” response to show how absolute moral statements are impossible without an absolute moral lawgiver. Leff writes:

Napalming babies is bad.
 Starving the poor is wicked.
 Buying and selling each other is depraved.
 Those who stood up and died resisting Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Idi Amin, and Pol Pot—and General Custer too—have earned salvation.
 Those who acquiesced deserve to be damned.
 There is in the world such a thing as evil.
 [All together now:] Sez who?
 God help us.²⁸⁷

And so, logic dictates that a person must either view seeming atrocities a matter of opinion or concede that there is an answer to the cosmic sez who: a personal God who sets all moral standards and cares about our moral behavior. This is not proof for the existence of God, but simply forces a choice. From an apologetic perspective this is a good thing because people are generally more open to possibilities when presented with a choice when compared to “you must believe this because of this proof.”

The remainder of this section will focus on apologetic responses to the most common objections to the moral argument for the existence of God. It will not focus on moral relativism, because this is a logical choice (although one in which most people will find unsettling). Rather, it will discuss divine arbitrariness, atheistic moral realism, and pantheism.

The objection of divine arbitrariness is that God could make any moral code he wants, such as murder and torture of the innocent being moral goods. This objection was famously presented in Plato’s dialogue *Euthyphro*. In this dialogue, Socrates is conversing with Euthyphro on the definition of piety (Socrates had been charged with the crime of impiety). Euthyphro offers several definitions of piety including the following: “What all the gods love is pious, and what they all hate is impious.” Socrates argues that the gods all love something because it is pious, not the other way around. Otherwise the gods (or God) could arbitrarily make anything pious or impious. This objection is generally correct, but not specifically applicable to the Christian God. The Christian God is not arbitrary but consists of the perfect embodiment of divine attributes such as love, justice, and mercy. God cannot act contrary to His nature. Therefore, the moral code is necessarily in accordance with the divine conception of love, justice, mercy, and any other relevant divine attributes.

Another objection is that absolute moral standards can exist in a materialistic universe without the need for a divine lawgiver. This is called atheistic moral realism (AMR). AMR holds that real morals exist as part of the physical universe and therefore those who do not believe in God do not have to resort to moral relativism. Advocates of AMR typically feel that there is little evidence for a moral God but a significant amount of evidence for objective moral values. Moral values are similar to mathematics, simply true due to the nature of reality. Just as the sum of the interior angles of a triangle are necessarily equal to two right angles, torturing innocent people is necessarily immoral.

AMR is most effectively countered by arguing for the existence of a moral God. After all, the job of apologetics is to advocate for Christianity, and nobody will consider Christianity a viable option if they are convinced that there is not God. But there are also some philosophical arguments against AMR. First, there is no objective criteria for AMR morality and so AMR adherents can still choose any moral system that they want, making it functionally equivalent to moral relativism. Second, there is no reason why an objective moral system would apply to humans if humans are merely an accidental result of impersonal physical processes. Last, even if it is assumed that certain objective morals exist apart from God, there is no reason why a person should adhere to them rather than ignore them.

The last major objection to the moral argument for God's existence is pantheism, where all of the universe is part of God and God is beyond good and evil. For the pantheist, something that seems immoral or evil from a human perspective would not if understood from God's perspective. This is the flip side of materialism. There is no room for God in materialism and therefore no room for moral realism. With pantheism, everything is God and therefore everything is moral, even if we cannot recognize it. But the practical result is the same: an inability to make moral judgements, which is a bridge too far for most. Some forms of pantheism address this through the doctrine of karma, where one is resurrected based on how moral one has been in past lives. But since everything is moral, karma requires two levels of reality, a higher level that is beyond good and evil, and a lower level where a distinction is made between good and evil. But this distinction is not representative of the highest truth. Needless to say, the apologetic weak point in pantheism is the reliance of karma on living a moral life when the highest truth does not make moral distinctions. A specific form of pantheism (Advaita Vedanta Hinduism) is discussed in its own section below.

Example Apologetic Dialogue with an Agnostic

- Apologist: What are your opinions about God?
- Agnostic: I am not sure whether God exists or not.
- Apologist: Do you think that it matters?
- Agnostic: Not really. If it really mattered whether God exists or not it would probably be more obvious.
- Apologist: Do you think that people who don't believe in God can be good people?
- Agnostic: Of course. There are a lot of agnostics and atheist who are much better people than many religious people that I know.
- Apologist: Do you consider these people good because they tend to make good moral choices and try to live a moral life?
- Agnostic: For the most part. These people are genuinely kind, unselfish, and willing to help others in need.
- Apologist: So you think that things like being kind, unselfish and helpful to others are moral goods?
- Agnostic: Yes. I think that most people do as well.
- Apologist: What about people who do not believe that these are moral goods?
- Agnostic: Such as who?
- Apologist: Have you heard of Friedrich Nietzsche?
- Agnostic: Yes, wasn't he a philosopher?
- Apologist: He was a German philosopher who believed that morality consists of the strong dominating the weak, and that strong people having compassion for weak people is evil.
- Agnostic: Hmmm. I don't think that a lot of people would agree with that.
- Apologist: But who is to say that your view of morality is correct, and that Nietzsche's is incorrect?
- Agnostic: I think that society as a whole gets to decide.
- Apologist: So if a majority of people believe that torturing babies for fun is moral, does that make torturing babies moral?
- Agnostic: I wouldn't go that far.
- Apologist: Who decides whether torturing babies is moral or not if it is not society?
- Agnostic: I guess it must be human instinct or something. Normal people have evolved an inner sense of right and wrong.
- Apologist: But what if someone says that their inner sense is right and your inner sense is wrong? Aren't we back to morality being decided by society as a whole?
- Agnostic: I suppose so.

- Apologist: But if society decides what is moral or not, absolute morality cannot exist, some acts cannot be truly more moral than other acts, and true moral improvement is not possible.
- Agnostic: That seems to be the logical conclusion.
- Apologist: Are you comfortable with this conclusion, that torturing babies would be moral if society says so?
- Agnostic: That doesn't seem right to me.
- Apologist: It doesn't seem right to me either. For absolute moral standards to exist, there needs to be a source of absolute moral standards. There is an atheist Yale Law professor named Arthur Leff. He says that any proposed moral rule can simply be responded to by saying "Sez who?" He calls this the cosmic sez who. Unless you can answer the cosmic sez who, morality is just a matter of opinion. For example, one might say to him, "Torturing babies is wrong." He would simply answer, "Sez who."
- Agnostic: And he is comfortable with this?
- Apologist: Not really, but this is what is logically required if one is an atheist. People who believe in God have an answer to the cosmic "sez who." It is God who sets absolute moral standards. But if you don't believe in God, absolute moral standards cannot exist.

13.2 The Problem of Evil

Perhaps the strongest argument against the existence of God is the problem of evil, popularized by John Mackie in his 1955 article "Evil and Omnipotence."²⁸⁸ The logical formulation of the problem of evil states that an all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful God is inconsistent with the presence of evil in the world. The evidential formulation of the problem of evil identifies the incompatibility of an all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful God with pointless worldly suffering.²⁸⁹ The logical formulation of the problem of evil is based on the following two premises and single conclusion:

Logical Formulation

- P1: If an omnipotent, omnibenevolent and omniscient god exists, then evil does not.
- P2: There is evil in the world.

C1: Therefore, an omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient god does not exist.

There is also an evidential formulation of the problem of evil based on the existence of unnecessary suffering in the world. This version was developed by William Rowe as an argument for atheism.²⁹⁰ The evidential formulation of the problem of evil (the Rowe version) is similarly based on two premises and single conclusion:

Evidential Formulation

- P1: There exist instances of intense suffering that an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
- P2: An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
- C1: Therefore, there does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.

The problem of evil counters several arguments for the existence of God, but primarily the ontological argument. As discussed previously, the ontological argument argues for the existence of a God defined as a being than which no greater can be conceived. This infinite greatness necessarily requires God to be all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful, which constitutes the basis for the problem of evil. This section will offer several apologetic responses to the problem of evil, but the logical dilemma remains. If God hates evil and unnecessary suffering, and has the power to eliminate both, why would He not do so? This is precisely the struggle that Job had in trying to understand his trials and sufferings. God does not explain himself, but simply chides Job for questioning God's sovereignty.

Who is this who darkens the divine plan by words without knowledge? Now tighten the belt on your waist like a man, And I shall ask you, and you inform Me! Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me if you have understanding. (Job 38: 2-4).

God's point is noted, but it does not provide an apologetic answer to the problem of evil. Philosophically, this view is called compatibilism, where it is simply assumed that the presence of evil and suffering in the world is somehow compatible with a God that is all-good and all-powerful. Compatibilism is the preferred position of Reformed theologians and is summarized in the Westminster Confession as follows:

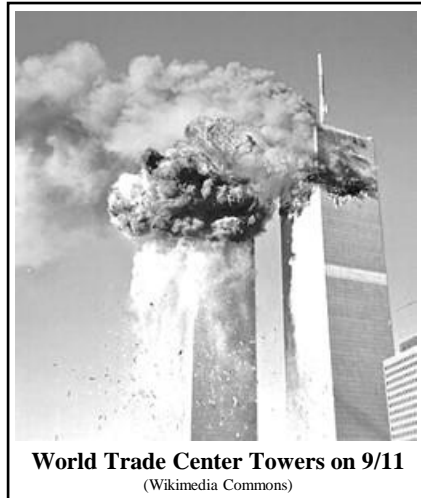
God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeable ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions; yet has He not decreed anything because He foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.²⁹¹

Compatibilism is preferred by Reformed theologians since they do not believe in libertarian free will (which is discussed below). They further believe that the problem of evil and the origin of evil is a mystery beyond human understanding (like non-libertarian free will). Jordan Steffaniak summarizes, “Humanity does not know the origin of evil or how it works exactly because God has chosen to conceal it for our good.”²⁹²

A person that is questioning the existence of God due to the problem of evil will not be comforted by telling them to trust in God’s sovereignty. As Douglas Groothuis honestly observes, “Evil in the world *is* a possible defeater to theism and Christian theism; it is a *prima facie* problem.”²⁹³ It is typically more effective for an apologetic approach to offer a positive argument that attempts to solve the problem of evil. Such an argument is called a theodicy. The most common theological solutions to the problem of evil are free will theodicy, soul-building theodicy, and greater good theodicy. Each of these is now discussed.

Perhaps the most common Christian explanation for the problem of evil is that people have free will in the libertarian sense. If people are free to choose good, they must also be free to choose evil. Otherwise they are not truly free. If people were created to only choose good, they become akin to God’s puppets and are not true moral agents. C.S. Lewis writes:

God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right. Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong; I cannot. If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that



makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata—of creatures that worked like machines—would hardly be worth creating. The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other in an ecstasy of love and delight.²⁹⁴

Free will theodicy understands that evil due to human choices is the responsibility of humans and not God. However, the problem of natural evil and unnecessary suffering due to non-human causes remains. As such, many prefer a soul-building theodicy to a free will theodicy. A soul-building theodicy includes the concept of evil due to free choices, but also holds that pain and suffering, including pain and suffering due to non-human causes, are necessary for moral development. C.S. Lewis also explored this aspect of the problem of evil. He writes:

We are perplexed to see misfortune falling upon decent, inoffensive, worthy people—on capable, hardworking mothers of families or diligent, thrifty, little trades-people, on those who have worked so hard, and so honestly, for their modest stock of happiness and now seem to be entering on the enjoyment fit with the fullest right ... God, who made these deserving people, may really be right when He thinks that their modest prosperity and the happiness of their children are not enough to make them blessed: that all this must fall from them in the end, and that if they have not learned to know Him they will be wretched. And therefore He troubles them, warning them in advance of an insufficiency that one day they will have to discover. The life to themselves and their families stands between them and the recognition of their need; He makes that life less sweet to them.²⁹⁵

Soul-building theodicy takes the position that God created this world so that people could develop morally through a certain amount of hardship. This world can therefore be thought of as the best possible world as it was specifically designed for God's purpose and does this in the best possible way. Irenaeus was an early advocate that this world must be the best possible world. Soul-building theodicy in this form is therefore referred to as Irenaean theodicy.

There is much merit to soul-building theodicy. Erik Wielenberg writes, "I think that the soul-making theodicy is among the more promising theodicies available, and that Lewis's version of that theodicy deserves the attention of contemporary philosophers."²⁹⁶ However, many feel that soul-building theodicy unacceptably makes God the author of evil, at least with respect to naturally-caused pain and suffering. Attempts to avoid this are typically called greater good theodicies.

A greater good theodicy assumes that a certain amount of evil and suffering are necessary so that certain goods can be realized that would not otherwise be possible. Free will can be framed in this context. Free will allows for evil but results in the greater good of people being responsible moral agents. Natural evil can also be explained as allowing for the greater

good of moral development. Paul essentially makes a greater good theodicy statement when he writes, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28).

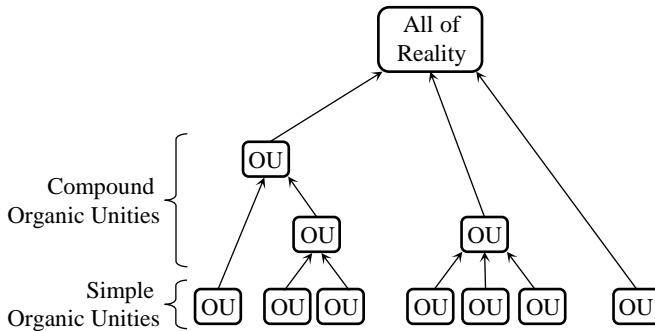


Figure 13-2. An Example Hierarchy of Organic Unities

A compelling version of greater good theodicy is called organic unities. The basic principle is that the value of a whole is not determined by the sum of the value of its parts. Therefore, it is possible for an organic unity to be good while having evil parts that are necessary. Graham Floyd writes, “Organic unities are wholes (objects or states of affairs) that have good, bad, or indifferent valued parts. These parts contribute to the existence of the whole but do not determine the value of the whole ... therefore, an organic whole may have bad or indifferent parts but still possess the power of goodness.”²⁹⁷ An example of a possible organic unity is farming, where plants must be killed in order for food to be produced.

Simple organic unities can be used as parts to form compound organic unities. Combinations of simple and compound organic unities can then form higher order organic unities. In this way, each individual organic unity does not necessarily have to be good if it is part of a higher order organic utility that is good. This hierarchy of organic unities ends with the whole of all reality, which includes both physical reality and spiritual reality. This hierarchical structure of organic unities is shown in Figure 13-2.

Floyd makes a compelling argument that organic unities prevent atheists from arguing that God cannot exist from both the logical and evidential formulations of the problem of evil. This is because to do so, the atheist must assume what he is trying to prove:

In order to justify his atheism, the atheist must appeal to the existence of gratuitous and pointless evil. The only gratuitous and pointless evil possible given the argument from organic unities is the highest-level organic unity, and the atheist's understanding of the highest-level organic unity already implies the truth of atheism. The argument is circular and unusable.²⁹⁸

Atheists might disagree, but this type of argument will probably be effective in addressing the problem of evil with anyone other than atheist philosophy professors. A good apologetic approach is to begin with free will theodicy, which is easy to understand. Soul building theodicy can be used if the problem of natural evil arises. For those still skeptical, the complexities of greater good theodicy and organic unities may be required.

Example Apologetic Dialogue with an Atheist about the Problem of Evil

Apologist: What are your opinions about God?

Atheist: I am an atheist and have been for a long time.

Apologist: What made you decide to be an atheist?

Atheist: There is just so much evil and unnecessary suffering in the world. I can't believe that God, if He existed, would allow such things to happen.

Apologist: It seems as if you have been very thoughtful. This is called the problem of evil. How can evil exist if God is all-good, all knowing, and all powerful.

Atheist: Precisely. I see starving children in Africa, innocent lives lost in wars, and a host of other evils. If God existed, He does not seem to be a God that I would want to worship.

Apologist: Do you think that some of the evil in the world is due to bad people doing evil things?

Atheist: Certainly this is true. It happens all the time. But natural evil is also prevalent that has nothing to do with people doing evil things.

Apologist: How would you explain these natural evils?

Atheist: They are just a result of the universe and its physical laws.

Apologist: Are people's choices also just a result of the universe and its physical laws? For example, if I ask you to hold up either your right hand or your left hand, do you have a genuine choice in the matter?

Atheist: It certainly seems as if I do.

Apologist: Could you have a genuine choice if everything that happens is due to physical laws? That is, could anything that happens

in the universe, including moral choices, have been otherwise?

Atheist: If the universe is all that exists, I guess that free will must be an illusion.

Apologist: You are not alone in making that observation. The Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza also came to this conclusion. But if people can't make true moral choices, morality is also an illusion. Both Hitler and Mother Theresa could not have lived their lives in any other way. Do you believe that Hitler is morally accountable for what He did?

Atheist: I see where you are going. If I say yes, then Hitler must have been able to make true choices. And if he could make true choices, these choices couldn't have been determined strictly by the physical laws of the universe.

Apologist: Precisely. Something else besides the physical universe must exist if people are to be morally accountable for their actions. This is the reason why C.S. Lewis switched from being an atheist to a deist and then to a Christian. He explains this very well in his book *Mere Christianity*. Would you like to read it? I can loan you a copy.

13.3 Jesus of Nazareth

A surprising number of people are under the impression that a historical person named Jesus of Nazareth did not exist. These impressions are demonstrably false. All serious historians view it as a historical fact that a Jewish man named Jesus of Nazareth did exist in the Herodian Kingdom of Judea in the early 1st century. Many specific events that are recorded in the NT are subject to historical debate, but there is almost unanimous agreement among historians that (1) Jesus of Nazareth existed; (2) that He was baptized by John the Baptist; and (3) that He was crucified by order of Pontius Pilate, who was the Roman Prefect of Judea from 26–36. Bart Ehrman, a non-Christian NT professor and historian writes:

[T]here are several points on which virtually all scholars of antiquity agree. Jesus was a Jewish man, known to be a preacher and teacher, who was crucified (a Roman form of execution) in Jerusalem during the reign of the Roman emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea. Even though this is the view of nearly every trained scholar on the planet, it is not the view of a group of writers who are usually labeled, and often label themselves, mythicists.²⁹⁹

Of course, the existence of Jesus is affirmed in all of the books of the NT. This includes the following authors:

- **The Four Authors of the Gospels.** Although anonymous, there is strong evidence that the Gospels were written by two of Jesus's apostles (Matthew and John); a missionary companion to Paul (Luke); and a missionary companion to Paul, Barnabas, and Peter (Mark). Furthermore, these Gospels are most likely based on at least five sources containing independent material.³⁰⁰
- **Paul.** Paul assumes the life of Jesus in his many Epistles. Paul is also known to have interacted closely with Jesus's apostles during the early days of Christian church formation.
- **James.** James was likely the brother of Jesus and was an important early church leader.
- **Peter.** Peter was an apostle of Jesus.
- **Jude.** Jude was a brother of James, and therefore likely a brother of Jesus as well.

There is virtually no scenario considering the above attestations where Jesus could not have actually existed. However, some will still dismiss any biblical evidence that Jesus existed. This poses no problem, as there are many other non-biblical sources that affirm the existence of Jesus. This includes references to Jesus from both the Jewish 1st century historian Flavius Josephus and Roman historian Tacitus (who was also a senator).

Flavius Josephus (c.37–c.100) was a Jewish historian who was born into a Jewish family, was a military general of Jewish forces, and later defected to the Roman side and was granted Roman citizenship. His most important historical writings are *The Jewish War* (c.75) and *Antiquities of the Jews* (c.94). These works describe many historical figures of the NT including Pontius Pilate, Herod the Great, John the Baptist, James (brother of Jesus), and, of course, Jesus of Nazareth. In *Antiquities*, Josephus recounts the unlawful execution of James. Josephus refers to James as the brother of Jesus, the man referred to as the Messiah. Other passages in *Antiquities*, refer to Jesus as a man who did surprising deeds and was crucified by Pilot,



Flavius Josephus, by Whiston
(Wikimedia Commons)

but some scholars believe that these passages are not original.

Publius Cornelius Tacitus (c.56 – c.120) was a Roman senator but is best known as one of the greatest Roman historians. His two major historical works are *Annals*, and *Histories*. These two works primarily cover the period from the death of Augustus in 14 to the death of Domitian in 96. In *Annals*, Tacitus recounts the great fire of Rome in 64. He describes how Nero (1) falsely blamed Christians for the burning; and (2) that that founder of Christianity, *Christus*, was put to death by Pontius Pilate who Tacitus identifies as the procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius. When recording historical events, Tacitus normally noted when he considered any of his sources unreliable. No such notes are present in passages that relate to Christ and Christians.

Although the historical writings of Josephus and Tacitus are the most important in terms of non-Biblical accounts of the life of Jesus, there are many more. Craig Blomberg writes:

A dozen or more references to Jesus appear in non-Christian Jewish, Greek, and Roman sources in the earliest centuries ... These references appear in ... several portions of the Talmud ... the Greek writers Lucian of Samosata and Mara bar Serapion, and Roman historians Thallus, Tacitus, Pliny, and Suetonius ... The Talmud repeatedly acknowledges that Jesus worked miracles but refers to him as one who “practiced magic and led Israel astray.”³⁰¹

In terms of apologetics, it is straightforward to assert the existence of Jesus of Nazareth as a historical fact, at least as a man who was baptized by John the Baptist and was crucified by Pontius Pilate. This may come as a surprise to some, who simply assume that the whole of Christianity is based on a myth. But the realization that Jesus actually existed may open their minds to the possibility that Jesus, if He existed, may have been more than just a man.

Example Apologetic Dialogue With a Historical Jesus Denier (HJD)

Apologist: Do you belong to a church?

HJD: Definitely not. I don't buy into the Christian myth.

Apologist: What do you mean?

HJD: The stories in the Bible are basically made-up stories with no basis in historical fact.

Apologist: Do you mean that Jesus never existed as a real person?

HJD: Yes. That and all of the other stories in the Bible.

Apologist: Does this include letters that were written to early churches that refer to the life of Jesus, including letters from some of his followers and a letter from his brother?

HJD: I don't think that anything in the Bible can be trusted.

Apologist: What about non-Christian historians in the first century. Would they have credibility if they referred to a man named Jesus?

HJD: I would be surprised if this were the case but would keep an open mind.

Apologist: I appreciate that. There are two names that come to mind. There was a first-century Jewish historian named Josephus who wrote historical works that mention many of the people in the Bible including Jesus, Jesus's brother James, Pontius Pilate, Herod the Great, and John the Baptist. There was also a first-century Roman historian named Tacitus who wrote a historical work that identifies Jesus as the founder of Christianity and that he was executed by Pontius Pilate. I can get you these sources if you are interested.

HJD: I didn't realize this.

Apologist: Those are the major historians, but Jesus is also referred to many times in the Talmud, which is an important collection of Jewish writings. Needless to say, Jesus is not presented very favorably in the Talmud. Jesus is also mentioned by several other Roman historians such as Thallus, Pliny, and Suetonius.

HJD: Do you know what modern historians think about all of this?

Apologist: I don't know about everybody, but there is an agnostic professor of religious studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill named Bart Ehrman. He says that virtually all historical scholars agree that Jesus was a Jewish preacher and teacher who was crucified by Pontius Pilate during the reign of the Roman emperor Tiberius.

13.4 Miracles

Most of the miracle accounts in the Bible are not theologically necessary. That is, theological propositions rarely (if ever) rely on specific miracle accounts being literally true. Of course, those who believe that the Bible is inerrant will believe that the miracles accounts are literally true, and those who believe that the Bible is infallible will believe that there is much truth to most of the miracle accounts. But there are many non-Christians who discount the possibility of any miraculous events and view the miracle

accounts in the Bible as evidence that the Bible cannot be trusted as it contains (in their minds) much obvious fiction.

From an apologetic perspective, defending all of the miracle accounts in the Bible is of minor importance. The profound exception is the miracle account of the Resurrection, which is absolutely core to all of Christianity and all of Christian theology. Paul writes:

[I]f Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, your faith also is in vain. Moreover, we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ ... and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ only in this life, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Cor 15:14-19)

But for a person to believe in the Resurrection of Christ, they would have to first believe that miracles are possible, at least in theory. The reader is probably aware that many people are not open to this possibility. They believe that any explanation for something incredible, no matter how improbable, is more likely than a miraculous explanation, which they deem impossible. Nevertheless, some will have an open mind about miracles and the apologist should be able to address the issue. This section therefore makes the case that (1) miracles are possible; (2) the claims of miracles in the NT are credible (regardless of whether they actually occurred); and (3) there is strong evidence that actual miracles have occurred, even in recent times.

Possibility of Miracles

The possibility of miracles is a nuanced philosophical topic that, if approached in this way, will generally be unhelpful for apologetics. This said, a very brief background of the philosophy of miracles will be covered, as this knowledge provides credibility to the apologist even if the philosophical arguments are not used.

Miracles were first given serious philosophical consideration by Thomas Aquinas. According to Aquinas, all things have the inherent potential to receive some perfection or to perform some action. This is referred to as potency. A particular type of potency is for something to respond to a divine decree, called obediential potency. Ignacio Silva writes, "This potency is rooted in the primordial order through which creatures depend upon their creator. Ultimately, given that God has the power to do everything that does not imply a contradiction, and that nothing prevents there being an obediential potency in creatures, God can command this

potency to be actualized by His active power without any natural created means.”³⁰² In other words, there is nothing philosophically problematic with God performing miracles.

Aquinas developed his philosophy of miracles before a time where the world was largely understood as following physical laws of nature. A number of more recent philosophers have therefore modified the philosophy of Aquinas to reflect that miracles require a temporary suspension of these physical laws. These philosophers are called neo-Thomists. For example, Édouard Hugon asserts that physical laws are contingent upon the concurrence of God.³⁰³ Since physical laws work under God’s concurrent causation, they can temporarily be suspended by God, allowing miracles to occur.

The most prominent philosopher arguing against miracles was the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776). Hume argues that the only way to judge between two or more explanations is by weighing the evidence. Hume goes on to argue that since miracles are by definition single occurrences, the evidence in favor of natural explanations will always outweigh the evidence in favor of miraculous explanations. According to Hume, it will always be more likely that the report of a miracle is a result of misinterpretation, deception, or some other non-miraculous phenomenon.³⁰⁴

The primary criticism of Hume’s argument is that it assumes that miracles are highly improbable. C.S. Lewis explains, “Unfortunately we know the experience against [miracles] to be uniform only if we know that all the reports of them are false. And we can know all the reports to be false only if we know already that miracles have never occurred. In fact, we are arguing in a circle.”³⁰⁵

But miracles can typically be treated in a more simple way by the Christian apologist. An all-powerful God can perform miracles if He so desires. Therefore, the first step of the apologist with regards to miracles is to argue for the existence of an all-powerful God. This subject is treated in the first section of this chapter and will not be repeated here. But typically the opposing view to a God that can perform miracles is that (1) there is no God; and (2) all things happen in accordance with the physical laws of the universe. An apologetic response to this is that it is a self-defeating



**Jesus Walks on the Sea,
by Tissot**

(Wikimedia Commons)

viewpoint. John Haldane writes, “For if my mental processes are determined wholly by the motions of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true. They may be sound chemically, but that does not make them sound logically. And hence I have no reason for supposing my brain to be composed of atoms.”³⁰⁶

Since miracles require a temporary suspension of the physical laws of nature, it is worth exploring the most common ways that people understand these laws of nature.³⁰⁷ The first option is that they can be understood as simply descriptive. Observations have been made in the past and certain laws are consistent with these observations. The second option is to view the motion of atoms and sub-atomic particles as somewhat random. Individual particles behave randomly, but the law of averages allows for highly confident statistical predictions at a macroscopic level. There is room for miracles in both of these views.

A third option for understanding the physical laws of nature is that they are necessary truths like mathematics. This view typically precludes miracles since miracles would violate necessary truths, similar to a mathematical contradiction. However, these necessary truths are not necessarily inconsistent with miracles performed by a power unconstrained by normal physical laws. C.S. Lewis explains this through the example of a billiard ball. Physical laws can predict what a billiard ball will do when struck by another billiard ball. But if a person interferes with the billiard ball by manually stopping it, the prediction turns out to be wrong. No violation of physical laws occurred. The prediction simply did not account for external interference. In the same way, God can interfere in something, resulting in an outcome that would not have been predicted without this divine interference.

Biblical Miracle Accounts

There are some who dismiss all of the Gospel books as made up since they describe miraculous events. To these people, miracles are impossible and therefore nobody could honestly make such miracle claims. Craig Keener has made an extensive investigation of this topic, not whether miracles actually occur, but whether honest people make miracle claims similar to those found in the NT. Keener concludes the following:

[M]y primary argument, based on substantial evidence, is that historians should not dismiss the possibility of eyewitness information in the miracle accounts in the Gospels or Acts, since large numbers of eyewitnesses can and do offer miracle claims, many of them quite comparable in character to the early Christian accounts ... the kinds of miracle claims most frequently attested in the Gospels and Acts are also

attested by many eyewitnesses today. Whether any miracle claim represents genuine divine or supernatural activity is a separate question that must be addressed separately, but events such as the immediate recovery of many people after a significant spiritual experience are too well attested to question.³⁰⁸

There are well over fifty miraculous accounts in the NT, most related to healings and exorcisms. In addition, the author of the Gospel of John writes, “So then, many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book” (Jn 20:30). Some NT miracles apart from physical healings and exorcisms include the following:

- The virgin birth of Jesus (Mt 1:18-25; Lk 1:26-38);
- Jesus turns water into wine (Jn 2:1-11);
- Catching many fish (Lk 5:1-11);
- Widow’s son raised from the dead in Nain (Lk 7:11-17);
- Calming the storm (Mt 8:23-27; Mk 4:35-41; Lk 8:22-25);
- Jairus’s daughter raised from dead (Mt 9:18-25; Mk 5:22-43; Lk 8:41-56);
- Feeding of 5000 men (Mt 14:15-21; Mk 6:35-44; Lk 9:12-17; Jn 6:5-14);
- Walking on water (Mt 14:22-33; Mk 6:45-52; Jn 6:16-21);
- Feeding of 4000 men (Mt 15:29-39; Mk 8:1-10);
- Tribute money appears in mouth of fish (Mt 17:24-27);
- Lazarus raised from dead (Jn 11:1-44);
- Fig tree cursed and withered (Mt 21:18-22; Mk 11:12-25);
- Apostles freed from prison by angel (Acts 5:19; 12:7-11);
- Dorcas is restored to life (Acts 9:40);
- Earthquake releases Paul and Silas from prison (Acts 16:25-26);
- Eutychus restored to life (Acts 20:7-12); and
- Paul is unharmed by viper’s bite (Acts 28:1-6).

Based on the above list, it must be recognized that Keener’s observation of miracles claims that commonly happen in modern times does not cover the full scope of miracles in the NT (Keener *does* document claims of dead people coming back to life). Most evangelical and fundamentalist Christians believe in all of the NT miracle accounts including healings, exorcisms, and the other various miracles listed above. But many non-Christians will be highly skeptical, and the apologist should make it clear that belief in all of the NT miracles is not required to have saving faith in the Gospel message, nor is belief in all of the NT miracles essential or even relevant for the vast majority of theological topics.

Evidence of Miracles

And so, belief in a personal God is consistent with a belief in the possibility of miracles. God can perform miracles if he so chooses, but does this actually happen? Some believe that it would be unseemly for God to create the universe just as He wanted, only to have to meddle in it later on. C.S. Lewis writes:

He might work miracles. But would He? Many people of sincere piety feel that He would not. They think it unworthy of Him. It is petty and capricious tyrants who break their own laws: good and wise kings obey them. Only an incompetent workman will produce work which needs to be interfered with ... Looking up (like Lucifer in Meredith's sonnet) at the night sky, they feel it almost impious to suppose that God should sometimes unsay what He has once said with such magnificence. This feeling springs from deep and noble sources in the mind and must always be treated with respect. Yet it is, I believe, founded on an error.³⁰⁹

There are philosophical and aesthetical argument both as to why God may choose to perform miracles and why he may choose not to perform miracles. These arguments are not likely to be helpful in apologetics and will therefore not be addressed here. Much better is to make the case that verifiable miracles have occurred in recent history. Recall from the section on prayer that Craig Keener, after carefully investigating many hundreds of miracle claims, finds that some have no easy non-miraculous explanations (see p. 202). He summarizes these findings in a table, where he identifies 23 miracle accounts where supernatural explanations are much more plausible than natural explanations if supernatural explanations are not *a priori* ruled out.³¹⁰ Some of these are:

- Flint McGlaughlin and Robin Shields witnessed a blind man whose eyes were clouded with cataracts instantly healed, his eyes visibly changing. This is medically impossible, and the healing is verified by post-healing photographs;
- Professor Ayodeji Adewuya witnessed his baby son being restored to life through prayer after being dead for twenty minutes with no vital signs. There was no brain damage and the son now has a master's degree;
- Elaine Panelo was pronounced dead due to liver cancer. After being dead for two hours, she came back to life with the liver cancer immediately and permanently healed;
- Albert Bissouessou witnessed the raising of a child who had been dead for about eight hours;

- Douglas Norwood's wife regained the ability to walk after being paralyzed due to a severed spinal cord (this is medically impossible); and
- Stephen and Sheila Heneise witnessed a person with a congenital limp be healed as one leg visibly lengthened over several minutes.

These are some of the miracle accounts that describe phenomena most likely to be supernatural, but still largely rely on eyewitness testimony. Keener also recounts many extraordinary healings that are medically documented. Some of these are:

- Carl Cocherell had a severe ankle break, which was x-rayed and put in a cast. Carl heard a voice from the Lord saying that his ankle was not broken. The next day, more x-rays were taken showing no signs of either an ankle break, or even tissue indicating where the break had been. Keener has reviewed the before and after radiology reports for this healing.
- Melaina Marshall was diagnosed with osteopetrosis, with x-rays showing the resulting calcification of her bones. Melaina chose not to undergo treatment and had a prayer group pray over her. After that, Melaina never experienced any symptoms of osteopetrosis, and later x-rays showed no signs of calcification. There is no known medical cure for osteopetrosis.
- Onel was a twelve-year-old boy with broken and malformed bones in his feet. X-rays showed the lower bones in his feet becoming like sand. After prayer for healing, new x-rays showed the full formation of the foot bones with no deformity; and
- Dr. Chauncey Crandall, a distinguished cardiologist, personally witnessed the death of Jeff Marking from a heart attack in an emergency room and then coming back to life after being dead for more than 30 minutes. Crandall certified the death, and notes that Marking was obviously dead as his face, toes, and fingers had already turned black. Crandall left to return to his other patients but felt a strong compulsion from God to return. He returned, prayed over Marking, and instructed the emergency room doctor to shock Marking's heart one more time. Marking's heartbeat was instantly and completely restored, he suffered no brain damage, and his blackened extremities were ultimately restored.

Another very credible source for a large number of miraculous healings is the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes, a Roman Catholic shrine and healing bath in southern France. Millions of people pilgrimage to

Lourdes with the hopes of miraculous healings, and systems are in place to document these healings when they occur. Lourdes has an extensive medical organization that archives medical documents showing pre-healing conditions and post-healing conditions. They also have an extensive review process to determine whether an observed healing can be explained by known natural means or not. This process takes at least two years and is fully auditable by external parties. Although there are many more claimed cures, the Lourdes archives has about 1200 records of inexplicable cures for which there are systematic and orderly medical documentation such as x-rays, clinical reports, and doctor diagnosis certificates. There are also about an additional 4000 cases that are probably miraculous cures, but with somewhat incomplete records. Some examples of miraculous healings at Lourdes includes the following:³¹¹

- Charles McDonald was diagnosed with tuberculosis of the lungs and of his twelfth thoracic vertebrae with dozens of confirming x-rays. He was unable to walk for over a year. McDonald was taken from his home in Dublin to Lourdes on a stretcher, with multiple abscesses having to be dressed multiple times per day. After two immersions in the waters at Lourdes, McDonald regained the ability to walk. McDonalds' abscesses quickly healed, and follow-up medical examinations after his return home showed no traces of his former illness.
- Madame Augault was ill for twelve years with a fibroid tumor of the uterus that had grown to an enormous size and was startling in appearance. This tumor was externally obvious but also verified through x-rays. She journeyed to Lourdes on a mattress and was immersed in the healing waters. The very next day her abdomen was completely flat, with her waist diameter shrinking by seven inches. After a meticulous examination of all medical records, the president of the Lourdes Medical Bureau concluded that Augault's cure was instantaneous, astonishing to the many medical professionals who observed it, and that the cure cannot be attributed to natural processes.
- Lydia Brosse was a young woman who had suffered for years with intestinal tuberculosis and had undergone multiple surgeries. When she finally travelled to Lourdes, she had to lie on her stomach due to large abscesses extending down to both buttocks. She was submerged in the healing waters of Lourdes on two occasions with no healing evident. But on the train ride back, her abscesses completely healed. Brosse's surgeon, after examining her after her return, was

astonished. He did not believe that such quick healing from tuberculosis was possible by natural means.

From an apologetic perspective, the above miracle accounts should demonstrate that miraculous healing and reviving the dead are not only possible but have recently occurred based on credible accounts and testimony. Presenting some of these cases to a person skeptical of miracles can result in a more open mind with regards to biblical miracle accounts but is particularly important with regards to the resurrection of Jesus, which is discussed next.

Example Apologetic Dialogue with a Miracle Denier (MD)

Apologist: Do you believe that modern day miracles are possible?

MD: Definitely not.

Apologist: You seem quite sure. Can you explain some more?

MD: If miracles occur, there would be some solid evidence for at least some of them.

Apologist: So you are not denying that an all-powerful God could perform miracles if He felt the need?

MD: Not in principle. Maybe God can perform miracles but simply chooses not to interfere in the normal laws of nature.

Apologist: That is fair. Can I share with you a medical study that examined the impact of prayer on sick people?

MD: Sure... Sounds interesting.

Apologist: There is a man named William Braud who got his PhD in experimental psychology from the University of Iowa. His research area is what he calls remote mental influence. He did a well-known study on 400 patients with coronary disease.

MD: What was the study?

Apologist: The study randomly selected groups of about 200 and assigned remote prayer teams to members of one group and no prayer teams for the other. Both the patients and the physicians did not know which patients were assigned to prayer teams.

MD: What were the results?

Apologist: The prayed-for patients were five times less likely than control patients to require antibiotics and three times less likely to develop pulmonary edema.

MD: Were the results statistically significant?

- Apologist: Yes. These results statistically significant, which even skeptics of miracles have admitted. Another result was that fewer prayed-for control patients died, but this result was not statistically significant.
- MD: That is very interesting, but didn't you say that this guy's research area was remote mental influence. It doesn't necessarily mean that these results are miraculous.
- Apologist: They seem to be to me, but there are many other medically verified miraculous healings to individuals. These have been thoroughly research by a man named Craig Keener. He initially started to investigate claims of miracles, but some of the claims had no medical explanations, such as a crippled man's leg visibly growing to its appropriate length and cataracts visibly vanishing. I can loan you his book documenting this if you are interested.
- MD: Thanks, I would appreciate that.
- Apologist: The last example I will bring up are the healing pools in Lourdes, France. They have a full medical team that document medical evidence both before and after claimed healings. Claims go through a two-year process to determine whether there are any possible natural explanations. A few of the verified miracles include instant healings of tuberculosis and the overnight disappearance of cancerous tumors. I can also loan you these findings.
- MD: Wow. This all seems highly improbable, but I look forward to learning more about these supposed modern-day miracles.

13.5 The Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to Christianity and is a belief that all Christians must hold. This section presents a basic apologetic argument showing that the resurrection of Christ is the most plausible explanation for a variety of historical facts. There are many more detailed academic arguments for the Resurrection, but these are typically not necessary outside of scholarly debate. This section therefore largely follows the approach of Gary Habermas and Michael Licona in their book *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*. This approach uses four historical facts plus one additional element that is believed by most scholars. They call this the "4 + 1" approach and write:

Our objective will be to build a strong yet simple case for Jesus' resurrection on just a few facts. All four meet our "minimal facts approach" criteria. They are backed by so much evidence that nearly every scholar who studies the subject, even the rather skeptical ones, accepts them. A fifth fact will be added that enjoys acceptance by an impressive majority of scholars, though not by nearly all.³¹²

The four facts almost universally accepted by historians are (1) Jesus died by crucifixion; (2) Jesus's disciples believed that the resurrected Jesus physically appeared to them; (3) the apostle Paul underwent a profound conversion; and (4) James, the brother of Jesus, changed from a skeptic to a leader in the Christian movement. The fifth element that is held by most but not all historians is that Jesus's tomb was found empty. Each of these elements is now discussed in detail.

Jesus Died by Crucifixion

It was already discussed above how Jesus's crucifixion is documented in the first century by both the Jewish historian Flavius and the Roman historian Tacitus. Additional early non-Christian writings that refer to Jesus's resurrection include the following:

- The Greek satirist Lucian of Samosata does not refer to Jesus by name but refers to the leader of the Christians having been crucified;³¹³
- Mara bar Serapion, a Syriac Stoic philosopher, also does not mention Jesus by name or specifically the crucifixion, but does refer to the murder of the king of the Jews;³¹⁴
- The Talmud is more specific and writes that on the eve of the Passover feast, Yeshu was hanged. Yeshu is the Hebrew equivalent of Jesus and being hung on a tree was a common way to refer to being crucified.³¹⁵

Of course, all four Gospels also recount Jesus's death by crucifixion. From a historical perspective, these four books can be considered independent sources, as they were written before the NT as we know it was compiled. Clearly, there is very strong documentary evidence for the crucifixion of Jesus, which is why it is affirmed by almost all historians. Habermas and Licona summarize this position by quoting John Crosson, a highly skeptical NT scholar who does not even believe that the Jews were involved in the killing of Jesus. "That [Jesus] was crucified is as sure as anything historical can ever be."³¹⁶

Some skeptics acknowledge that Jesus was hung on a cross, but that He never actually died. This is not a credible position, as the Romans were experts in killing people by crucifixion. When the Roman soldiers discovered that Jesus was dead, they broke the legs of the two thieves to hasten their death (Jn 19:32). Furthermore, the soldiers pierced Jesus with a spear to make sure that He was dead. William Edwards explains:

Clearly, the weight of historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to his side was inflicted and supports the traditional view that the spear, thrust between his right ribs, probably perforated not only the right lung but also the pericardium and heart and thereby ensured his death. Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge.³¹⁷

The same article explains that death by crucifixion typically ranged from three hours to four days depending upon the severity of the scourging that occurred prior to being nailed to the cross. As Jesus was heavily scourged, it is not unusual that He died quickly. When Joseph of Arimathea came to ask Pilot for the dead body of Jesus for burial, Pilot conferred with guard to ensure that Jesus was, in fact, dead (Mt 15:42-45).

Jesus's Disciples Believed that the Resurrected Jesus Appeared to Them

There are two steps of argumentation to show that Jesus's disciples believed that the resurrected Jesus appeared to them. First, that they *claimed* that this happened. And second, that they actually *believed* that this happened. This section will begin with the issue of claims.

There are many post-resurrection appearances of Jesus in the Gospels and in Acts. He appears to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:10-18), Mary and other women (Mt 2:1-10); Peter (Lk 24:34); two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35); seven of the apostles (Jn 21:1-23); ten of the apostles (Lk 24:36-49); eleven of the apostles (Jn 20:24-31); all of the apostles (Mt 28:16-20); and again to all of the apostles (Acts 1:4-8). Clearly, the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus are an important part of the Gospels, but many skeptics discount the historical content of the Gospels outright. Therefore, the demonstration that Jesus's disciples claimed that the resurrected Jesus appeared to them typically begins with the following passage from Paul:

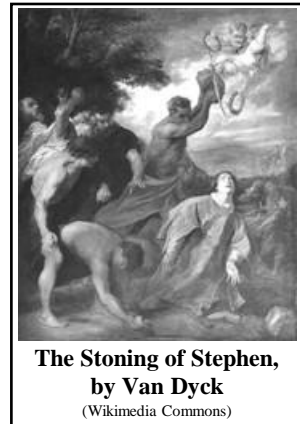
[Christ] was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen

asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. (1 Cor 15:4-8)

When Paul wrote this, he personally knew many of Jesus's original apostles. This is particularly true of Peter (also known as Cephas), James, and John. Paul would have therefore had first-hand knowledge of the claims about Peter's encounter with the risen Christ, James's encounter with the risen Christ, and the occasions when the risen Christ appeared to multiple apostles at once. At a minimum, this demonstrates that the apostles, including Paul, *claimed* that they encountered the risen Christ.

But we don't just have to take Paul's word for it. Clement of Rome wrote a letter in 95 that speaks of the apostles' certainty as to the resurrection of Jesus, presupposing a claim. This account has strong weight since it is known from the writings of Irenaeus and Tertullian that Clement had personal relationships with many of Jesus's original apostles and a particularly close relationship with Peter. In addition, Polycarp (who was also identified by Irenaeus and Tertullian to have been associated with the original disciples) wrote a letter that describes Paul and the other apostles loving Jesus who was raised from the dead by God.³¹⁸ There are therefore extensive independent sources attesting to the claims of Jesus's disciples that that the Resurrected Jesus appeared to them.

Did the disciples believe their claims or were these false claims? There is strong evidence in favor of the former. This is based on the psychological transformation of the apostles from defeated to the extent of denying their relationship with Jesus to faith so strong as to be willing to suffer and die for it. For example, Peter after Jesus's arrest denied even knowing Jesus (Mt 26:69-75; Mk 14:66-72; Lk 22:54-62; Jn 18:25-27). He later became the leader of the early Christian church, refused to stop preaching the gospel even after being arrested and threatened by the Jewish council (Acts 4:13-22), and was eventually put to death by Emperor Nero for being Christian.³¹⁹ It is believed that of all of the apostles, only John did not die a martyr's death. Examples of early disciples that were martyred include:



- **Stephen.** After preaching the Gospel to the Jewish high priests, Stephen was driven out of the city and stoned to death (Acts 7:1-60).

Although not an apostle, the stoning of Stephen made the risks of preaching the Gospel crystal clear.

- **James, the Brother of John.** The apostle James was the second known Christian to be martyred (after Stephen). This occurred when King Herod arrested some Christians and had James executed with a sword (Acts 12:2).
- **Andrew.** After preaching Christ's resurrection to the Scythians and Thracians in Greece and Turkey, the apostle Andrew (and brother of Peter) was crucified for his faith. Tradition has it that Andrew was crucified on an X-shaped cross with his feet and hands bound rather than nailed. But the writings of Hippolytus state that Andrew was hung on an olive tree at the city of Patras in Achaea, in the year 60.
- **Thomas.** Thomas, the "doubting Thomas" apostle, was martyred with a spear in the city of Chennai (formerly called Madras) after preaching extensively throughout India. This occurred in the year 72.
- **Matthias.** Matthias replaced Judas Iscariot as the twelfth Apostle (Acts 1:26). After preaching the Gospel throughout Asia Minor, Matthias was martyred around the year 64 in Colchis, a city in the Caucasus Mountains north of Cappadocia.

A host of historical sources attest to the willingness of Christian disciples to suffer and die for their faith. Some of the more important include the writings of Clement of Rome (died c.100), Ignatius of Antioch (died c.108), Polycarp (d.155), Dionysius of Corinth (d.171), Tertullian (died c.220), and Origen (died c.253). The willingness of Christians to suffer and die does not prove that the risen Jesus actually appeared to them but does provide strong evidence that this was believed to be true. Habermas and Licona write (emphasis in the original):

All of these sources, biblical and non-biblical alike, affirm the disciples' willingness to suffer and die for their faith ... The disciples' willingness to suffer and die for their beliefs *indicates that they certainly regarded those beliefs as true*. The case is strong that they did not willfully lie about the appearances of the risen Jesus. Liars make poor martyrs.³²⁰

The belief of the disciples that they had truly seen the risen Jesus is strong evidence of the Resurrection. Other explanations are highly improbable and are only seriously entertained by those who do not believe that the Resurrection is a real possibility and therefore any other explanation is more probable.

Paul was Converted

Perhaps even stronger evidence than the original apostles is the conversion of Paul (also known as Saul). This is because the original apostles were followers of Jesus during his earthly ministry whereas Paul was an aggressive enemy of the early Christian church. Paul speaks of his persecution of Christians in his letter to the Galatians, in his letter to the Philippians, and in his letter to the Corinthians. The book of Acts also separately testifies to Paul's anti-Christian activities:

Now Saul approved of putting Stephen to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles. Some devout men buried Stephen, and mourned loudly for him. But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and he would drag away men and women and put them in prison. (Acts 8:1-3)

Later in Acts, Paul recounts his strong opposition to Christians, explaining how he locked up many in prison, cast votes against them when they were being put to death, punished them in synagogues, and even pursued them to foreign cities (Acts 26:9-11). Paul explains that his conversion was not based on a reconsideration of Christian teachings, but due to a direct encounter with the risen Christ. Paul writes about seeing Jesus (1 Cor 9:1; 1 Cor 15:8) and about God revealing His Son to him (Gal 1:13-17). Paul's strong belief that he had encountered the risen Jesus is also documented by Clement of Rome (died c.100), Polycarp (d.155), Dionysius of Corinth (d.171), Tertullian (died c.220), and Origen (died c.253).

As with the early followers of Jesus, Paul's belief that he had truly seen the risen Jesus is strong evidence of the Resurrection. Unlike the early followers, it is easier to argue that Paul's experience was a hallucination or a delusion since it is not clear whether other people experienced the risen Christ along with Paul. But Paul's conversion from one of Christianity's chief persecutors to one of its chief proponents is best explained by Paul actually experiencing the true risen Christ.



James, the Skeptical Brother of Jesus, is Converted

James was a brother of Jesus and a non-believer of the Gospel message during Jesus's earthly ministry. "For not even His brothers believed in Him" (Jn 7:5). The risen Jesus is then recounted by Paul to have appeared to James. "[Then Jesus] appeared to James" (1 Cor 15:7). It seems that Paul heard this directly from James, as Paul met with James on his first visit to Jerusalem. "Then three years [after my conversion] I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him for fifteen days. But I did not see another one of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother" (Gal 1:18-19).

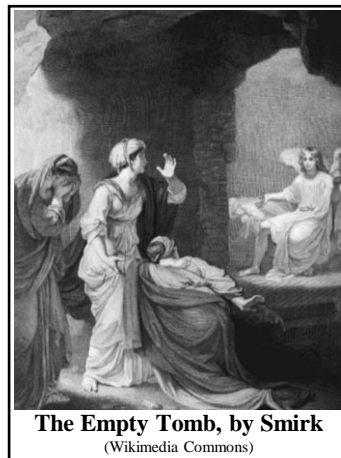
After seeing his risen brother, James was converted from being a skeptic to leading (along with Peter) the early Church in Jerusalem. According to the historian Hegesippus (d.180), the Pharisees commanded James to climb to the top of the Temple and tell the crowds that Jesus was not the Christ. When James boldly proclaimed that Jesus is the Christ and is at the right hand of God in Heaven, the Pharisees had James pushed from the top of the temple. Hegesippus writes that James survived the fall, but was then stoned to death.³²¹

Similar to Paul, James's conversion from one of Christianity's skeptics to one of its chief proponents is best explained by James actually experiencing the true risen Christ. This explanation is made even stronger due to James growing up with Jesus as his brother.³²²

The Tomb was Found Empty

The empty tomb of Jesus does not have as strong of historical evidence as the first four facts pointing to Jesus's resurrection, but Gary Habaneras still estimates that about 75 percent of scholars on the subject accept the empty tomb as a historical fact. This is based primarily on the historical situation around Jerusalem, enemy attestation, and the testimony of women.

Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem and was buried in a tomb nearby. His claimed post-resurrection appearances were also in Jerusalem. As such, it would have been impossible for the early Christian movement to maintain the claim of Jesus being



The Empty Tomb, by Smirk
(Wikimedia Commons)

risen from the dead if the body of Jesus could simply be produced by the Jewish or Roman leadership if the tomb was not empty. There is also no mention by early critics of Christianity that the tomb was occupied. For example, Celsus, a second century Greek philosopher, makes no mention of an occupied tomb when arguing against Jesus's resurrection, even though this would strongly support his position.

Early critics of Christianity claimed that the body of Jesus was stolen. For example the gospel of Matthew reads:

Now while they were on their way, some of the men from the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, "You are to say, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him while we were asleep.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and keep you out of trouble." And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews and is to this day. (Mt 28:11-15)

The "stolen body theory" also appears in several non-biblical sources. It is written about by Justin Martyr in his *Trypho* and by Tertullian in his *De Spectaculis*. In criticizing non-believers, Justin Martyr writes, "Yet not only did you not repent, when you learned that He had risen from the dead, but [claim that] His disciples stole Him by night from the tomb."³²³ Tertullian writes, "[N]othing was found in the tomb ... None the less, the chief men of the Jews ... spread the story about that the disciples had stolen him."³²⁴

There are no known alternate theories to explain the empty tomb. Either the tomb was not really empty (highly unlikely because the body would have been produced), the body of Jesus was stolen (which results in an empty tomb), or Jesus experienced bodily resurrection (which results in an empty tomb).

The Resurrection Best Explains the Historical Facts

Habermas and Licona conclude their argument for the resurrection of Jesus by enumerating the options from which to consider. They list five plausible explanations that account for the claims by the disciples that they sincerely believed that Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to them. These explanations are:³²⁵

1. Jesus actually rose from the dead;
2. The disciples committed fraud;

3. The appearance of Jesus to the disciples was due to hallucination or delusion;
4. Jesus never really died and his appearances were after recovering from a coma; and
5. The entire story is a legend that developed over time.

Option 2 does not sufficiently account for the disciples' transformed lives, or the transformation of both Paul and James and Christ's appearance to both of them. Option 3 does not account for the risen Christ appearing to multiple people at the same time on multiple occasions. Option 4 is extremely unlikely due to the determination of the guards that Jesus was dead and their additional stabbing of Jesus with a spear which likely punctured both the lungs and the heart. Option 5 is untenable since there are multiple early attestations of the disciples claiming that they saw the risen Christ from both Christian and non-Christian sources. This leaves Option 1 as the most plausible explanation of the facts; Jesus did indeed die on the cross, was buried in a tomb, rose from the dead on the third day, and actually appeared to His disciples after His resurrection.

Even scholars who think that the resurrection of a dead person is impossible recognize the strong case for Jesus's resurrection. Douglas Groothuis cites the following quote from Antony Flew, who does not believe in the resurrection, "The evidence for the resurrection is better than for claimed miracles in any other religion. It is outstandingly different in quality and quantity, I think, from the evidence offered for the occurrence of most other supposedly miraculous events."³²⁶

Example Apologetic Dialogue with a Resurrection Denier (RD)

Apologist: Do you celebrate Easter?

RD: Sure. The Easter Bunny hides eggs for the kids, and we traditionally have a big honey-baked ham for dinner.

Apologist: That sounds like good family time. But I mean do you celebrate Easter in the traditional Christian sense of celebrating the resurrection of Jesus three days after being killed?

RD: No, we don't do that. We do sometimes go to church as a family on Easter where this is the focus, but I can't really believe that a person who was dead for three days can be brought back to life.

Apologist: I get it, it sounds incredible. Nevertheless, over 2 billion people in the world believe this to be true. Do you think that they are all wrong?

- RD: Well, there are over five billion people in the world that do not believe this to be true. Do you think that they are all wrong?
- Apologist: That is a fair point. But yes, I do think that they are all wrong. I was very skeptical about the Jesus's resurrection at one point, but it seems to be the only scenario that can explain the historical facts.
- RD: I find that hard to believe. It seems that any explanation would be more likely than someone coming back to life.
- Apologist: Of course, that is true if you dismiss the possibility of the Resurrection in the first place. But that is not an argument, it is simply assuming the answer. Would you like to hear an argument that assumes the Resurrection is at least a possibility?
- RD: I'm still skeptical, but let's hear it.
- Apologist: OK. This is the argument by two New Testament scholars and professors named Gary Habermas and Michael Licona. They call their argument "four plus one" because it relies on four things almost universally agreed with by historian and one thing that most agree with. They explain each of these things in detail in their book *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, which I can loan you if you want.
- RD: Thanks. But can you just give me the short version for now?
- Apologist: No problem. They base their argument on the following four historical facts. First, Jesus died by crucifixion. Second, Jesus's disciples believed that the resurrected Jesus physically appeared to them. Third, the apostle Paul underwent a profound conversion from anti-Christian to Christian in the strongest sense. And fourth, James, the brother of Jesus, changed from being a Christian skeptic to a leader in the Christian movement. The fifth element that is held by most but not all historians is that Jesus's tomb was found empty.
- RD: Interesting, but why do these things point the Jesus being resurrected?
- Apologist: Nothing else can explain why the early Christians believed that they actually saw the resurrected Jesus on multiple occasions and often to many people at the same time. The only other explanation is that they were liars, but this would not explain the conversion of Paul, the conversion of James, or the fact that all of these people were willing to die for their beliefs.

13.6 Islam

Christianity and Islam are the largest religions in the world, having about 2.2 and 1.8 billion members, respectively. Both religions are expected to grow, but with Islam growing faster. Projections for 2050 are 3.0 billion Christians and 2.8 billion Muslims. To the extent that religions are competitors, Islam is the biggest competitor to Christianity both now and in the foreseeable future. As such, it is critical for Christian apologists to understand how Christianity and Islam differ and to have arguments prepared to demonstrate how Christianity is correct and Islam is incorrect with respect to these differences. This section describes some of these important differences and presents arguments why, in each case, the theology of Christianity is to be preferred.

Much is known about the early history of both Christianity and Islam. This includes information about their respective founders, early conversion and growth, and church formation. An examination of these histories can be an effective apologetic technique by providing context about these two religions that goes beyond doctrine.

The overwhelming historical consensus is that the historical Jesus of Nazareth was an extremely good and admirable person. In contrast, the historical Muhammad was flawed in many ways and he did not lead a particularly ethical life. In the words of H.G. Wells, an atheist historian, Muhammad was not on the same moral level as “Jesus of Nazareth or Gautama, or Mani. But it is surely manifest that he was a being of commoner clay; he was vain, egotistical, tyrannous, and a self-deceiver; and it would throw all our history out of proportion if, out of an insincere deference to the possible Moslem reader, we were to present him in any other light.”³²⁷ As an example, the Quran instructs that the maximum number of wives that a man can have is four. Muhammad married twelve wives in his life and died with nine still alive. In terms of the quality of its founder, Christianity is to be much preferred over Islam.

With regards to early church growth strategy, early Christians went to new places to preach the Word. They established and nurtured seed churches that grew through voluntary conversions. In contrast, early Muslims expanded through military conquest. Defeated people were “offered a



choice of three alternatives; either pay tribute, or confess the true God and join us, or die.”³²⁸ In other words, most early Christians chose to become Christians whereas most early Muslims were forced to become Muslim. The organic growth of early Christianity through people’s voluntary response to the Gospel call is to be much preferred over the early growth of Islam by military conquest and forced conversion.

The doctrines of Christianity and Islam are similar on a superficial level as both believe in one God, angels, prophets, sacred books, and the Day of Judgement. However, on a deeper level there are fundamental theological differences. These all involve core Christian beliefs including the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of the Atonement, and the doctrine of the Church.

Muslims believe in one ineffable God and reject the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Consequently, Muslims reject the divinity of Christ and consider him a prophet like Moses or David. For Muslims to hold this belief, they claim that both the Jewish and Christian scriptures have been changed and corrupted by men and are therefore not absolutely true like the Quran. This belief that Jewish and Christian scriptures have been changed is almost universally rejected by critical text scholars.

Islam also denies that Jesus was crucified. Douglas Groothuis writes, “To the Islamic mind, it is unthinkable that a true prophet of Allah should be subject to such humiliation.”³²⁹ However, as discussed in the section on the Resurrection above, the crucifixion of Jesus is an established historical fact.

As Islam rejects the crucifixion, Islam also reject its atoning significance. Whereas Christianity teaches salvation through God’s grace made possible by the atoning work of Christ, Islam teaches salvation through good works. In Islam, if a person’s good deeds outweigh the bad deeds, he or she may hope for paradise as a reward. According to Islam, all will be judged by Allah on the final day, and the only sure way to salvation is to die in service to a genuine jihad.

For Christians, the Church is the body of believers who have been adopted into the divine family with God as Father, Christ as head, and with all believers filled with the Holy Spirit. In contrast, Islam teaches that all are slaves to Allah, who is a slave master that demands complete submission.³³⁰ Faraz Sheikh describes the relationship of a Muslim to Allah as “a slave subjected to God’s power and in need of God’s favor.”³³¹ The Christian God is a God who loves everyone unconditionally. Although Allah is referred to as the “Most-Loving,” the Quran qualifies this love by stating, “Surely, Allah defends those who believe. Allah does not love any treacherous, ungrateful.”³³²

If you feel that you are good enough to earn your spot in heaven, Islam may be for you. If you believe that God loves everyone including you, that you are broken, that you cannot fix yourself, and that you can put your trust in God for the forgiveness of sins and spiritual rebirth, Christianity is to be preferred. Christianity is also a safer choice. Christians attract and retain believers purely based on the truth of the Christian message. If you become a Muslim and start to have doubts, you are not so fortunate. “According to Sharia law, falling away from Islam is punishable by death.”³³³ As such, apologetics are likely to be most effective for someone considering conversion to Islam, and likely to be least effective for current Muslims whose conversion would be accompanied with high personal risk.³³⁴

Example Apologetic Dialogue with a Potential Muslim Convert (PMC)

Apologist: I hear that you are thinking about converting to Islam.

PMC: That’s true. I have some friends who are Muslim, and I think that I am ready to fully submit myself to God.

Apologist: Why are you considering Islam over other options such as Christianity?

PMC: Because God revealed himself directly to Muhammad. Islam therefore has the Qur’an which is the final and most authoritative revelation of God.

Apologist: Do you know much about the early efforts of Muhammad to convert people to Islam?

PMC: Not really.

Apologist: After his spiritual experience, Muhammad faced about a decade of opposition from his community in Mecca, especially about his claim to be a prophet. He then successfully established himself as a prophet in Medina. Essentially, all of the converts after this were through conquest, where defeated people were given the option to convert, pay tributes, or be killed.

PMC: But today Islam is the fastest growing religion.

Apologist: True. But much of this is due to high fertility rates and the practice of polygamy.

PMC: In any case, Islam teaches the worship of one God. The Christian understanding of one God with three separate persons seems a bit far-fetched.

Apologist: Maybe, but what is important is whether Christian doctrine is true or whether Islamic doctrine is true.

PMC: That I agree with.

- Apologist: The Christian position is that mankind has a broken relationship with God the Father that can only be restored through God the Son, and then strengthened through God the Spirit. The Christian conception of God follows logically from its understanding of the human condition.
- PMC: It is much simpler with Islam—simply offer complete submission to the single God.
- Apologist: Yes. But doesn't the Qur'an state that entry into heaven will be the result of divine judgement on whether a person lived a righteous life?
- PMC: That is my understanding.
- Apologist: This, then, is the biggest difference between Christianity and Islam. In Christianity, people are never good enough earn their way into heaven. Righteousness is a free gift for those who trust in the redemptive power of Christ. In Islam, people have to earn their way into heaven by being a good enough person. Both of these understandings of God cannot be true.
- PMC: I agree with that.
- Apologist: Imagine you as a Muslim and being judged by God as to whether you will spend eternity in heaven or hell. Now imagine God showing the ledger book and saying that you just missed the cut. If you had performed just one more good deed you would be going to heaven, but as it stands you will be going to Hell. In Christianity there is no such situation. Either one accepts the free gift of salvation, or one does not.
- PMC: Those seems to be two very different portrayals of how God interacts with people.
- Apologist: I agree. I also suggest that you seriously consider how an all-loving God is likely to deal with a sinful person: through the Islamic understanding or through the Christian understanding.

13.7 Pantheism

Pantheism takes many forms but can generally be understood as either (1) the universe being equivalent to God; or (2) the universe being animated by God. In both cases, pantheism is distinguishable from theism due to God's imminence rather than God's transcendence. In pantheism, everything is part of the divine. In theism, everything has been created by the divine. Although there are many types of pantheism, they can be distinguished by whether they teach the doctrine of karma and reincarnation or

whether they simply equate the universe and its laws as the One Divine Spirit.

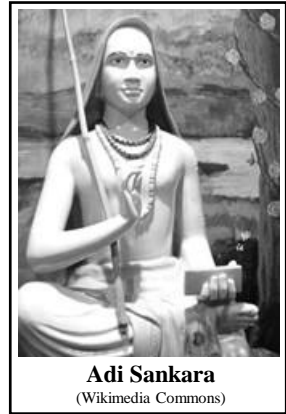
The form of pantheism that equates God with the universe and its laws is doctrinally equivalent to atheism. For example, John Gula describes the view of the afterlife according to this system as follows. “After we die our remains sooner or later reenter the divine creation and recycle through Earth’s biosphere, providing molecules that may become part of other living things. This is our ‘afterlife,’ or at least one aspect of it. Of course, we also ‘live on’ through our children, our accomplishments, and others’ memories of us.”³³⁵ This form of pantheism is simply a feel-good consolation prize for atheists that does not explain creation, moral accountability, or the presence of evil in the world. An additional feel-good belief often accompanies this form of atheism through the concept of a creative but impersonal “life force” that directs the development of the universe through an evolutionary-like process. But if a mind is behind this life force it is equivalent to a personal God. If a mind is not behind this life force, then the evolutionary-like process is reduced to being random and meaningless. C.S. Lewis writes:

When you are feeling fit and the sun is shining and you do not want to believe that the whole universe is a mere mechanical dance of atoms, it is nice to be able to think of this great mysterious Force rolling on through then centuries and carrying you on its crest. If, on the other hand, you want to do something rather shabby, the Life-Force, being only a blind force, with no morals and no mind, will never interfere with you like that troublesome God we learned about when we were children. The Life-Force is a sort of tame God. You can switch it on when you want, but it will not bother you. All the thrills of religion and none of the cost. Is the Life-Force the greatest achievement of wishful thinking the world has yet seen?³³⁶

The God-equals-universe form of pantheism is not able to address issues of creation, moral accountability, and the presence of evil in the world and is therefore best apologetically addressed in a manner similar to atheism. This will typically start with arguments in favor of the existence of a personal creator God who sets all moral standards and cares about our moral behavior.

The other general form of pantheism holds to the doctrine of karma and reincarnation. As such, it requires a different apologetic approach. Perhaps the most philosophically-developed form of this type of pantheism is Advaita Vedanta Hinduism (AVH).³³⁷ The remainder of this section will therefore examine AVH since apologetic arguments addressing AVH are likely to be effective for less-developed forms of karma-based pantheism. AVH, which was founded by the Hindu philosopher Adi Sankara in the 8th century, can be summarized as follows:

Sankara's system of thought is called "non-dualism" (*advaita*), because it holds that the world (*prakriti*), the individual ego (*jiva*), and Brahman, while not absolutely one, do not really exist separately but are in reality "not different" ... Besides It, the eternal, the undecaying, the full of being, all else is "transient, impure, unsubstantial" ... in short, a product of *maya*. The empirical world is thus phenomenal, neither existent nor non-existent, and truly unexplainable ... to believe in the independent reality of the individual soul, as is the common experience, is to move in the world of *maya* and to have only the lower kind of knowledge, but to know that our selves and Brahman-Atman are not-two is to apprehend reality and have the higher knowledge ... In reality, there is only Brahman-Atman, solely existent, spaceless, timeless, and eternal.³³⁸



Adi Sankara
(Wikimedia Commons)

AVH teaches that the ultimate reality is being and consciousness. Within this worldview, God can have a higher meaning and a lower meaning. The higher meaning views God as equivalent to the ultimate reality of being and consciousness. The lower meaning views God as a theistic person to which the unenlightened can relate and pray (*saguna* Brahman, or Brahman with qualities). The world viewed as subject/object is an illusion. The ultimate calling is to escape this illusory world by the dissolution of the personal self, which itself is illusory. There is only the universal Self, which is fully real and beyond change. Humans are unique in that they are aware of their illusory self. The basic problem with the human condition, according to AVH, is that people view themselves as individuals. Enlightenment is obtained when a person extinguishes the illusory self and becomes one with the eternal and unchanging Self. "Advaita Vedanta holds that liberation is none other than the realization that the pure presence at the basis of subjectivity (called *atman*) is non-different from the all-pervasive, universal consciousness (called *brahman*)."³³⁹

The concept of karma is central to all Hinduism, including pantheistic AVH. People accumulate good and bad karma on earth according to their good and bad behavior. Those with good karma go to a temporary heaven after death and those with bad karma go to a temporary hell. Although these temporary relocations are experienced, heaven and hell are illusory in the same way that the physical universe is illusory. After spending a time in heaven or hell, the unenlightened are then reincarnated with accumulated impressions from past incarnations. This cycle is repeated, resulting in gradually increasing levels of consciousness (*sakshi*). "The blanket term for the experience of such states is *samadhi* (absorption). In *savikalpa*

samadhi, there remains some residual sense of a distinction between witness and witnessed. But in *nirvikalpa samadhi* that slips away, so there is nothing but the witness. It is no longer really ‘witnessing’ itself, it is simply being itself.”³⁴⁰ When *nirvikalpa samadhi* is achieved, the law of karma is transcended and one is absorbed into the eternal Self.

In AVH, the ultimate reality does not distinguish between good and evil. Everything that people experience is determined by Brahman. Free will is based on the illusion that we are individuals with a will. The one freedom we have is to believe that we are Self. Good and evil are illusions. Choices between good and evil are illusions. Distinctions between good and evil in this illusory world are necessarily illusory and are not part of the ultimate reality. According to AVH, neither Hitler nor Mother Theresa had any control over the life that they experienced.

From a Christian apologetic perspective, AVH has two fatal flaws. The first is that karma is based on good and evil deeds, but AVH denies the reality of good and evil. AVH claims that the good and evil deeds that feeds into karma are illusory. But what then is the standard for determining what is good and what is evil, even if illusory? Second, AVH denies free will in everything except deciding to relinquish an understanding of the individual self. What then is the point of karma? If good and evil actions are not performed out of free moral choices, one’s karmic rebirth cycle is seemingly pointless. In contrast, Christianity believes in a transcendent God who determines all moral standards, which are real and absolute. A good apologetic conversation with a karmic pantheist will therefore involve a discussion about whether some actions are truly more moral than others and why this is so. Also, Christianity believes that moral choices are freely made, making them meaningful and having divine purpose. Another good apologetic conversation with a karmic pantheist will therefore be related to the seemingly pointless existence of karma-based reincarnation if moral choices are not freely made.



Example Apologetic Dialogue with a “Life Force” Pantheist

Apologet: Do you belong to a church?

Pantheist: No. I am very spiritual, but not religious.

- Apologist: Can you explain what you mean by being very spiritual? Do you believe in God?
- Pantheist: Not in the sense of a specific being. There is a cosmic energy that pervades the universe. The more that we are in tune with this cosmic energy the more we are spiritually in tune with the divine.
- Apologist: Do you mean like Taoism, where Taoists strive to become one with the Tao?
- Pantheist: Exactly.
- Apologist: In Taoism there are two opposing divine forces, yin and yang. Do you believe that there are opposing forces of cosmic energy like in Taoism?
- Pantheist: Not really. There is just a positive energy that animates the universe. I try to increasingly tap into this positive energy.
- Apologist: What about all of the physical and moral evil that seem to exist in the universe.
- Pantheist: I'm not sure about physical evil such as natural disasters and famine, but moral evil exists because people are not aligning themselves with the cosmic life force.
- Apologist: Are there any consequences for people not aligning themselves with the cosmic life force and doing horrible things? For example, what would happen to a person who decides to become a mass murderer of innocent people?
- Pantheist: They wouldn't be at peace with the universe.
- Apologist: And if they disagree? What if they simply enjoy the feeling of killing and have no interest in being at peace with the universe as you understand it? Is it therefore OK for this person to do horrible things?
- Pantheist: Of course not.
- Apologist: But there will be no real consequences for this person, such as facing judgement from a righteous God?
- Pantheist: I guess not.
- Apologist: It seems as if your idea of spirituality might work well as long as everyone chooses to be peaceful and loving. But it seems to have serious problems if some people choose to be evil and hateful, which is unfortunately a real thing in this world.
- Pantheist: I see your point.
- Apologist: Interestingly, Christianity teaches that one day there will be a New Heaven and a New Earth where sin does not exist, similar to what would be needed for your ideas to work. But Christianity believes that we are not there yet. People are sinners,

evil exists, and God therefore must have a system in place to deal with these realities.

13.8 Postmodernism

Postmodernism is a term that many theologians are hesitant to define since it is used in many different ways. Instead, the tendency is to describe postmodernism as a rejection of the basic tenants of modernism. Modernism, in turn, was an intellectual movement that followed premodernism. A detailed understanding of these relationships is not necessary or useful from an apologetic perspective, but a high-level overview of premodernism, modernism, and postmodernism will now be provided before discussing the apologetic issues associated with postmodernism.³⁴¹

Premodernism is generally understood as the time when the majority of people believed in the active role of the spiritual realm in the earthly realm. In the western world, this was a time when most people were Christian, believed in the authority of the Bible and/or the Church. The Christian God was understood to have an active role in determining what happens in the world and in individual lives. Last, and the Christian community as a whole was understood to be more important than any individual.

Modernism is generally thought to have started in the late 1800s as movement away from life under the sovereignty of God to life under the sovereignty of human reason as exercised by individuals. Modernism believes that the appropriate use of reason can lead toward (1) the understanding of universal truths; and (2) positive progress in the human condition through advances in science, technology, and politics.

Postmodernism rejects all of the major assumptions of modernism. First, postmodernism rejects the concept of universal truths. Since truth is shaped by a person's past experiences and cultural situation, everyone has their own truth. Furthermore, it is illegitimate to claim that your truth is truer than another person's truth. Second, logic and reason are to be viewed with skepticism since they are merely conceptual constructs and are therefore valid only within the established intellectual traditions in which they are used.³⁴² Third, human progress is not guaranteed through advances in science, technology, and politics since these tend to strengthen existing power structures that oppress the weak and underrepresented. In addition, advances in science and technology are often bad for the human condition as evidenced by technology used in warfare.

In summary, premodernism, modernism, and postmodernism can be distinguished (for the purposes of apologetics) by a source of authority, an understanding of truth, and a worldview/metanarrative. In premodernism,

God and the Scripture is the source of authority, God's natural and special revelations are the source of truth, and the worldview/metanarrative is the story of the Bible. In modernism, logic and reason are the source of authority, scientific advancement is the source of truth, and human progress is the worldview/metanarrative. In postmodernism, there is no source of legitimate authority, all truth is in the eye of the beholder, and all worldviews and metanarratives are to be rejected as they exist to bolster oppressive power structures.

Although it is typically sufficient to understand postmodernism in terms of authority, truth, and metanarratives, it can be helpful to be aware of some additional beliefs that are commonly held. For example, Stewart Kelly describes postmodernism as being committed to nine primary beliefs. These include (1) skepticism of human reason; (2) all people understand the world in the context of biases, prejudices, blind spots, limits, and a host of other biasing influences; (3) language is often not neutral when attempting to describe reality; (4) human existence is real, but the enduring self is fiction; (5) the scientific enterprise is not strictly objective but is highly influenced by human subjectivity; (6) existing power structures historically developed from an assumption as to the inferiority of people of color; (7) objective truth does not exist; (8) all metanarratives are inherently oppressive and should be rejected; and (9) human reason is to be viewed with skepticism and certainty about any truth is an illusion.³⁴³

What is the typical result of a person holding these postmodern beliefs? James Marriot describes postmodernists as having the characteristics of pessimism, holism, communitarianism, and relativistic pluralism.³⁴⁴ Postmodernists tend to be (1) pessimistic since they cannot experience optimism through religious faith or through the belief in human progress; (2) holistic since they emphasize emotion and intuition over rationality; (3) communitarian since they reject the existence of an enduring self and emphasize the role of community in establishing truth for that community; and (4) pluralistic/relativistic since there are many different communities and therefore many different truths.

We are at a time when many people, especially young people, reject absolute religious truth and will not accept rational arguments that might indicate otherwise. However, this situation is potentially an improvement over modernism where God is a myth, religion is for the gullible, and any knowledge not based on science is false knowledge. Furthermore, postmodernists tend to be highly spiritual whereas modernists tend to view spirituality with suspicion. Abraham Okunade writes, "Postmodernism demonstrates a profound interest in spirituality, they are skeptical of any unique claims for God, but they are in the market of spirituality ... there

is a need for theologians to know what is good about postmodernism in order to know what to keep and what to discard.”³⁴⁵

In other words, postmodernism from an apologetic perspective is not necessarily all bad. Since (in postmodernist thinking) everyone’s personal truth has validity, the apologist has an opportunity to listen to the postmodernist’s personal narrative, and the postmodernist will presumably be open to hearing the apologist’s narrative. Lee Ramsey writes, “Thus, our preaching, while *still proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ among us*, will be more tentative, inviting, conversational, and mutual as we respectfully seek common ground and difference among hearers within and outside of the church.”³⁴⁶

If the postmodernist firmly holds to the position that objective truth does not exist, true conversion is impossible. Christians, of course, believe that Christianity represents objective truth. Furthermore, there will be a tendency among many postmodernists to not seriously consider apologetic arguments due to both a comfort with pluralism and a skepticism of logical reasoning. Douglas Groothuis writes, “Many works of Christian apologists assume that unbelievers want to know truth ... While good arguments are indispensable, they are not sufficient because the unbeliever may never seriously consider these arguments due to their various truth-suppressing habits and proclivities.”³⁴⁷ It is therefore not the job of the apologist to convert, which is for God alone. Gregory Koukl gives the following advice to the apologist, “Be content to plant a thought or an idea that might later flourish under God’s sovereign care. Be a good gardener, then trust the Lord to bring in the harvest in his proper time.”³⁴⁸

Example Apologetic Dialogue with a Postmodernist (PM)

Apologist: Do you belong to a church?

PM: No. For me, people that belong to churches are too judgmental about people with different beliefs.

Apologist: You mean like when Christians think that they are right and Muslims are wrong, and Muslims think that they are right and Christians are wrong.

PM: Yes. But more than that, the traditional religions all seem to look down upon less common beliefs like Wiccan, Rastafarianism, atheism, and a lot of others belief systems.

Apologist: That is interesting. As a Christian, we are taught not to judge other people, but we are also taught that certain ideas about God are true and certain ideas about God are not true.

- PM: Truth is subjective. Everyone has their own context for processing information, and someone with a different context is in no position to judge another's belief system.
- Apologist: But what about logical contradictions. God can't both exist and not exist, right?
- PM: True. But whether God exists is objectively unknowable. Atheists disagree with deists and deists disagree with atheists. Neither can prove the other wrong.
- Apologist: Even if this is true, aren't there some ethical actions that are objectively bad and others that are objectively good?
- PM: Do you have an example?
- Apologist: Sure. So it is objectively bad if a person tortures an innocent baby for fun or is this just a matter of the person's context.
- PM: Part of a person's context is their community. The consensus of the community therefore has moral authority over specific individuals.
- Apologist: That makes sense, but it really doesn't solve the problem. If a community believes that torturing babies is OK, would it be OK to torture babies within that community?
- PM: You are just inventing a ridiculous hypothetical situation that is not realistic.
- Apologist: I'm not so sure. It was acceptable by the community in Nazi Germany to round up Jews, forcibly perform medical experiments on them, and then kill them. Isn't this evil behavior no matter what the context?
- PM: I guess that most people would think so. I tend to agree.
- Apologist: If so, then at least some truths don't depend on context. The next question is then who gets to decide on whether the Nazi actions were evil in an absolute sense.
- PM: I see where you are going.
- Apologist: I suspected you might. You seem like a thoughtful person. If there is an absolute moral law, there must be an absolute moral lawgiver. If Nazi actions were evil in an absolute sense, God as an absolute moral lawgiver must exist, regardless of a person's context or the opinion of a community. Maybe some absolute truths do exist.

13.9 Worldviews

Jesus instructs Christians to undertake the Great Commission: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore, and make

disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:18-19). This is not a book about evangelism, but a Christian with knowledge of theology and apologetics should welcome the opportunity to engage in conversations about Christianity with a wide variety of non-Christians. All Christians, especially those with extensive theological knowledge, would be well served to adopt the mindset of Paul when he writes, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16).

An apologetic engagement will be most effective when it does not come across as critical or condemning of someone’s currently held beliefs. It is impossible to have complete familiarity with all belief systems, but most people have some form of worldview that can be described in terms of its similarities and differences when compared with the Christian worldview.

A worldview is a way that a person understands reality. It includes issues such as whether God exists, whether the universe has a purpose, whether human existence has a purpose, whether humans have a spiritual component, whether existence persists after death, whether objective truths exist and can be known, and whether objective good and evil exists.³⁴⁹ To come up with a random worldview, one need only flip a coin for each of these questions.

Most people presumably do not flip coins to determine their worldview. Instead, James Sire identifies the following nine worldviews that are held by most people: Christian theism, deism, naturalism, nihilism, existentialism, non-dualistic pantheism, new age spirituality, postmodernism, and Islamic theism. Pantheism and Islamic theism have been previously discussed (see p. 344 for pantheism and p. 341 for Islamic theism). The remaining worldviews can be thought of as progressively moving further away from Christian theism: from deism to naturalism to nihilism. Existentialism and new age spirituality are generally attempts to escape the pessimism of nihilism.

Christian theism can be described as having the following worldview. God exists and is the personal triune God of the Bible. People are God’s creation, have both a physical and a spiritual component, and continue a personal existence after death. Objective good and evil exist, and people have the free will to choose between good and evil. Objective truth exists, and divine truth can be known to a certain extent through God’s creation and through God’s revelation as recorded in the Bible. And the universe was created good, is in a compromised state, but exists to fulfill God’s divine plan.

The first step away from the Christian worldview is deism. Deism exists in a multitude of forms but can generally be characterized based on their hostility to Christianity. Sire describes deists that do not object to Christianity as “warm deists” and those that are hostile to Christianity as “cold deists.” Warm deists tend to believe in a somewhat personal and moral

God similar to the Christian God whereas cold deists view God as impersonal and uninvolved with the universe and humanity since its creation.

Warm deism rejects the authority of the Bible but still has a worldview similar to Christianity. In very warm deism, God is the creator of the universe, cares about our moral behavior, has a purpose for the universe and humanity, and has made us such that our existence persists after death. The major departure from Christian theism is a lack of acknowledgement of fallen mankind and therefore the need for a Savior. Like most religions besides Christianity, entry into heaven after death is either universally granted or earned by being good enough.

An apologetic approach to people holding to warm theism is to explain that Christianity understands someone’s spiritual condition as whether there is a right or wrong relationship with God. Honest introspection will reveal a person’s broken spiritual state that cannot be fixed by trying harder. Rather, when one repents and surrenders to God, they are spiritually renewed and are adopted into God’s spiritual family. A complementary approach is to explain the historical evidence for the existence of Jesus and the Resurrection (see p. 331). This can lead to the “trilemma” argument, which forces one to understand Jesus as either God, and madman, or a deceiver. C.S. Lewis famously writes:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.³⁵⁰



Globe, Earth, America
(Pixabay)

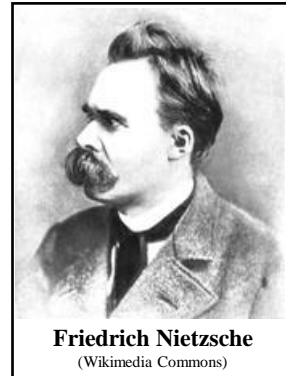
At the other end of the deism spectrum is cold deism. This worldview sees God as having created the universe and, ever since, has basically left it alone. People do not have a spiritual component and therefore cease to exist after death. But humans still have free will, and the universe and humanity exist to advance human knowledge and the human condition. The apologetic goal when engaging a cold deist is to move them towards warm deism. Typically this will involve an interrelated discussion of morality, whether mankind has a spiritual nature, and whether there is an afterlife. If there is no afterlife and God is uninvolved in the universe, there is no compelling reason to abide by any moral code, even if this moral code is objective and has its basis in the Creator. If the Creator has an objective moral code, He presumably cares about the moral actions of people and is therefore more of a personal God than cold deism would otherwise admit. If the Creator God does not have an objective moral code, moral judgments become a matter of opinion, a position to which few people will admit when pressed.

Cold deism transitions into naturalism by denying the existence of God entirely. The universe simply exists as a mechanical system of which humanity is a part. Objective truth still exists, including objective good and evil, which can be increasingly known by studying the universe. However, a mechanistic universe means that humans do not have true free will in the libertarian sense. Naturalism is therefore an unstable worldview. If human beings are simply machines governed by the laws of physics, morality is an illusion and life has no meaning. Therefore, a logical examination of naturalism will force a person to either ascend to cold deism or to descend into nihilism.

Nihilism is a philosophical term that takes many forms but always asserts that life is meaningless and without absolute moral truths. Nihilism typically also understands both free will as an illusion and true knowledge as impossible. Friedrich Nietzsche famously embraced nihilism, declaring that God is dead and that mankind does not possess free will. He writes:

In looking at a water-fall we imagine that there is freedom of will and fancy in the countless turnings, twistings, and breakings of the waves; but everything is compulsory, every movement can be mathematically calculated. So it is also with human actions; one would have to be able to calculate every single action beforehand if one were all-knowing; equally so all progress of knowledge, every error, all malice. The one who acts certainly labors under the illusion of voluntariness; if the world's wheel were to stand still for a moment and an all-knowing, calculating reason were there to make use of this pause, it could foretell the future of every creature to the remotest times, and mark out every track upon which that wheel would continue to roll. The delusion of the acting agent about himself, the supposition of a free will, belongs to this mechanism which still remains to be calculated.³⁵¹

As a worldview, nihilism believes that God does not exist, the universe has no purpose, human existence has no purpose, humans have no spiritual component, existence ceases upon death, objective truth cannot be known, and that evil and good are meaningless concepts. Although depressing, this worldview is logically sound and is able to easily withstand all critical attacks. The only apologetic appeal to the committed nihilist is existentialism. Is your nihilist worldview really how you experience reality? Do you really believe that you have no free will?



Do you really believe that your life is a meaningless accident? Do you really believe that there are no objectively good or evil things that a person can choose to do? If the committed nihilist answers yes to these questions, Christian should best direct their apologetic efforts elsewhere.

Very few people will be able to live a happy life with a nihilist worldview, even if they are convinced that nihilism is correct. For this reason, there are several common ways to “escape” nihilism. These include atheistic existentialism and new age spirituality.

Existentialism exists in both a theistic and an atheistic form. Theistic existentialism is perhaps best characterized by the theology and philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard. Atheistic existentialism is perhaps best characterized by the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. It is an attempt to find meaning in a nihilistic worldview. It views objective reality as distinct from subjective reality. The objective physical universe is a deterministic machine without meaning or value, as per nihilism. But our subjective reality is distinct from this physical reality and allows for free will and self-determination. A person’s choices define who that person is, and meaning is found by authentically making these choices.

In atheistic existentialism, choosing to do something bad makes you a bad person and choosing to do something good makes you a good person. The only problem is that there is no objective standard for badness and goodness. Rather, something is good because we choose it and therefore there are no bad choices. All individuals, therefore, determine their own morality.

The free will required for atheistic existentialism is incompatible with a deterministic universe of which the human mind is a part. Therefore, atheistic existentialism often involves solipsism, where only one’s own mind is sure to exist. From an apologetic perspective, the atheistic existentialists either believe in a mechanistic universe or only believe in their own mind. If the former, free will cannot exist and the existential goal of

finding meaning in life is futile. If the latter, all meaning is derived from self-centered motives. Solipsism is therefore inherently selfish by societal standards in addition to taking moral relativism to its most extreme form. If a person is truly convinced that their own mind is the only reality, they will probably be comfortable with these things. If not, they will either sink back into nihilism or perhaps be open to other worldviews.

The last worldview that will be discussed in New Age Spirituality (NAS). This is essentially a modern repackaging of pantheism which was previously discussed in Section 13.7 (see p. 344). Its name comes from an astrological change from the Age of Pisces, which lasted 2,160 years, to the Age of Aquarius, which will also last 2,160 year. New Age Spirituality holds that previous astrological ages resulted in increasing spiritual degeneracy, but this will be reversed and remedied in the Age of Aquarius. This remedy is essentially to embrace pantheism.

Douglas Groothuis recognizes that there are many different NAS movements that look distinct at a superficial level. But he identifies the following six distinctive attributes of New Age thinking. These are monism (all of reality is one), pantheism, that all people are gods, that people need a change in consciousness to realize their god nature, that all religions at their core teach these things, and that the universe is evolving towards a state where all consciousness is fused and all become fully absorbed into the one cosmic reality.³⁵²

Although pantheistic, NAS differs somewhat in that enlightenment can be pursued is a variety of ways in addition to the traditional pantheistic practices of transcendental meditation and the extinguishing of self. Various NAS groups use a variety of different ways to pursue enlightenment including hallucinogenic drugs, astrology, alternative medicinal and healing practices, tarot card reading, *I Ching* divination, channeling spirits, shamanism, witchcraft, and numerous others. Due to this variety, apologetic engagements tend to be situation-specific. Furthermore, many involved in NAS are cultish. They have “drunk the Kool-Aid” and will not be open to other worldviews short of intervention.

But many NAS adherents are otherwise normal people likely to categorize themselves as “spiritual but not religious.” John Moorhead explains that these people have “moved away from confidence in traditional and institutionalized forms of religion in favor of individualized forms of religiosity, usually referred to in common parlance as a preference for spirituality over religion.”³⁵³ In other words, they are skeptical of traditional theistic religions, but want a universe and life that has meaning, and have found that meaning is some form of NAS. The more intellectually-inclined a person is the more their practice of NAS is likely to resemble classical pantheism seeking enlightenment and can be apologetically engaged in a

similar way. Others can generally be classified as occultists or narcissistic solipsists.

Occultist NAS practitioners typically understand cosmic energy as the ultimate reality. Becoming increasingly one with the cosmic energy is aided by interacting with the spirit world that inhabits this cosmic energy. Relatively benign ways of doing this involve various forms of divination and precognition. More insidious ways of doing this involve communication with spirits that pervade the cosmic energy. To the extent that real contact with spirits occurs, the Christian must understand these spirits as demonic, however benign they may or may not seem. Therefore, any apologetic effort should focus on the reality of evil, the reality of evil spirits, the reality of a leader of these evil spirits (e.g., Satan), that Satan is the Father of Lies, and that interacting with these entities leads to eternal damnation. The OT condemns the use of mediums and channeling the dead in many places (e.g., Lv 19:31; Lv 20:6; Dt 18:12). The NT warns us that “even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14).

Many NAS practitioners see it as a way to become a God. Becoming one with the One is not done to achieve traditional enlightenment. Rather, becoming one with the One paradoxically results in a limitless strengthening of the self rather than the distinguishing of self. I refer to these people as narcissistic solipsists. They are narcissistic in that all efforts are focused on self-actualization. They are solipsists in that the self is seen as the only reality. As they increasingly become one with the One, latent divinity is released, and one increasingly becomes deified. Apologetic engagement with these types will generally involve the difference between self-worship and God-worship. The original temptation by Satan in the garden, after all was “you will become like God” (Gn 2:5).

Example Apologetic Dialogue with a Warm Deist (WD)

Apologist: Do you believe in God?

WD: I do. I believe in a God that created the universe and gave us free will. But God doesn’t meddle with the universe at this point.

Apologist: You mention that we have free will. Does God in your understanding care about the moral choices that we freely make?

WD: Absolutely. God sets absolute moral standards, gives everyone a sense of these moral standards, and cares about whether we abide by these moral standards or not.

- Apologist: Are there any consequences for making good or bad moral choices?
- WD: Of course. When we die, our eternal fate will depend upon how moral we lived our life.
- Apologist: Are you talking about heaven and hell?
- WD: No, it is more of a continuum. The better a person lived their life, the better the reward in the afterlife. The worse a person lived their life the worse things will be.
- Apologist: That sounds pretty close to Christianity.
- WD: Sort of, but I don't believe in a strict distinction between heaven and hell. Also, it is all about how good you lived your life rather than believing anything in particular about God and salvation.
- Apologist: So you think that everyone has the ability and free will to be as good or as bad as they choose?
- WD: Exactly. And because all moral choices are freely made, people are fully accountable to God for these moral choices.
- Apologist: This is very interesting. There was a Christian theologian in the early 5th century named Pelagius. Like you, he believed that humans have the free will and capability to live a sin-free life. This teaching was condemned at an ecumenical council and is now referred to as the Pelagian heresy.
- WD: That surprises me. Why wouldn't God create mankind with the ability to live a moral life?
- Apologist: C.S. Lewis describes this situation very well in his book *Mere Christianity*. I can loan you a copy if you want, but here is the essence of what he says. First, all people have a sense of absolute morality, which must necessarily be based on an absolute moral lawgiver that we call God. If I understand you correctly, you agree with this, right?
- WD: Yes, I fully agree.
- Apologist: Lewis goes on to say that even though we know right from wrong, we often choose to do wrong. You seem to agree with this as well.
- WD: I do.
- Apologist: Here is where Christianity is probably different from what you believe. The Christian God is a personal God who wants to have a close relationship with people, but our sinful actions have damaged this relationship. God does not want us to be good enough, he wants us to surrender to Him fully.

- WD: I don't see how this isn't compatible with what I believe. A person can always surrender fully to God. This will result in the best rewards in the afterlife.
- Apologist: In Christianity, our sinful nature prevents us from surrendering to God. Christians use the term repent. The worse a person is, the more they need to repent, but the less they are able to do it. The only person who can perfectly repent is a perfectly good person, and that person wouldn't need it.
- WD: That is a very depressing understanding of humanity.
- Apologist: Perhaps, but what is more important is whether it is true or not. Furthermore, this depressing situation is met with good news that Christians call the Gospel. Jesus Christ came to earth and lived a sinless life. He was therefore able to repent perfectly. Lewis calls Christ the Perfect Penitent. Now that God has experienced perfect repentance, we have the ability to repent with His help.
- WD: I have never heard Christianity explained that way before.
- Apologist: A lot of people haven't. Too often people judge Christianity based on caricatures rather than actual theology. What is also interesting is that C.S. Lewis was originally an atheist. After thinking about issues related to morality, he became a deist like you. A few years later, he became a Christian after examining the impact of sin on our relationship with God, our inability to remedy the situation on our own, and the Christian answer to this dilemma.

13.10 Further Reading

Christian wanting a simple “how to” book on sharing and defending the Gospel message to non-Christians are encouraged to read Gregory Koukl's book *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*. All Christians, especially those interested in apologetics, are very strongly encouraged to read C.S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*, which is cited often and extensively throughout this book. *Mere Christianity* is the gold standard for accessible apologetics and does so in writing quality that far surpasses any other apologetic work. Those wanting comprehensive academic treatment of apologetics are encouraged to read the excellent book *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*, by Douglas Groothuis.

13.11 Study Questions

1. What are the five ontological proofs of Thomas Aquinas for the existence of God?
2. Briefly explain the fine-tuning argument for the existence of God and the irreducible complexity argument for the existence of God.
3. What is the problem of Evil? What do you feel is the best solution to the problem of evil?
4. Explain how the existence of the man Jesus of Nazareth is a historical fact apart from any biblical evidence.
5. Do you believe that all of the miracle accounts in the Bible are literally true? Do you think that believing that they are all literally true is important from a theological perspective? What are your thoughts on the possibility of modern-day miracles?
6. Briefly explain the “4 + 1” argument used by Gary Habermas and Michael Licona for the plausibility of the resurrection and of Jesus.
7. Explain some of the doctrinal differences between Christianity and Islam.
8. What are some of the weaknesses of the doctrine of karma and reincarnation as believed by many pantheists?
9. What is meant by the term postmodernism. What is a good apologetic approach when engaging with a postmodernist?
10. What is meant by a worldview? Describe a worldview other than Christian theism.

14. Other Major Denominations

Christian denominations can roughly be divided into three major categories: Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox. There are about 2.4 billion Christians in the world. Of these, about 1.2 billion are Roman Catholic, about 900 million are Protestant, and about 300 million are Eastern Orthodox.³⁵⁴ Protestants are further divided into more specific denominations such as Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Methodist. A Venn diagram of Christian denominations is shown in Figure 14-1.

The focus of this book has been to present orthodox theology in its four major forms: Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Reformed/Presbyterian, and Arminian/Methodist. Dispensationalism has also been discussed (see p. 219). The remainder of this chapter provides brief overviews of the histories and theologies of the remaining major denominations. It begins with the largest denomination after Roman Catholicism: Eastern Orthodox. It continues with the third largest denomination: Anglican/Episcopal. It then discusses Baptist and Pentecostal denominations. The chapter ends with discussions of fundamentalism and evangelicalism, which are not a denominations *per se* but are of theological interest.

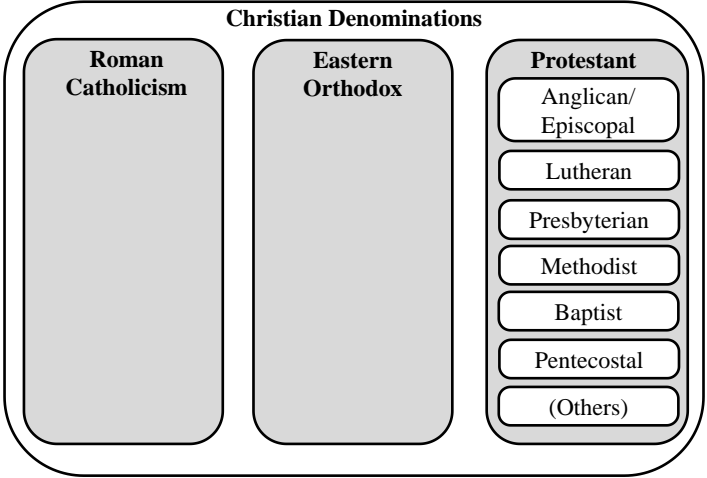


Figure 14-1. Venn Diagram of Christian Denominations

14.1 Eastern Orthodox

A summary of Eastern Orthodox theology was previously provided in the introductory chapter (see p. 6). This section repeats some of this material and then discusses Eastern Orthodox theology in more detail.

Eastern Orthodoxy begins with the understanding that the people and practices closest in time to Christ and early Christianity are the most reliable sources of correct theology and correct church practices. Eastern Orthodoxy therefore seeks to preserve these traditions and to not let them be corrupted by modern inventions.

The importance of staying true to early church teachings is perhaps best demonstrated by the event that resulted in the separation of the Eastern Orthodox church from the Roman Catholic church. The original Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed states, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father.” In the late 6th century, some Latin Churches began to add “and the Son” to this statement, referred to as the *filioque* clause (*filioque* means “and the son” in Latin). The Eastern churches felt that this was an innovation unsupported by Scripture and a theological error. The Latin speaking and Greek speaking churches were already culturally separated, and the *filioque* clause controversy resulted in the Eastern Greek churches under the leadership of the Bishop of Constantinople separating from the Western Latin churches under the leadership of the Bishop of Rome (i.e., the Pope). This separation is known as the East-West Schism of 1054.

Along with the split from Rome, the Eastern Orthodox church naturally rejects the doctrine that the Pope is the supreme head of Christianity. Along with this, additional aspects of Roman Catholic doctrine are also rejected such as papal supremacy, papal infallibility, the immaculate conception of Mary, the bodily assumption of Mary, the efficacy of indulgences, and the existence of Purgatory.

Viewing itself as the preserver of apostolic knowledge, the Eastern Orthodox church gives doctrinal authority, as with the Roman Catholic church, to both Scripture and to church tradition. In addition, the Eastern Orthodox church considers the rulings of first seven ecumenical councils as authoritative. A summary of the rulings of these ecumenical councils that the Eastern Orthodox church considers authoritative is:

- **First Council of Nicaea (325).** Affirmed the full divinity of Jesus Christ in the first version of the Nicene Creed (p. 408). See also p. 43;
- **First Council of Constantinople (381).** Affirmed the full divinity of the Holy Spirit in the second version of the Nicene Creed,

technically called the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (p. 408). The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed is therefore considered authoritative. See also p. 44;

- **Council of Ephesus (431).** Affirmed Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Word of God and Mary as the God-bearer (*Theotokos* in Greek). See also p. 44;
- **Council of Chalcedon (451).** Defined Christ as a single person who is both fully God and fully human. The complete position is stated in the Chalcedonian Definition (see p. 409). The Chalcedonian Definition is therefore considered authoritative. See also p. 44;
- **Second Council of Constantinople (553).** Reconfirmed the doctrinal rulings of the first four ecumenical councils;
- **Third Council of Constantinople (680).** Affirmed that Christ has both a human will and a divine will; and
- **Second Council of Nicaea (787).** Restored the use and veneration of icons, which had been previously forbidden within the Byzantine Empire by imperial edict.



Theotokos Icon
(Wikimedia Commons)

In addition to Scripture, tradition, and the first seven ecumenical councils, the Eastern Orthodox church also considers the writings of the Greek Fathers authoritative. This is especially true of Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, and Cyril of Alexandria, all of whom are venerated as saints. The trio of Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom are also known as the Three Holy Hierarchs. Summaries of the doctrinal teachings of these Greek Church Fathers are now provided.

- **Athanasius (c.296–373).** Athanasius is best known for his stand against Arianism and his insistence that the Son was not created by the Father. Rather, the Son is co-eternal with the Father and is therefore fully divine. Athanasius also taught that the Holy Spirit is fully divine, and that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all of the same essence (*homoousios*). See also p. 48;
- **Gregory of Nazianzus (c.329–390).** Gregory of Nazianzus (also known as Gregory the Theologian) made significant contributions

to the doctrine of the Trinity. As such, he is often referred to as the Trinitarian Theologian. Specifically, Gregory taught that the Holy Spirit's relationship to the Father is different from that of the Son. Whereas the Son is eternally begotten by the Father, Gregory holds that the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father. Debates about this topic led to the East-West Schism, as the Latin Churches began to teach that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. See also p. 48;

- **Basil the Great (330–379).** Basil the Great (also known as Basil of Caesarea) was, like Athanasius, heavily involved in fighting the Arian heresy. In doing so, Basil developed the concept of the three persons of the Trinity being of the same substance and coined the term *ousia*, to refer to this substance. He also asserted that the three aspects of the Trinity are distinct “persons” and coined the term *hypostasis* to refer to a divine person.
- **Gregory of Nyssa (c.335–c. 394).** Gregory of Nyssa taught orthodox Trinitarian theology as described above, but also taught that God is infinite. Because God is infinite, He is incomprehensible to the finite minds of created beings. This teaching has been highly influential in Eastern Orthodox theology with its focus on the ineffability of God and a resulting emphasis on apophatic theology.
- **John Chrysostom (c.347–407).** Chrysostom is best remembered for his eloquent oratory skill and sermons, which are often used to better understand how the early church fathers interpreted and preached Scripture. He also, like Gregory of Nyssa, taught of the incomprehensible nature of God. However, Chrysostom taught that God is knowable to the extent that He reveals himself. See also p. 49;
- **Cyril of Alexandria (c.376–444).** Cyril is best known for his fight against Nestorianism. Whereas Nestorianism understands Christ as the union between a divine person and a human person (i.e., two *hypostases*), Cyril insists that Christ is only a single person. This is referred to as the hypostatic union. Christ is the God-man



St. Basil the Great
(Wikimedia Commons)

(*Theanthropos*), and therefore the Virgin Mary is the God-bearer (*Theotokos*). Cyril also believed that the power of Christ is so powerful that it can spread to people, strengthen one's union with God, and ultimately result in deification.

Based on the creeds, the councils, and the Fathers, it can be seen that Eastern Orthodox theology emphasizes the doctrine of the Trinity (one God consisting of three Persons) and the doctrine of Christ (a single Person whose divine and human nature are in a hypostatic union). But these beliefs are true of all orthodox theologies and do not really capture the different theological approach of Eastern Orthodoxy. When reading Vladimir Lossky's *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, one is struck by how different it is when compared to Protestant systematic theology textbooks. Lossky writes:

[Theology] must fertilize itself from instants of eschatological silence and attempt to express, or at least to suggest, the ineffable. Nourished with contemplation, it does not become established in silence but seeks to speak the silence, humbly, by a new use of thought and word. That is why theology must be praise and must dispose us to praise God.³⁵⁵

Lossky explains that faith is a mystery. God can only be grasped by not grasping and known by not knowing. As such, Eastern Theology is primarily apophatic rather than kataphatic. Theological mysteries are described by what they are not rather than the typical Western approach of making positive statements. Lossky explains (emphasis in the original), "That is why the apophatic (i.e., negative) way has been adopted by Christians ... It is a prostration before the living God, radically ungraspable, unobjectifiable and unknowable, because He is personal, because He is the free plenitude of personal existence. *Apophasis is the inscription in human language, in theological language, of the mystery of faith.*"³⁵⁶

Western thought tends to see two separate approaches to religion: intellectual and mystical. This is perhaps most clearly described by the philosopher Henri-Louis Bergson (1859–1941), who distinguishes between the "static religion" of a doctrinally-focused approach and the "dynamic religion" of a mystical approach. Static religion tends to be social and conservative



Vladimir Lossky
(Wikimedia Commons)

whereas dynamic religion tends to be personal and creative. But Eastern Orthodoxy rejects this dichotomy and considers theology and mysticism inseparable. In *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Lossky writes:

[W]e must live the dogma expressing a revealed truth, which appears to us as an unfathomable mystery, in such a fashion that instead of assimilating the mystery to our mode of understanding, we should, on the contrary, look for a profound change, an inner transformation of spirit, enabling us to experience it mystically. Far from being mutually opposed, theology and mysticism support and complete each other. One is impossible without the other.³⁵⁷

God's essence is unknowable, but believers can directly experience God's activity, referred to as God's energy (*energeia* in Greek). This is particularly true of God's grace. Through grace, the indwelling Holy Spirit restores and strengthens our union with God, referred to as deification (*theosis*).

In summary, the theological content of Eastern Orthodoxy is similar to Roman Catholicism minus the Pope and papal decrees. But the practice of theology is markedly different, with a focus on negation, mystical experience, and personal deification. Selected other specifics of Eastern Orthodoxy include the following:

- Much of Scripture interpreted allegorically, with a focus on what the Holy Spirit is trying to teach rather than a focus on literal inerrancy;
- Seven sacraments are recognized, essentially the same ones as the Roman Catholic church: baptism, Chrismation (i.e., confirmation), Eucharist, Healing (i.e., Holy Unction), marriage, confession, and ordination;
- Transubstantiation of the Eucharistic elements is believed, although in a less specific form when compared to Roman Catholicism;
- *Kenosis* in Phil 2:6-7 refers to Christ relinquishing His divine glory by becoming man and subjecting Himself to humiliation and death;
- Divorce is allowed, whereas the Roman Catholic church only recognizes annulment.

Since Eastern Orthodoxy combines intellectual study and mystical experience, it is difficult (if not impossible) to be grasped through study alone. Rather, Eastern Orthodoxy has a personal aspect that needs to be experienced. Interested readers are encouraged to find a local Eastern Orthodox church, some who now hold services in English, and attend a service.

14.2 Anglican/Episcopal

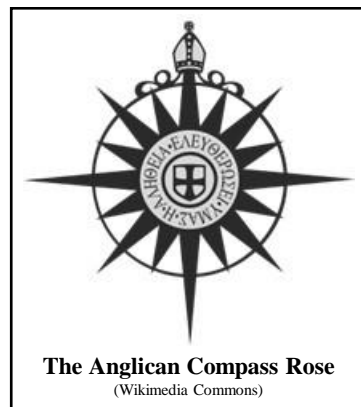
The Anglican denomination derives from the Church of England. Churches that began as part of the Church of England tend to be called Anglican and those that formed outside of the Church of England but held to the same doctrine and liturgy tend to be called Episcopal. Care must be taken to distinguish between a denominational Episcopal church and a church that has an episcopal organization structure but does not hold to Anglican/Episcopal doctrine (see p. 195).

Most Anglican and Episcopal churches belong to the Anglican Communion, which is the third largest Christian communion after Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. The theology of the Anglican Communion was derived from a 1571 document titled the “Thirty-nine Articles” plus the *Book of Common Prayer*, which contains a catechism answering theological questions.

The Thirty-nine Articles is primarily a document that distinguishes Anglican theology from Roman Catholicism. For example, it states that the Holy Scripture contains all things necessary for salvation, thereby discounting both the authority of church tradition and the need for priest-administered sacraments. It only recognizes the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper and condemns the doctrine of transubstantiation. But the Thirty-nine Articles do teach that the sacraments are more than just symbolic. Sacraments are said to work invisibly inside a believer to quicken, strengthen, and confirm faith. Purgatory and public prayer in non-local languages (i.e., Latin) are condemned.

The Thirty-nine Articles specifically affirms the three major creeds: Nicene, Athanasian, and Apostles. Although the Bible contains all things necessary for salvation, these creeds are said to be fully proven by Holy Scripture.

Last, the Thirty-nine Articles strongly asserts the doctrine of predestination of the elect. Every person is born into the world with original sin and is deserving of God’s wrath and condemnation. This original sin makes it impossible for a person to have saving faith apart from the grace of God. God has therefore, before the foundation of the world was laid, chose certain people to be given eternal salvation. This is achieved through the death of Christ, which is described as a propitiation and a satisfaction.



The catechism in the *Book of Common Prayer* largely follows the Thirty-nine Articles, but only affirms the Nicene and Apostle's Creed (it refers to the Athanasian Creed as simply an ancient document proclaiming the nature of the Incarnation and of God as Trinity). Some interesting additions are that God's will for humanity is most clearly shown in the Ten Commandments, that infants should be baptized, and that the Lord's Supper results in the forgiveness of sins. Another interesting addition is that the Holy Spirit guides the Church to identify the true interpretation of Scripture. A seeming departure from the Thirty-nine Articles is that the mission of the Church is to restore all people to the unity of God, which seems to contradict the position of predestination of the elect that is strongly asserted in the Thirty-nine Articles.

But this is as far as Anglican theology goes in terms of specifics. Individual Anglican and Episcopal churches can therefore hold a wide range of beliefs concerning sexuality, the role of women, the death penalty, divorce, remarriage after divorce, and so forth. The Anglican Communion website describes this doctrinal flexibility as follows: "Anglicanism's greatest strength—its willingness to tolerate a wide variety in Anglican faith and lifestyle—is also the thing that provokes the most debate among its practitioners ... Anglicanism represents a middle way between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism."³⁵⁸

The issue of homosexuality has been particularly controversial in Anglican and Episcopal churches. For example, the United States Episcopal Church, which is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion, has allowed for homosexual clergy since 2012 and has blessed homosexual marriages since 2015. Many local churches were not in favor of these and other socially liberal changes and therefore formed the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), which is not part of the Anglican Communion. There is also a growing movement for more conservative Anglican and Episcopal churches to organize themselves under conservative bishops, who are often from another country. Switching bishops is referred to as Anglican realignment. For example, many local churches in the U.S. have left the United States Episcopal Church and have realigned under the Nigerian Anglican bishop. Although part of the Anglican



Communion, the Anglican Church of Nigeria holds that homosexuality is evil, a perversion, and contrary to Scripture.

14.3 Baptist

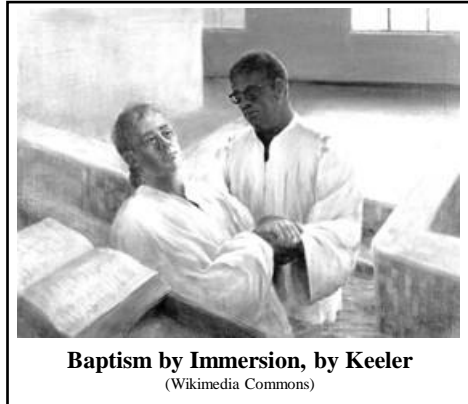
There are an estimated 170 million people in the world who identify as Baptist. The defining belief of Baptists is that infants should not be baptized. Baptism requires the full immersion of a confessed believer. This is referred to as a believer's baptism.

Although the Anabaptist movement also rejected infant baptism, its influence on the beginnings of the Baptist movement is thought by most historians to be minimal. Rather, the Baptist movement is predominantly thought to be a result of dissatisfied members of the Church of England after its split from Roman Catholicism. Those that strived to reform the Church of England from within were called Puritans. Those that chose to break off were called Separatists.

The Baptist denomination resulted from a Separatist movement started by John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, who left England for Amsterdam in 1607 to pursue religious freedom. In 1609, they founded the first Baptist church and began to baptize believers by full immersion. Helwys moved back to England in 1611, founded the first General Baptist Church, and wrote first Baptist confession of faith, "A Declaration of Faith of English People."

Early Baptist growth came primarily from people leaving other denominations. Some of these denominations taught Reformed theology and some taught Arminian theology. Baptist denominations holding to Reformed theology are called Particular Baptists or Regular Baptists. Baptist denominations holding to Arminian theology are called General Baptists or Free Will Baptists.

The Baptist movement in America was started by Roger Williams and John Clarke. This happened in Rhode Island, which Williams founded after being expelled from the Massachusetts Bay Colony as a place allowing for religious liberty (see p. 70). In 1638, Williams established a Baptist



church in Providence. Around the same time, Clarke began a Baptist church in Newport.

The Baptist movement gradually spread, but then experienced quick growth during the First Great Awakening, a revival movement that occurred from about 1730 to 1740 (see Jonathan Edwards on p. 76). This was especially true in the Southern States, where Baptists were often the largest population in a community, including among black slave communities. About 100 years later, tensions over slavery that led to the U.S. Civil War resulted in a North-South Baptist split. The northern Baptist congregations organized under what is now the American Baptist Churches USA (ABC-USA) and the southern Baptist congregations organized under what is now the Southern Baptist Convention.

There are currently many more Baptist organizations and many independent Baptist churches that choose not to be associated with a larger organization. This makes a discussion of doctrine problematic, as each organization and each church typically have its own doctrinal position. Therefore, this section will focus on the doctrinal positions of the two largest Baptist organizations: the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). The SBC is the largest Baptist denomination at about 47,000 churches and 13 million people. The BWA is the largest organization of Baptist conventions, consisting of 266 conventions and about 51 million people. The SBC is not a member of the BWA, but the ABC-USA (about 1.1 million members) is a member.

The beliefs of the SBC are recorded in the pamphlet “The Baptist Faith and Message.” This was first adopted in 2000 and was amended in 2023. It starts by asserting the inerrancy of the Bible. Although this language implies historical and scientific inerrancy, the focus is clearly on spiritual truths:

It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried.³⁵⁹

The SBC is therefore *sola Scriptura*. The Bible and the Bible alone is the only authoritative source for Christian doctrine. Beyond this, the “The Baptist Faith and Message” is largely Arminian. It speaks of the free will of mankind and that salvation is offered to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. As with Arminian theology, the SBC pamphlet also states that God has perfect knowledge of future decisions of His free creatures, implying that certain choices that cannot be otherwise are compatible with free will.

“The Baptist Faith and Message” departs from Reformed and Arminian theology with regards to original sin. It states that people become transgressors and are under condemnation as soon as they are capable of moral action. Therefore, all children before they are morally accountable are not under condemnation. But once a person is saved, the Reformed rather than the Arminian position is stated in that a true believer will never fall away from the state of grace but shall persevere to the end.

Beyond this, the “The Baptist Faith and Message” asserts the following doctrinal positions:

- Christ’s death on the cross is a substitutionary atonement;
- Women are not allowed to be pastors, elders, or overseers;
- The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are symbolic acts of obedience. However, baptism is required for church membership and for a person to partake in the Lord’s Supper;
- It is the duty of every church member to constantly evangelize to non-believers;
- Adultery, homosexuality, and pornography are sexually immoral; and
- Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. Same-sex marriage is unbiblical and it is implied that Christian divorce and remarriage after divorce is somehow impossible, but specifics are not elaborated.³⁶⁰

Perhaps the biggest surprise in “The Baptist Faith and Message” is its position on baptism. In agreement with Arminianism, it holds that baptism is merely symbolic and has no spiritual effects. Baptism is obedience to a Biblical command and results in the baptized person becoming a member of the church.

The BWA statement of beliefs can be found on its website.³⁶¹ It is far less detailed than “The Baptist Faith and Message,” and it perhaps is best understood by what it does not address rather than what it does address. It is worth noting that the SBC withdrew from the BWA in 2004, primarily for increasing anti-American sentiment and increasingly liberal theological positions such as with homosexuality.

As with the SBC, the BWA begins its belief statement with its understanding of the Bible. Whereas the SBC understands the Bible as inerrant, the BWA see it as infallible in areas of faith and Christian conduct. The only substantial theological area of difference relates to the nature of the Atonement, which the BWA describes it as Christ paying the price for our sin rather than being a substitutionary sacrifice. The BWA does not state any doctrinal positions on original sin, perseverance of the saints, the role

of women in the church, homosexuality, or marriage/divorce/remarriage. As such, member churches of the BWA can vary widely on these issues, resulting in some having liberal practices of which the SBC disapproves. For example, the ABC-USA ordains female pastors and allows individual congregations to decide whether or not to ordain LGBT clergy and/or perform same-sex marriages.

14.4 Pentecostal

Pentecostalism had its humble beginning in Topeka Kansas. In 1900, Charles Fox Parham started Bethel Bible School, of which he was the only teacher. A few years earlier, both Parham and his son had fallen ill. He refused all medical treatment and placed his faith in the Holy Spirit's power of divine healing. At Bethel, he further developed his views on the work of the Holy Spirit. Specifically, Parham taught that sometime after a person is initially saved, they can experience a "Baptism of the Holy Spirit." When this happens, the power of the Holy Spirit becomes much more active within a believer's life. Parham believed that Baptism of the Holy Spirit was similar to what happened when the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus during His baptism (Mt 3:13-17; Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-22; Jn 1:29-34). More importantly, Baptism of the Holy Spirit was what specifically happened to the apostles at Pentecost. The Book of Acts reads:

When the day of Pentecost had come, [the apostles] were all together in one place. And suddenly a noise like a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And tongues that looked like fire appeared to them, distributing themselves, and a tongue rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with different tongues, as the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak out. (Acts 2:1-4)

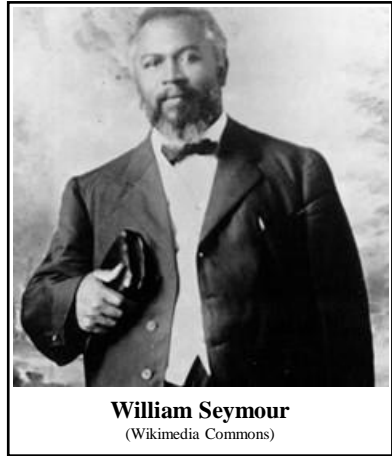
Soon after starting Bethel, a student name Agnes Ozman felt the strong presence of the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues. It was not long afterwards when other students and Parham himself had the same experience. In 1905, Parham moved to Houston and started a Bible school that focused on Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

William Seymour (1870–1922) was the son of an emancipated slave. At age 31, Seymour moved to Cincinnati where he attended God's Bible School and Training Home. This school taught premillennialism and had both black and white students. While in Cincinnati, Seymour contracted smallpox and became blind in his left eye.

In 1903, after two years in Cincinnati, Seymour moved to Houston. Here, he met a variety of local holiness leaders including Parham. Parham

had recruited African American holiness leader Lucy Farrow to be on his evangelistic team, resulting in Farrow hiring Seymour to be the replacement pastor at her church. Seymour joined Parham's Bible school in 1906 and came to believe in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. But Seymour had not yet experienced this himself.

Soon after beginning his studies at Parham's Bible school, Seymour received an invitation to preach at a holiness mission in Los Angeles. He travelled there and began to preach about Baptism in the Holy Spirit, still seeking this for himself. After several months of preaching, multiple people began speaking in tongues. Three days later, Seymour experienced baptism in the Holy Spirit himself and also spoke in tongues.



Attendance at the mission quickly grew and a larger meeting space was needed. The mission therefore moved into an old African Methodist Episcopal church building on Azusa Street in Los Angeles. The legal name was the Apostolic Faith Mission, but it was commonly called the Azusa Street Mission. Activities surrounding this mission were called the Azusa Street Revival, which is understood as the beginning of Pentecostalism.

Since its beginnings, Pentecostalism has been closely associated with Baptism of the Holy Spirit resulting in the speaking of tongues. Speaking in tongues is also called glossolalia (Greek: γλωσσολαλία). This Greek word is the combination of *glossa* (tongue or language) and *laleō* (to speak). Some believe that the sounds uttered during glossolalia do not correspond to any actual language. Others believe that these sounds corresponding to an actual but unlearned language. Those believing the latter often use the term xenolalia instead of glossolalia.

From its humble beginnings on Azusa street, Pentecostalism has become, by far, the fastest growing Christian denomination. A Pew research study in 2011 estimated the number of Pentecostals at 279 million, comprising 12.8% of all Christians. In addition, another 304 million Christians identify as charismatic.³⁶² Charismatics believe in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and in the speaking of tongues but remain members of non-Pentecostal churches. Together, Pentecostals and charismatics comprised over a quarter of all Christians in 2011. They continue to grow both in absolute size and as percentages of worldwide Christianity.

Pentecostal worship is characterized by spontaneity and exuberance. Services typically include the raising of hands in praise, shouting out in praise, dancing, clapping, and people spontaneously speaking in tongues. Services can also include faith healings and even exorcisms. These Pentecostal worship-style influences can often be seen in other denominational services as charismatic members raise their hands in the air while singing and spontaneously vocalize praise during sermons and prayers.

There are many Pentecostal organizations. In addition, many Pentecostal churches are independent and do not belong to any of these organizations. But the largest Pentecostal organization by far is the World Assemblies of God Fellowship (WAGF), consisting of Assemblies of God denominations and churches. According to its website, the WAGF has more than 170 denominational members consisting of more than 442,000 Churches and over 85 million people.³⁶³

Although different Pentecostal denominations may have doctrinal differences, the beliefs of the U.S. Assemblies of God (USAG) is fairly typical and will now be examined. The USAG core beliefs are summarized in its “Sixteen Fundamental Truths.” Many of these align with standard orthodox Christian theology. Summaries of the truths that are more distinctive to Pentecostalism are (numbers correspond to the corresponding numbers used in the USAG document):

1. The Scriptures, are verbally inspired, infallible, and the authoritative rule of faith and conduct;
- 6a. Baptism by immersion is commanded in the Scriptures. Those being baptized declare to the world that they have died with Christ and that they also have been raised with Him to walk in newness of life;
- 6b. The elements of the Lord’s Supper are symbols expressing the sharing of the divine nature of Jesus Christ. They are a memorial of His suffering and death and a prophecy of His second coming;
7. All believers are entitled to and should ardently expect and earnestly seek Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Baptism in the Holy Spirit was the normal experience of all members of the early Christian Church;



8. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking in tongues;
10. Baptism in the Holy Spirit enables a believer to: (a) evangelize with accompanying supernatural signs, (b) have a closer relationship with God, and (c) better utilize the fruits of the Spirit for edifying the body of Christ;
12. Divine healing is an integral part of the gospel. Deliverance from sickness is provided for in the Atonement, and is the privilege of all believers; and
14. The second coming of Christ includes the rapture of the saints, followed by the visible return of Christ with His saints to reign on the earth for one thousand years. This millennial reign will bring the salvation of national Israel and the establishment of universal peace.

As can be seen, the Sixteen Fundamental Truths essentially describe dispensationalism with the added elements of Baptism in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, supernatural signs, and divine healing. Unlike dispensationalism, the Bible is described as infallible and authoritative in areas of faith and conduct but not necessarily in all historical and scientific details (although many Pentecostals believe these things as well).

Neoecharismatics and the Third Wave

The Pentecostal/charismatic movement is often viewed as a renewal with three waves. The First Wave started with the Azusa Street Revival in 1906 and led to Pentecostalism as a new denomination. The Second Wave is associated with the rapid growth in the 1960s of charismatic participation in traditional denominations. These people were also referred to as neopentecostal, but charismatic eventually became the preferred term.³⁶⁴

The Third Wave of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement began in the late 1970s and emphasizes the power of the Holy Spirit that can express itself in miracles, signs, and wonders. This includes traditional Pentecostal aspects such as speaking in tongues, prophesy, and healing. But there is also a strong emphasis on spiritual warfare and the exorcising of evil spirits. A precursor to this Third Wave was the growth of Pentecostalism in indigenous cultures, especially in Africa, where there is a strong recognition of evil spirits and the harm that they can do to both individuals and communities.

The theological basis of the Third Wave was formally developed by John Wimber (1934–1997). Wimber converted to Christianity in 1963 at

age 29 after a career as a prominent rock-and-roll musician. He enrolled in Azusa Pacific College, majored in Biblical Studies, and was therefore well schooled in First Wave Pentecostalism. Upon graduating, Wimber was ordained as a Quaker minister. He eventually left the Quaker denomination due to its discomfort with Pentecostal beliefs and practices.

Wimber believed in Kingdom Theology, where Satan and his demons rule the earth. In Kingdom Theology, the Kingdom of God on earth was inaugurated with the death and resurrection of Christ but will not be consummated until Christ returns and defeats Satan for good. In the meantime, the earth is a place of spiritual warfare between the forces of evil and the forces of good. The power of the Holy Spirit channeled through spiritual gifts can be used to combat evil in this spiritual warfare.

Wimber believed in Baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. But he did not believe that Baptism of the Holy Spirit necessarily resulted in the speaking of tongues, although it might. Rather, Baptism of the Holy Spirit could result in a range of bestowed spiritual gifts such as those listed in 1 Cor 12 (wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophesy, distinguishing spirits, interpretation of tongues) and Rom 12:6-8 (faith, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, showing mercy). Lessening the importance of speaking in tongues made many people much more open to the Third Wave as compared to the first two waves.

Wimber called his revival the Vineyard Movement and formed a church called the Anaheim Vineyard Christian Fellowship. There were soon many other neocharismatic churches, some of whom formed the Association of Vineyard Churches in 1982. Today, this association has more than 2,500 churches in nearly 100 countries.

The US Vineyard organization is called Vineyard USA. It has a statement of faith document called *Core Values and Beliefs*. This document surprisingly has almost no traces of traditional Pentecostal theology. It does not mention Baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, divine healing, or the rapture of the Church. This statement of faith does have much to say about Satan's presence on earth. Some representative excerpts from the Vineyard USA statement of faith include:

- We believe that Satan, originally a great, good angel, rebelled against God, taking a host of angels with him. He was cast out of God's presence and, as a usurper of God's rule, established a counter-kingdom of darkness and evil on the earth;
- Through the fall, Satan and his demonic hosts gained access to God's good creation. Creation now experiences the consequences and effects of Adam's original sin. Human beings are born in sin,

subject to God's judgment of death, and captive to Satan's kingdom of darkness;

- By [Jesus's] death on the cross He also disarmed the demonic powers; and
- The Spirit brings the permanent indwelling presence of God to us for spiritual worship, personal sanctification, building up the Church, gifting us for ministry, and driving back the kingdom of Satan by the evangelization of the world through proclaiming the word of Jesus and doing the works of Jesus.

These statements recognize Satan's presence on earth but tend to minimize the aspect of spiritual warfare that is so central to many neocharismatic churches. Demonic powers are said to have been disarmed and the kingdom of Satan is combated through spreading the gospel rather than through exorcisms and demonic banishment. Nevertheless, active spiritual warfare against Satan and his demons remains central to many neocharismatic churches, especially in Africa. An article from the *Journal of Religion in Africa* explains:

Conversion to Christianity [in Southern Africa] is not taken lightly. It is a bold decision to fight against the devil and his spiritual agents. Pentecostal Charismatic movements' interest in combating poverty and illnesses is grounded in the spiritual warfare doctrine. Due to the spiritual nature of the battle, Satan often works through traditional spirit mediums, relatives, and supernatural forces to burden believers with poverty and ill-health. Concomitantly, Pentecostal Charismatic movements invest in rituals of exorcism, prayers, and casting out of demons. All these rituals form strategies and technologies for spiritual welfare in which a competent fighter-prophet is required.³⁶⁵

The theology and practice of spiritual warfare is sometimes referred to as Deliverance Ministry. The focus of Deliverance Ministry is to deliver believers from evil influences such as demonic possession and generational curses. From a biblical perspective, Christians should certainly be prepared for spiritual warfare. Paul writes, "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph 6: 11-12). However, some African churches go beyond Scripture and believe that salvation is incomplete without deliverance. Mookgo Kgatle writes, "The reason a complete salvation comes only after deliverance is the argument that even if one is born again, the person can still carry generational curses."³⁶⁶

In summary, neocharismatics have retained the Pentecostal and charismatic focus on the Holy Spirit, lessened the emphasis of Baptism in the

Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, and added a strong element of spiritual warfare against Satan and his demons.

Prosperity Theology

Prosperity Theology is known by many other terms such as the Prosperity Gospel, the Health and Wealth Gospel, Name It and Claim It, the Gospel of Success, Seed-Faith Gospel, and Word-Faith. It essentially teaches that it is God's will to bless people's lives in both physical health and in material wealth. If a person has a strong enough faith, physical health and material wealth will ensue. The corollary is that persistent physical unhealth and/or poverty is an indication that a person's faith is not strong enough. Prosperity Theology is thought to be a result of combining aspects of the 19th century New Thought movement and Pentecostal views about divine blessings.

New Thought (also known as Higher Thought) teaches that all disease is mental in origin and that right thinking can therefore have a healing effect. New Thought is thought to have begun with Phineas Quimby (1802–1866), who learned to use hypnotism (then called mesmerism) to treat physical diseases. Quimby opened a mental healing clinic in 1859 and gradually developed a theory that illness is a mental problem that manifests itself physically.

Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910) grew up in a congregational church and struggled with lifelong health issues. She would regularly fall to the floor, writhing and screaming, sometimes for hours. In 1862, Eddy went to Quimby's clinic in hopes of being healed. Her health significantly improved, but only temporarily. Eddy felt that there was spiritual significance to her health improvements, whereas Quimby did not. For the next three years, Eddy and Quimby had extensive discussions about healing methods. Eddy would go on to start the Christian Science movement, which relies on prayer for healing and avoids medical treatment.

New Thought continued to increase in popularity after Quimby with many different practitioners having different philosophies and healing methods. But these healing methods increasingly emphasized the



Mary Baker Eddy
(Wikimedia Commons)

power of thought rather than the use of hypnosis. The International New Thought Alliance was formed in 1914 and stated its purpose as follows:

To teach the Infinitude of the Supreme One; the Divinity of Man and his Infinite Possibilities through the creative power of constructive thinking and obedience to the voice of the indwelling Presence which is our source of Inspiration, Power, Health and Prosperity.³⁶⁷

And so, by the early 20th century, New Thought had expanded beyond healing and had an increased focus on personal empowerment and prosperity. This occurred at the same time Pentecostalism was forming and expanding.

The introduction of New Thought concepts into early Pentecostalism is attributed to Essek William Kenyon (1867–1948). Kenyon was a Baptist minister who had been exposed to New Thought while attending Emerson College of Oratory. After college, Kenyon and his wife spent nearly a decade as travelling faith healers. Kenyon founded the Bethel Bible institute in 1900 while living in Massachusetts. After many years, he moved to Washington State in 1931 and founded the New Covenant Church.

Kenyon believed that Christ's atoning work not only allowed Christians to be positionally righteous before God, but promised many other blessings as well. The Fall gave Satan legal authority over humanity. Christ's resurrection restored mankind's authority to have dominion over the world. This authority is asserted through the creative power of the spoken word, called positive confessions. Just as God created the universe through speech, believers can similarly create through speech. Kate Bowler explains Kenyon's beliefs about positive confession:

Prayer took on binding legal qualities as believers followed Jesus' formula: "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:14). Kenyon replaced the word "ask" with "demand," since petitioners were intitled to the legal benefits of Jesus' name. the Holy Spirit became merely an assistant as Kenton gave the credit for casting out demons, speaking in tongues, and curing disease to the rightful use of the name of Jesus.³⁶⁸

In the early 1930s and throughout the Great Depression, there were certain Pentecostal groups who integrated the views of Kenyon into their theology. Believers could invoke the power of the Holy Spirit through the spoken word, as long as it is done with sufficient faith. However, this power was mostly limited to issues of health and spiritual warfare. This began to change with Kenneth Hagin (1917–2003), who is known as the father of the prosperity theology.³⁶⁹

Hagin was born with severe health problems including a heart condition that eventually resulted in paralysis. He converted to Christianity in

1933 and was healed of his paralysis in 1934 without medical intervention, which Hagin attributed to faith. Several years later, Hagin became a Pentecostal minister and started applying Kenyon's teachings beyond health and healing. Rather, each Christian through faith has access to safety, health, happiness, and financial security. Hagin writes:

The reason we have a right to claim our needs met is, Jesus came to the earth and defeated Satan. We're in the world but we're not of the world (John 15:19), yet we still have to live in this world. So we must use our God-given authority to enforce Satan's defeat and enjoy the blessings of God that we have in Christ, including financial prosperity.

Hagin's views on prosperity theology are known as Word of Faith. The essence of Word of Faith is that a Christian can speak into existence anything consistent with the will of God as long as it is spoken with sufficient faith. God wills Christians to be blessed and financial prosperity is a blessing. Therefore, Christians can experience financial prosperity through Word of Faith.

The prosperity gospel became much more prominent when Oral Roberts started preaching in 1947 through radio broadcasts. Although Robert had been a traveling Pentecostal faith healer and much of his ministry focused on physical healing, he also added the concept of seed-faith to his version of prosperity theology. Seed-faith involved a financial donation to support a Christian ministry that would, in turn, result in eventual financial blessings. Roberts specifically promised that any donation to his ministry would be returned seven-fold. If this did not happen the donation would be returned.



Following Roberts, many prominent preachers increasingly focused on prosperity gospel and different flavors of seed-faith. Some even flaunted their ostentatious wealth as proof-positive of their teachings. Prosperity gospel became highly visible with televangelists such as Reverend Ike, Jim Bakker, Robert Tilton, and Benny Hinn, Joel Osteen, and many others.

Prosperity mega churches have also flourished. In the U.S., there are about 70 prosperity churches with congregations of more than 5000 members, the largest ones having 30,000 members or more.³⁷⁰ However, most of these are non-denominational and not Pentecostal.

But today's growth in the prosperity gospel movement is not in the Global North but in the Global South. Prosperity gospel has spread from the United States to Africa, Asia, and Latin America, often in the poorest of communities. The abject poor are often drawn to prosperity gospel churches in hopes of escaping poverty. But sadly, many end up worse off financially while enriching charismatic church leaders. Francis Sibanda explains the situation in Zimbabwe as the destitute look for solace in prosperity gospel churches, "[T]his search for solace has increased the vulnerability of particular groups of people. Some are pressured to make irrational decisions where they dispose of their property and even get into debt, hoping that spiritual solutions will translate into material well-being."³⁷¹

A fair presentation of the history of prosperity theology has been attempted. This done, it is now appropriate to comment on whether prosperity gospel is actually taught in Scripture. Proper exegesis of typical verses used to defend typical modern prosperity theology concludes that it is not. Furthermore, modern prosperity theology has caused much harm, often through the exploitation of the poor. Samuel Okanlawon gives the following caution:

[T]he traditional view is that the atonement of Jesus Christ does not imply financial and material abundance, nor does it refer to physical healing. Jesus' death on the cross reconciled humans to God and to themselves with wide-ranging implications for ethical living. These texts do not teach that physical healing, divine health, or material and financial abundance are tied to the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross, nor are they components of prosperity that Christians can lay claim to on the basis of their relationship with God ... Prosperity teaching is a perversion of Christian theology as it gravely distorts the biblical teaching of mainstream Christianity on Christ's atonement and is not grounded in a creedal theological system.³⁷²

14.5 Fundamentalism

The term fundamentalism can apply in a general religious sense and also in a specific Christian sense. In a general sense, Rik Peels characterizes fundamentalist movements as exemplifying the following: (1) a rejection of liberal ethics; (2) a literal and infallible view of authoritative texts; and (3) an interpretation of events in a grand narrative of paradise, fall, and redemption (or alternatively cosmic dualism).³⁷³ In addition, fundamentalism adheres unwaveringly to a set of core beliefs. Fundamentalists strictly separate those holding to these core beliefs and those who do not. Those who do not are religiously impure and are not to be trusted.

In this general sense, there can be Islamic fundamentalists, Jewish fundamentalist, Christian fundamentalists, Hindu fundamentalists, Buddhist fundamentalists, Zoroastrian fundamentalists, and perhaps others. But there is a specific history and theology associated with Christian fundamentalism which this section will now discuss. But first, it is necessary to present and discuss the development of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy.

The Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy

Since fundamentalism requires a literal and inerrant view of authoritative texts, Christian fundamentalism was not possible until this view was formally developed as a doctrine. Very few theologians up until the mid-18th century understood the Bible as literally true in all aspects and completely without error. Many fundamentalists today will disagree with this statement, which is why the following attempts a fair presentation.

Of course, the accuracy of Scripture has always been a topic of discussion from the earliest days of Christianity. Origen of Alexandria (c.185–c.253) recognized minor discrepancies in the Bible but was not concerned as they had no theological significance. This position is essentially what is now referred to as biblical infallibility. John Chrysostom (c.347–407) had a similar view: the Bible contains minor errors that are not of theological significance.

Augustine (354–430) had a stronger view of biblical inerrancy. He believed that the original manuscripts were completely without error, but that error could have been introduced in copying and translation. Furthermore, biblical language often uses “accommodation,” resulting in truths that could be understood by the target audience but might be scientifically inaccurate. Augustine also believed that much of Scripture is written in allegory and is therefore not to be taken literally. For example, he understood the creation stories of Genesis as allegorical and believed that creation happened instantaneously rather than over six literal days.

Thomas Aquinas held perhaps the closest view to today’s fundamentalist view of literal biblical inerrancy. He writes, “Hence, it is plain that nothing false can ever underlie the literal sense of Holy Writ.”³⁷⁴ However, this quote is often cited out of context. Aquinas is specifically answering the question of whether a passage in Scripture can have several senses. Aquinas answers in the affirmative. The literal sense of Scripture can point to an allegorical sense, a tropological sense, and an anagogical sense (see discussion of Quadriga hermeneutic on p. 27). Aquinas’s understanding of Scripture is therefore shown to be very far away from the fundamentalist approach to biblical interpretation.

When scholarly translations of the Bible began with Erasmus (c.1466–1536), positions on biblical inerrancy tended to soften somewhat. Erasmus himself believed that the Bible contained some unimportant inconsistencies and that the Holy Spirit did not always bother to correct the faulty memories biblical authors. John Calvin specifically addresses biblical inconsistencies in many of his commentaries. For example, Calvin identifies a clear Septuagint translation error that is quoted in the book of Hebrews but is unconcerned. Calvin simply comments that the biblical authors were not always scrupulous with minor details.

Martin Luther had a more skeptical view of the NT, believing that some but not all books were authoritative in themselves. As such, Luther relegated the entire books of Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation to an appendix in his German Bible translation (see inset showing Luther's table of contents with these four books listed at the end). In his preface to this appendix, Luther explains that the previous books are true and certain but that the four books in the appendix (i.e., Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation) have not held this status even from ancient times. Luther uses even stronger language in his introduction to the book of James, stating that he does not believe it to be of apostolic authorship.

The point is *not* that the major theologians did not understand the Bible as authoritative in theological matters. They certainly did. But none seem to have understood the Bible in the way that fundamentalist do today.

In any case, biblical inerrancy was not a major topic of theological debate until the emergence of historical-critical literary analysis in the early 1800s and its application to the Bible. Historical-critical analysis requires that the methods used to understand the Bible should be the same as for any other piece of literature. Application of the historical-critical method to the Bible then started to result in many unorthodox opinions such as the miracle accounts being myth and Jesus being merely human.

In defense against the historical-critical method, a formal doctrine of biblical inerrancy was developed by the Princeton Theological Seminary.³⁷⁵ This doctrine was first published in 1857 in the book *Inspiration*,

| Die Bücher des neuen testaments. | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Evangelium Sancti Matthei. |
| 2 | Evangelium Sancti Marci. |
| 3 | Evangelium Sancti Lucæ. |
| 4 | Evangelium Sancti Johannis. |
| 5 | Der Apostel geschickt bezeugen von Sancto Lucæ. |
| 6 | Epistel Sancti Pauli zu den Römern. |
| 7 | Die erste Epistel Sancti Pauli zu den Corinthern. |
| 8 | Die ander Epistel Sancti Pauli zu den Corinthern. |
| 9 | Epistel Sancti Pauli zu den Galatern. |
| 10 | Epistel Sancti Pauli zu den Ephesern. |
| 11 | Epistel Sancti Pauli zu den Colossern. |
| 12 | Epistel Sancti Pauli zu den Philippiern. |
| 13 | Die erste Epistel Sancti Pauli zu den Thessalonichern. |
| 14 | Die ander Epistel Sancti Pauli zu den Thessalonichern. |
| 15 | Die erste Epistel Sancti Pauli zu Timotheon. |
| 16 | Die ander Epistel Sancti Pauli zu Timotheon. |
| 17 | Epistel Sancti Pauli an Titon. |
| 18 | Epistel Sancti Pauli an Philemon. |
| 19 | Die erste Epistel Sancti Petri. |
| 20 | Die ander Epistel Sancti Petri. |
| 21 | Die erste Epistel Sancti Johannis. |
| 22 | Die ander Epistel Sancti Johannis. |
| 23 | Die dritte Epistel Sancti Johannis. |
| Die Epistel zu den Hebræern. | |
| Die Epistel Jacobus. | |
| Die Epistel Iudas. | |
| Die offimbarnus Johannis. | |

**Table of Contents in
Luther's German Bible**
(Wikimedia Commons)

which was authored by Archibald Hodge and Benjamin Warfield, both professors at Princeton Theological Seminary.

Inspiration makes a clear distinction between special revelation and inspiration. Special revelation occurs when God communicates directly to an individual. Inspiration occurs when a person is communicating, such as when writing Scripture. Inspiration ensures that what is communicated is correct. *Inspiration* states that this includes all aspects of the Bible, not just spiritual and ethical teachings. This is referred to as plenary inspiration as opposed to partial inspiration. *Inspiration* explains its position as follows:

This is the doctrine of plenary, as opposed to the theory of partial, inspiration. The church doctrine is opposed to the doctrine that some parts of Scripture are inspired, and others not; or that a higher degree of inspiration belongs to some portions than to others; or that inspiration is confined to the moral and religious truths contained in the Bible, to the exclusion of its historical or geographical details.³⁷⁶

The above citation essentially describes the fundamentalist view of biblical inerrancy today. However, the position of *Inspiration* is somewhat more nuanced than what the above-quote may reflect when taken alone. Whereas fundamentalist today understand inerrancy to apply to all details, such is not the case in *Inspiration*. When details are inconsequential, they do not necessarily have to be precisely true and perfectly consistent. *Inspiration* gives the following example:

Matthew says the inscription on the cross was, “The king of the Jews;” Luke, “This is the king of the Jews;” John, “Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.” All different, yet all true; the difference being precisely such as would naturally occur where no special importance was placed on the mere form of expression.³⁷⁷

Inspiration also admits that errors and inconsistencies do exist in the Bible. It simply recognizes that these are few and inconsequential, making the difficulties “miraculously small” and objections based on these minor issues “pitiful.” But still, there is an honest admission that errors and inconsistencies do exist. The authors write, “[T]he cases of contradiction of inconsistencies, are, considering the age and character of the different books constituting the Bible, wonderfully few and trivial. Secondly, these inconsistencies do not concern matters of doctrine of duty, but numbers, dates, and historical details.”³⁷⁸

Charles Hodge, father of Archibald Hodge and also a professor of theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, published the first volume of his seminal *Systematic Theology* in 1871. In it, he points out that general revelation is from God just as special revelation is from God. Therefore, facts about creation cannot be in conflict with Scripture. Hodge writes, “[I]t is

unwise for theologians to insist on an interpretation of Scripture which brings it into collision with the facts of science ... The theologian, therefore, acknowledges that the Scriptures must be interpreted in accordance with established facts ... [but] are at liberty to receive or reject the theories deduced from those facts.”³⁷⁹

Hodge later presents his theory of biblical inerrancy, which is essentially the same as *Inspiration*. He writes, “[Inspiration] is not confined to moral and religious truths, but extends to the statements of facts, whether scientific, historical, or geographical. It is not confined to those facts the importance of which is obvious, or which are involved in matters of doctrine.”³⁸⁰ Hodge therefore makes a distinction between scientific facts and scientific theories. Biblical interpretation must be done in light of scientific facts but not necessarily in light of any scientific theory.

As with *Inspiration*, Hodge admits that there are minor discrepancies in the Bible but is untroubled. He writes, “Admitting that the Scriptures do contain, in a few instances, discrepancies which with our present means of knowledge, we are unable satisfactorily to explain, they furnish no rational ground for denying their infallibility ... The marvel and the miracle is that there are so few of any real importance.”³⁸¹

And so, the Princeton Theological Seminary formally developed a doctrine of biblical inerrancy largely in response to the application of the historical-critical method to the Bible. The Bible was not just any book, but a divine work by inspired authors. A few trivial errors are admitted, but the Bible for the most part is without error in either doctrine or fact. But biblical inerrancy at this time was a debate largely limited to the academic community.

Things change with the appointment of Charles Briggs in 1891 to a new endowed chair in biblical theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Briggs began to aggressively teach extreme liberal positions with regards to the Bible. He specifically identified six barriers to correct biblical interpretation: superstition, verbal inspiration, authenticity, inerrancy, miracles, and predictive prophecy. In other words, Briggs taught that the Bible was a human work by uninspired and often misattributed authors. Furthermore, the Bible is replete with errors and contains miracle accounts that could not have possibly occurred. Briggs, an ordained Presbyterian pastor (PC-USA), was tried for heresy in 1892 by the presbytery of New



Charles Briggs
(Wikimedia Commons)

York. In addition, the PC-USA General Assembly issued a proclamation called the *Portland Deliverance* that required all ministers to affirm their belief in the inerrancy of the Bible's original manuscripts before being ordained. Briggs was eventually defrocked and excommunicated in 1893.

In 1910, the PC-USA General Assembly needed to address the issue of whether to ordain several people who denied the virgin birth of Christ. In response, it wrote the *Doctrinal Deliverance*, which declared five doctrines as being "necessary and essential" to the Christian faith. These "five fundamentals," which would govern all future ordinations, are:

1. The inspiration of the Bible by the Holy Spirit and the inerrancy of Scripture as a result of this;
2. The virgin birth of Christ;
3. The belief that Christ's death was an atonement for sin;
4. The bodily resurrection of Christ; and
5. The historical reality of Christ's miracles.

Conservative Christians widely embraced these five fundamentals and many regard the issuance of *Doctrinal Deliverance*, which included the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, as the beginning of Christian fundamentalism as a movement.

Roman Catholics and Biblical Inerrancy

The Roman Catholic church first established its position on biblical inerrancy in 1893 with Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (On the Study of Sacred Scripture). Leo states that the entire Bible is inspired, and that inspiration is incompatible with any possible error.

In 1943, Pope Pius XII reaffirmed the inerrancy of the Bible in his 1943 encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (On the Most Opportune Way to Promote Biblical Studies). He writes that just as Christ was like a man but without sin, the Bible is like the words of man, but without error.

However, the Catechism describes Holy Scripture more in terms of infallibility rather than inerrancy. Article 3 (Sacred Scripture) states the following (emphasis added):

Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures (§107) ...

God is the author of Sacred Scripture because he inspired its human authors; he acts in them and by means of them. *He thus gives assurance that their writings teach without error his saving truth.* ¶136

And so, the Roman Catholic church certainly holds to the Bible being infallible, but it is obscure as to whether it holds to something like the doctrine of biblical inaccuracy. In any case, Roman Catholic tradition typically interprets the Bible loosely when it relates to scientific issues, allowing for colloquial language that might not be scientifically precise.



Pope Pius XII
(Wikimedia Commons)

Fundamentalism in the 20th Century

Although today many consider the PC-USA to be a somewhat liberal organization, in the early 20th century it was quite conservative, committed to Reformed theology, and questioned the validity of any form of Christianity that did not affirm the five fundamentals. This aggressive affirmation to fundamentalist positions was in large part a reaction against the growing influence of liberal theologies, socialism, and Darwinism.

Fundamentalism soon spread from Presbyterianism to Baptists. The Baptists formed the World Christian Fundamentalist Association (1919), the National Federation of the Fundamentalists of the Northern Baptists (1921), the Fundamentalist Fellowship (1921), and the Baptist Bible Union (1923). These groups aggressively opposed the teaching of evolution in public schools, leading to the Scopes trial in 1925. The Scopes trial resulted in fundamentalism being closely associated with creationism.

By the 1940s, many negative connotations became associated with the term fundamentalism including intolerant, prudish, anti-science, and divisive. Some Christians held fast to the fundamentalist label. But others, though generally holding to the five fundamentals, wished to repair relationships with other Christians that did not. These people began to call themselves evangelicals and neoevangelicals. C.T. McIntire writes:

Fundamentalists and evangelicals in the 1950s and 1960s shared much: both adhered to traditional doctrines of Scripture and Christ; both promoted evangelism, revivals, missions, and personal morality against smoking, drinking, theater, movies, and card-playing ... Fundamentalists, however, believed that they differed from evangelicals and neoevangelicals by being more faithful to Bible-believing Christianity; more

militant against church apostasy, communism, and personal evils; and less ready to cater to social and intellectual respectability.³⁸²

A Venn diagram showing the relationship of evangelicalism and fundamentalism is shown in Figure 14-2. Any Christian in any denomination can be an evangelical, a fundamentalist, both, or neither. But some denominations are more associated with fundamentalism than others, such as dispensational churches. Evangelicalism will be separately discussed in the next section.

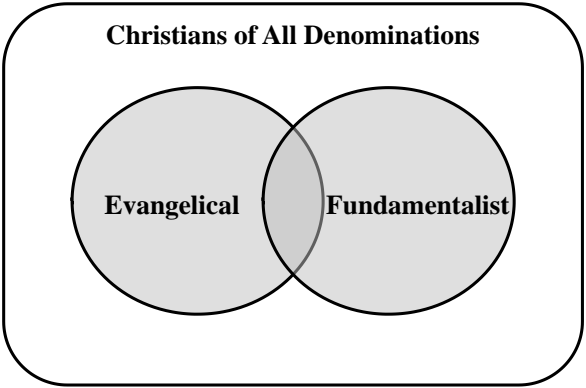


Figure 4-2. Venn Diagram of Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism

In the late 1970s, fundamentalism underwent a somewhat new phase with the political conservatism of Ronald Reagan and the emergence of television-based fundamentalist preachers such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. The major intellectual centers of fundamentalism became conservative universities founded by fundamentalists. Early on, Bob Jones University was founded by Bob Jones Sr. in 1927. Later, Liberty University was founded by Falwell in 1971. Regent University was founded by Robertson in 1978.

Today, Bob Jones University, Liberty University, and Regent can best be described as evangelical rather than fundamentalist. All believe in the doctrines of historic fundamentalism, but all embrace evangelicalism and do not separate themselves from Christian with opposing viewpoints. Fundamentalist higher education today is largely limited to dispensational institutions such as the Dallas Theological Seminary and the Moody Bible Institute.

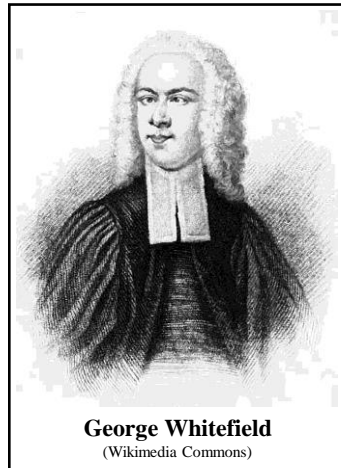
Today in the U.S., Christian fundamentalism is largely associated with the conservative Baptist South. It represents a powerful political voting block concerned with the preservation or restoration of social conservatism through legislation, executive action, and Supreme Court decisions.

14.6 Evangelicalism

The term evangelicalism derives from the Greek word *euangélion* (εὐαγγέλιον), literally means good news. In Old English Bible translations, *euangélion* was translated as *gōdspel* (gōd = good + spel = news). Middle English Bible translations modified this to *gospel*, which is still used in modern translations. In terms of etymology, evangelicalism and *gospel* are synonymous and both mean good news. In this sense, evangelicalism is the Christian practice of sharing the Gospel message, especially to unbelievers with the goal of conversion.

Although there are different historical opinions as to the precursors of evangelicalism as a movement, many trace it back to a combination of 17th century German pietism and 18th century Methodist revivals in England. German pietism focused on the Bible, individual piety, and living a holy Christian life. The Methodist revival movement also focused on living a holy life, but added a strong focus on revival and conversion through open preaching in public spaces. The modern form of evangelicalism began in America with the First Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s and the Second Great Awakening of the 1790s and early 1800s.

The First Great Awakening was largely led by Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, with a focus on the South. Theirs was a message of salvation that transcended denominational boundaries. A Christian begins by recognizing their hopeless sinful nature. This prepares a person for conversion through repentance and placing faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Once saved, a person gradually increases their assurance of salvation through self-reflection, living a sin-free life, and pursuing Christian virtues. The results of the First Great Awakening were increased enthusiasm among existing Christians, many conversions of non-Christians, an increased Christian role for women, an increased exposure of Christianity to southern African-



George Whitefield
(Wikimedia Commons)

Americans, and a greatly increased sense of unity for Christians of different denominations.

The Second Great Awakening was more focused on denominational outreach efforts to newly-settled frontier areas. These efforts were primarily undertaken by Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists. Travelling preachers called circuit riders would typically travel to a newly settled area and hold “camp meetings,” which were often a week long. These camp meetings were typically large outdoor worship services that included preaching, singing, the Lord’s Supper, and sometimes even dancing. The theological message was similar to that of the First Great Awakening, but often with the addition of postmillennialism. Christ would return after a long period of peace and happiness, and Christians therefore had a duty to purify society in preparation for this return. Many conversions happened through these camp meetings and the converted often formed local churches. Significant growth resulted, especially for the Methodists and Baptists.

Evangelicalism in the context of the Great Awakenings was a cross-denominational movement with a focus on four core beliefs: the authority and sufficiency of the Bible, salvation made possible through Christ’s death on the cross, the personal conversion experience, and the responsibility of believers to share the Gospel with non-believers. This is still a very good definition of evangelicalism. It is not unlike the Merriam-Webster definition: “Emphasizing salvation by faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ through personal conversion, the authority of Scripture, and the importance of preaching as contrasted with ritual.”

As described in the previous section on fundamentalism, a new form of evangelicalism emerged from a split within fundamentalism. One group felt that fellowship with Christians that do not hold fundamentalist beliefs is inappropriate. Another group felt that Christian fellowship across denominations is in the spirit of the Body of Christ and is therefore to be encouraged. This latter group initially called themselves neoevangelicals, but this was later shortened to simply evangelicals. Therefore, evangelicalism today can refer to the softer form of the Great Awakenings or to the stricter form that closely resembles fundamentalism.

Evangelicals today that came from the fundamentalist tradition typically view the Bible as literally inerrant, at least in the original manuscripts. However, these evangelicals are typically tolerant of those who do not believe in plenary inerrancy, especially if the alternative view is infallibility in matters of faith and practice. Evangelicals today that came from the Great Awakening tradition will often not believe that an evangelical needs to believe in the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, resulting in self-described evangelicals who disagree on this issue.

Good insight into evangelicalism and the doctrine of inerrancy comes from an examination of the Baptist theologian Carl Henry (1913–2003). Henry argued that the main focus of evangelicalism should be to avoid cultural isolationism. Fundamentalists were against smoking, drinking alcohol, movies, and dancing and therefore isolated themselves from society. Evangelicals should do the precisely the opposite and engage with modern culture so as to transform it from within.

Henry viewed the goal of evangelicalism as primarily to convert unbelievers and to transform society and did not think that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy was of critical importance in the advancement of these goals. Rather, requiring all evangelicals to believe in biblical inerrancy might shrink the ranks significantly and inhibit evangelical progress. Henry himself believed in biblical inerrancy, but also recognized that it is not explicitly taught in Scripture. Therefore, people believing in infallibility rather than inerrancy are still being faithful to the Bible. For all of the above reasons, Henry strongly opposed the believe in biblical inerrancy to be required for evangelicals in good standing.

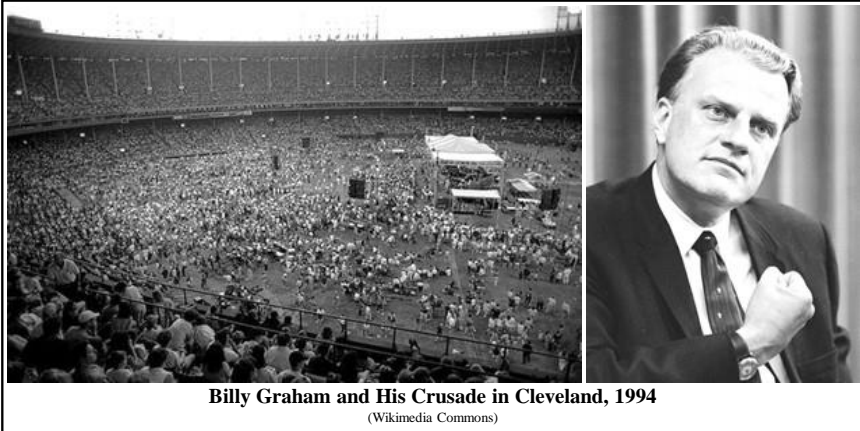
There is much more to the story that cannot be addresses here, except that the debate continues. Fuller Seminary in Southern California dropped its inerrancy statement in 1962, which became a growing trend for other seminaries. In response to this, about 200 conservative evangelical leaders gathered at a conference held in Chicago in October 1978 and wrote the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. It ends with Article XIX stating:

We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ.

We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the church.

This council was organized by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, making its conclusions unsurprising. But many evangelicals disagree with the Chicago Statement. As such, the evangelical debate in biblical inerrancy continues.

Most discussions of evangelicalism include extensive treatment of Billy Graham (1918–2018). Interested readers are referred elsewhere, as Graham was not part of important theological debates. However, Graham extensively engaged with other Christian denominations, including Roman Catholicism, and for this he was predictably criticized by many fundamentalist leaders.



14.7 Further Reading

Those interested in a concise treatment of the history and theology of a variety of Christian denominations are encouraged to read Ron Rhodes book *The Complete Guide to Christian Denominations: Understanding the History, Beliefs, and Differences*. Those wanting more detail are directed to Frank Mead's book *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*. Those wanting deeper treatment of Eastern Orthodoxy are encouraged to read Vladimir Lossky's classic, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. American Christian fundamentalism is given thorough treatment in David Beale's book *Christian Fundamentalism in America: The Story of the Rest from 1857 to 2020* (although there is not much 21st century content). Prosperity Gospel, at least from an American perspective, is given comprehensive treatment in Kate Bowler's book *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*.

14.8 Study Questions

1. What are the three major divisions within Christianity? What are the main distinguishing characteristics of these three divisions?
2. What are the sources of authority for Eastern Orthodox theology? How does this differ from Roman Catholicism and Protestant denominations?
3. What are the *Thirty-Nine Articles*? What are the Creeds that are affirmed in the *Thirty-Nine Articles*? Are these the same creeds that are affirmed in the *Book of Common Prayer*?

4. What are some of the doctrinal differences held by the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist World Alliance?
5. What does Pentecostalism mean by Baptism in the Holy Spirit?
6. Briefly describe the “three waves” of Pentecostalism.
7. What is meant by the Prosperity Gospel, how is it biblically defended, and how is it biblically criticized?
8. What are three general characteristics of fundamentalist movements?
9. Briefly explain John Calvin and Martin Luther’s views on biblical inerrancy.
10. What are some of the differences between evangelical Christianity and fundamentalist Christianity?

15. Theological Elegance

I end this book with some thoughts on the elegance or lack thereof of Christian theology. After reading this book, the reader is hopefully more knowledgeable about theology in general, understands a range of thoughts on various topics, and is better positioned to decide which best rings true. But should the elegance of a theological system matter in making such judgements? In physics, Einstein's theory of general relativity is both sublimely elegant and powerfully descriptive for large-scale phenomena. In contrast, quantum mechanics is anything but elegant but is equally powerful for describing small-scale phenomena. Is the elegant to be preferred over the inelegant?

The issue of elegance versus inelegance as it relates to theology was posed to C.S. Lewis with the question, "Is theology poetry?"³⁸³ Lewis is being asked if Christians might be drawn to Christianity because of its elegance rather than its truth. He responds first by refining the question and then by comparing Christian theology to the elegance of mythologies and to the elegance of a scientific worldview.

When asked whether theology is poetry, Lewis rephrases the question to be more precise: "Does Christian Theology owe its attraction to its power of arousing and satisfying our imaginations? Are those who believe it mistaking aesthetic enjoyment for intellectual assent, or assenting because they enjoy?"³⁸⁴ In other words, is there truth about the alleged confusion of Christian believers between imaginative enjoyment and intellectual agreement. This issue relates more specifically to the aesthetic attraction of the story of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Is there a romantic attraction of the story of Jesus that causes people to abandon reason when coming to faith? Lewis answers this question in pithy style and famously writes, "If Theology is Poetry, it is not very good Poetry."³⁸⁵

Lewis then compares Christian theology to both pantheism and polytheism. He observes



C.S. Lewis
(Wikimedia Commons)

that Christianity has neither the majestic simplicity of pantheism nor the rich imagination of polytheism. In other words, both pantheism and polytheism are better poetry than Christianity.

Lewis then examines science as a mythological secular worldview. In doing so, he distinguishes between science as observation about regularities seen in nature from science as a secular religion, which he calls the Scientific Outlook. Lewis concludes that the Scientific Outlook is one of the finest myths that human imagination has yet produced. He writes:

The play is preceded by the most austere of all preludes: the infinite void, and matter restlessly moving to being forth it knows not what. Then, but the millionth millionth chance—what tragic irony—the conditions at one point of space and time bubble up into that tiny fermentation which is the beginning of life ... With infinity suffering, against all but insuperable obstacles, it spreads, it breeds, it complicates itself, from the amoeba up to the plant, up to the reptile, up to the mammal ... [Then] there comes forth a little naked, shivering, cowering creature, shuffling, not yet erect, promising nothing, the product of another millionth millionth chance. Yet somehow he thrives ... He learns to master Nature. Science comes and dissipates the superstitions of his infancy. More and more he becomes the controller of his own fate ... And now, mark the final stroke of genius ... the whole universe will run down ... All ends in nothingness ... It is the pattern of many Elizabethan tragedies ... Such a world drama appeals to every part of us.³⁸⁶

And so, if people are primarily interested in mythical quality, they will choose the Scientific Outlook over Christianity. Christians do not do this and therefore cannot be mistaking aesthetic enjoyment for intellectual assent. Lewis goes on to describe why the Scientific Outlook is not supportable. It relies on reason, but then attributes reason to a cosmic accident that therefore cannot be trusted. This difficulty often leads the atheist to theism and then the theist to Christianity, as it did for Lewis.³⁸⁷

Lewis's message is that theology need not be aesthetically beautiful, just true. Hopefully after reading this book you will have found much beauty in much of theology just like scientists find much beauty in Einstein's equations. But this is just a bonus. You will also have found much messiness in theology just as scientists find much messiness in quantum mechanics. But these messy aspects of theology exist because they work, just as quantum mechanics persists because it works. Everything about theology need not be elegant, just consistent with God's revelation. In fact, there is cause to be suspicious in an overly-beautiful theology, for this might indicate that it is the work of man and not the truth of God. We turn again to C.S. Lewis:

Besides being complicated, reality, in my experience, is usually odd. It is not neat, not obvious, not what you expect ... Reality, in fact, is usually something you could not have guessed. That is one of the reasons I believe Christianity. It is a religion you

could not have guessed. If it offered us just the kind of universe we had always expected, I should feel we were making it up. But, in fact, it is not the sort of thing anyone would have made up. It has just that queer twist about it that real things have. So let us leave behind all these boys' philosophies—these over-simple answers. The problem is not simple and the answer is not going to be simple either.³⁸⁸

But many people (maybe most) are more comfortable with a simplified Christianity than a complicated Christianity. That is, a deep and thorough understanding of Christian theology will not be helpful for everyone. I therefore end with a request to the reader that is similar to the request made at the beginning of this book. Recall the apostle Paul's instructions regarding Christian stumbling blocks, "Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not to have quarrels over opinions . . . Therefore let's not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this: not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's or sister's way" (Rom 14:1-13). In the introduction, I ask the reader to make sure that this book is a personal blessing and not a personal stumbling block. I now ask the reader to ensure that their increased knowledge of theology is used as a blessing for others rather than a stumbling block for others. For example, it may be helpful to begin a theological discussion with something like, "I know that you believe this, as to many theologians. Are you interested in discussing some other views that theologians have held over time?" As the conversation progresses, be aware of whether is being helpful or is turning into a stumbling block. Hopefully you will find many who are just as interested in theological discussions as yourself, with the Holy Spirit working through these discussions to both strengthen faith and enlighten the truth, for "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:24).

Appendix A: The Creeds

A creed is an authoritative summary of beliefs. The earliest Christian creeds were written in Greek and consisted of short sections, each beginning with “I believe,” which is a translation of the Greek word *pistévo* (πιστεύω). This word is related to the Greek word *pistis* (πίστις), which is typically translated as “faith” in the New Testament. For example, in Ephesians Paul writes that you are saved by *pistis*. *Pistis* and *pistévo* mean more than simply belief and faith. They also involve trust and commitment. When someone says “I believe” when reciting a creed, they are saying that they believe it, they have faith in it, they are committed to it, and they have put their trust in it.

When the creeds were translated from Greek into Latin, *pistévo* was translated into *credo*, which also means “I believe.” Old English modified the Latin to *creda*, which means a confession of faith. Today, a creed is an short authoritative summary of religious beliefs. But it can be helpful to simply think of creeds as compilations of “I believe” statements.

The most important creeds are the Rule of Faith, the Nicene Creed, the Apostles Creed, the Chalcedonian Definition, and the Athanasian Creed. Each of these are reproduced at the end of this section except for the Rule of Faith, which is now discussed.

The Rule of Faith

The Rule of Faith is thought to have developed soon after Pentecost when new churches were being formed and the core of Christian beliefs needed to be consistently communicated to potential converts. The Rule of Faith is really more of a proto-creed since it was passed down through oral tradition rather than in writing.

The Rule of Faith has three sections. One about the Father, one about the Son, and one about the Holy Spirit. Irenaeus (c.130– c.202) describes the Rule of Faith as follows:

I believe in God, the Father, not made, not material, invisible; one God, the creator of all things.

I believe in the Word of God, Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, was made man among men, visible and tangible, in order to abolish death and show forth life and produce a community of union between God and man.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom the righteous were led forth into the way of righteousness; and who in the end of the times was poured out in a new way upon mankind in all the earth, renewing man unto God.

The Rule of Faith was primarily used as a baptismal confession. Before being baptized, a person was required to recite it. As can be seen, the Rule of Faith is Trinitarian. The Father is the Creator but exists outside of His creation. Jesus Christ is the Word of God who came to earth to allow the broken relationship between God and man to be restored. The Holy Spirit leads people in the ways of righteousness and renews fallen mankind. These truths are what the early church felt were most important for baptismal candidates to confess.

It is important to recognize that the Rule of Faith came before any of the NT writings. As the NT writings started to appear, the Rule of Faith was increasingly used as a test for interpretations of these writings and teachings based on these interpretations. Trying to determine an appropriate scriptural interpretation was referred to as seeking. In his *The Prescription Against Heretics*, Tertullian (c.155– c.220) writes, “Let our seeking, therefore be in that which is our own, and from those who are our own, and concerning that which is our own, –that, and only that, which can become an object of inquiry without impairing the rule of faith.” A scriptural interpretation must be consistent with the Rule of Faith, or it is a bad interpretation.

The Rule of Faith gradually lengthened into what is known as the Old Roman Creed. The Old Roman Creed was expanded even further to become the Apostles’ Creed.

Creds used for liturgical purposes were also referred to as symbols. For this reason, the Old Roman Creed is sometimes referred to as the Old Roman Symbol and the Apostles’ Creed is sometimes referred to as the Symbol of the Apostles.

The Nicene Creed

Baptismal creeds developed organically in response to liturgical needs. In contrast, conciliar creeds were written and formally approved by

ecumenical councils. The most important conciliar creed is the Nicene Creed, which is now discussed.

There are actually two versions of the Nicene Creed. The first was approved by the Council of Nicaea in 325. It is variously referred to as the Nicene Creed, the Original Nicene Creed, the Creed of Nicaea, or the first version of the Nicene Creed. The second version was approved by the Council of Constantinople in 381. It is, confusingly, also referred to as the Nicene Creed. In addition, it is referred to as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed and the second version of the Nicene Creed. The remainder of this section will use the terms Original Nicene Creed and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed to avoid confusion.

Recall that the Rule of Faith has three “I believe” sections: one about the Father, one about the Son, and one about the Holy Spirit. The same is true for the Original Nicene Creed. Its “I believe” section on the Father is almost identical to the corresponding section in the of the Rule of Faith. The “I believe” section about the Holy Spirit in the Original Nicene Creed is actually shorter than the Rule of Faith, only stating, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

The “I believe” section in the Original Nicene Creed on Christ is much longer than the other sections and is about three times as long as the corresponding section in the Rule of Faith. This is because it was specifically written to address the Arian controversy that was the primary issue at the Council of Nicaea (see p. 54). Recall that the Arian controversy boiled down to whether Christ was of the same substance as the Father (*homoousios*) or the Arian position that Christ was of a similar substance as the Father (*homoiousios*). If Christ is of the same substance, He must be God and co-eternal with God. If Christ is of a similar substance, he must be a created being and not co-eternal with God.

The Council of Nicaea consisted of a heated debate with Arius defending Arianism and Athanasius condemning it. After two intense months, Arianism was condemned as a heresy and Arius was exiled. As a result of this debate, both versions of the Nicene Creed specifically refer to Christ as *homoousios* with the Father (i.e., of the same substance as the Father). *Homoousios* is often translated into English as Christ being consubstantial with the Father.

The Original Nicene Creed addressed the Arian controversy but raised many questions about the Holy Spirit. This is because it only stated that one is to believe in the Holy Spirit, leaving the issue of whether the Holy Spirit has full divinity unclear. This and other issues led Emperor Theodosius I to convene the Council of Constantinople in 381. The result was the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, which greatly expands on the Holy Spirit and adds a new “I believe section” on the church.

In the Original Creed, it was not clear if the Holy Spirit is fully God. The Son is represented as fully God, but we are only told to believe in the Holy Spirit. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed clarifies this issue by representing the Holy Spirit as truly God. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the one Triune God who is to be adored and glorified on equal terms with the Father and Son.

There is a specific aspect of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed related to the Holy Spirit that is of critical importance. In the version approved by the Council of Constantinople, the Holy Spirit is said to “proceed from the Father.” This is referred to as the procession clause. In the late sixth century, some Latin churches started adding “and the Son” to this procession statement, so that the Holy Spirit is said to “proceed from the Father and the Son” rather than just the Father. In Latin, the clause “and the Son” corresponds to the word *filioque*. This addition is therefore referred to as the *filioque* controversy.

The Eastern Churches strongly objected to the addition of *filioque* to the procession clause and viewed it as a heresy. From their perspective, God the Father is the sole reason everything exists, including the second and third Persons of the Trinity. Therefore, the Holy Spirit must only proceed from the Father and not also from the Son. This controversy persisted for hundreds of years, and it was one of the major reasons why the Eastern Church finally separated from the Roman Catholic Church. This occurred in 1054 in an event known as the East-West Schism (see p. 45).

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed has a new “I believe” section that relates to the church. It reads:

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

This section starts off by calling the church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. These four characteristics are referred to as the “Four Marks of the Church.” The church is one in that it consists of all believers as the body of Christ. The church is holy in that it is set apart for God’s purposes. It is catholic in the sense of being universally open to all of humanity regardless of ethnicity or nationality. And it is apostolic in that it is based on the teachings and practices of Jesus’s original apostles.

The aspect of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed that we will examine last is its inclusion of the words: “I confess to one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.” The creed here uses language that corresponds closely to Scripture. In Acts 2:38, Peter says, “Repent, and each of you be

baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

There is much scholarly debate about this verse. Evangelicals tend to associate the forgiveness of sins strictly to repentance. They would understand this verse to mean something like “Repent for the forgiveness of your sins, and then be baptized.” But the creed mentions nothing about repentance, it only speaks of “baptism for the forgiveness of sins.” This is not a simple topic. Baptism is understood in widely different ways by different denominations (see Section 10.4). This ranges from baptism actually resulting in the forgiveness of sins to baptism being merely a human act of obedience with no spiritual effects. But if baptism is strictly a human act of obedience, it is fair to ask why believing in baptism for the forgiveness of sins was important enough to be included in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, right along with belief in the Father, belief in the Son, and belief in the Holy Spirit. This is an ongoing and fascinating theological debate with good arguments on all sides.

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed is the most agreed-upon dogmatic statement of faith in all of Christianity. It is officially affirmed by the Roman Catholic church, the Anglican Communion (which includes Episcopal churches), and Eastern Orthodoxy. In addition, the major Protestant denominations of Lutheranism, Methodism, and Presbyterianism also affirm the Nicene Creed. And Baptists agree with it but do not officially affirm it as they only affirm the Bible.

Apostles’ Creed

Recall that there are two categories of creeds: baptismal and conciliar. The Original Nicene Creed and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed are conciliar since they were formally approved by an ecumenical councils. Baptismal creeds, in contrast, developed organically for use in baptismal ceremonies. This started with the Rule of Faith, which expanded into the Old Roman Creed, and then further expanded to become the Apostles’ Creed.

The Apostles’ Creed can be divided into 12 articles. Sometime, probably in the 6th century, a tradition arose that assigned each of these articles to a specific apostle (with Matthias replacing Judas). In this legendary account, each Apostle contributed their associated article, making the Apostles’ Creed a compilation of what each of the apostles thought to be theologically important. Although this is a legend, it is a fun way to think about the Apostles’ Creed.

The content of the Apostles’ Creed will be examined by noting how it compares to the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. For example, the “I

believe” section on the God the Father as creator of Heaven and earth are very similar.

The “I believe” section on the God the Son in the Apostles’ Creed is much shorter than the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed and more closely resembles the Rule of Faith. This is because the Apostles’ Creed, unlike the Original Nicene Creed and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, is for baptismal purposes and is not trying to refute the Arian heresy. However, the Father and Son sections taken together can be thought of as refuting another heresy called Marcionism (see p. 53).

In Marcionism, the God of the Old Testament is a lesser God, called the Demiurge, who created a world tainted with sin. The creeds refute this by stating that God is the creator of heaven and earth. In Marcionism, the God of the New Testament is the true and pure God who cannot be associated with the tainted physical universe. Jesus is therefore a purely spiritual entity and only appears to have a physical body. The Apostles’ Creed also refutes this by stating that Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered, and died.

The Apostles’ Creed section on the Holy Spirit is very short. In fact, it is identical to the Original Nicene Creed, only stating, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” The section on the church, however, is almost identical to the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. It affirms belief in “the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.” Notice, however, that it affirms belief in the forgiveness of sins, but does not refer to baptism for the forgiveness of sins, thereby avoiding this theological difficulty.

The Apostles’ Creed also states that Christ, “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead.” The Apostles’ Creed adds that Christ “descended into hell,” which does not appear in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.

There are several common interpretations about what it means for Christ to have descended into Hell. In the original Greek, Christ is said to have literally descended to the bottom (*katelthonta eis ta katôtata*). In the Latin translation of the Greek, Christ is said to have descended to those below (*descendit ad inferos*). And so, it is possible that Christ, being a dead person, simply went to where all dead people go with nothing more to the story.

Other think that Christ descending into hell has more significance. Ephesians 4:9 reads, “Now this expression, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?” Perhaps more interesting is 1 Pt, which reads, “[Christ] also went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison ... For the gospel has for this

purpose been preached even to those who are dead.” And so, there are those who believe that Christ descended to preach to the unsaved souls in hell, those who think that Christ descended to release OT saints, and those who think that Christ descended to proclaim victory to Satan and his minions. In any case, a better modern English translation is probably that “Jesus descended to the dead” rather than “Jesus descended into hell.”

Although not as universally affirmed as the Nicene Creed, the Apostles’ Creed is still widely used in baptismal ceremonies. It is used by the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church, the Anglican Church, the Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church, and others.

Summary

Creeds are not merely symbols used in baptism or conciliar rulings against heresies. They are authoritative summaries of the core of Christian faith. As such, they are doctrinally and theologically useful.

Cyril of Jerusalem (c.313–386) was a bishop who wrote a series of lectures given to catechumens in Jerusalem being prepared for baptism. Cyril, who refers to creeds as Articles of the Faith, and writes:

[I]n the Articles, which are few, we comprehend the whole doctrine of the Faith. This I wish you to remember even in the very phrase, and to rehearse it with all diligence among yourselves, not writing it on paper, but by memory grav[ing] it on your heart as on a monument. For the Articles of the Faith were not composed at the good pleasure of men: but the most important points chosen from all Scripture, make up the one teaching of the Faith. And, as the mustard seed in a little grain contains many branches, thus also this Faith, in a few words, hath enfolded in its bosom the whole knowledge of godliness contained both in the Old and New Testaments.³⁸⁹

And so, Christians interested in theology are strongly encouraged to be familiar with the major creeds, to recognize their dogmatic emphases, and to use them as a supplemental hermeneutic when interpreting Scripture themselves and when assessing the interpretations of others. In a liturgical context, those who recite the creeds in church services will hopefully find their worship experience strengthened and more closely aligned with theological truths.

Original Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the same substance [*homoousios*] of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth,

Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down, and became incarnate and became man, and suffered, and rose again on the third day, and ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and dead,

And in the Holy Spirit.

But as for those who say, There was when He was not, and, Before being born He was not, and that He came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis or substance, or created, or is subject to alteration or change—these the Catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes.

Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial [*homoousios*] with the Father;

through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father [and the son], who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,

and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our
Lord, who was conceived by the Holy
Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate, was
crucified, died and was buried; he de-
scended into hell; on the third day he
rose again from the dead;

he ascended into heaven, and is seated
at the right hand of God the Father al-
mighty; from there he will come to
judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy
catholic Church, the communion of
saints, the forgiveness of sins, the res-
urrection of the body, and life ever-
lasting.

Amen.

Chalcedonian Definition

Following, then, the holy Fathers, we all
unanimously teach that our Lord Jesus
Christ is to us One and the same Son, the
Self-same Perfect in Godhead, the Self-
same Perfect in Manhood; truly God and
truly Man; the Self-same of a rational
soul and body; co-essential with the Fa-
ther according to the Godhead, the Self-
same co-essential with us according to
the Manhood; like us in all things, sin
apart; before the ages begotten of the Fa-
ther as to the Godhead, but in the last
days, the Self-same, for us and for our
salvation (born) of Mary the Virgin The-
otokos as to the Manhood; One and the
Same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten;
acknowledged in Two Natures uncon-
fusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, in-
separably; the difference of the Natures
being in no way removed because of the
Union, but rather the properties of each
Nature being preserved, and (both) con-
curring into One Person and One Hy-
postasis; not as though He was parted or
divided into Two Persons, but One and
the Self-same Son and Only-begotten
God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ; even as
from the beginning the prophets have
taught concerning Him, and as the Lord
Jesus Christ Himself hath taught us, and
as the Symbol of the Fathers hath
handed down to us.

Athanasian Creed

Whoever desires to be saved should
 above all hold to the catholic faith.
 Anyone who does not keep it whole
 and unbroken will doubtless perish
 eternally.

Now this is the catholic faith:

That we worship one God in trinity
 and the trinity in unity,
 neither blending their persons
 nor dividing their essence.

For the person of the Father is a
 distinct person,
 the person of the Son is another,
 and that of the Holy Spirit still an-
 other.

But the divinity of the Father, Son,
 and Holy Spirit is one,
 their glory equal, their majesty co-
 eternal.

What quality the Father has, the Son
 has, and the Holy Spirit has.

The Father is uncreated,
 the Son is uncreated,
 the Holy Spirit is uncreated.

The Father is immeasurable,
 the Son is immeasurable,
 the Holy Spirit is immeasurable.

The Father is eternal,
 the Son is eternal,
 the Holy Spirit is eternal.

And yet there are not three eter-
 nal beings;

there is but one eternal being.

So too there are not three unre-
 created or immeasurable beings;

there is but one uncreated and
 immeasurable being.

Similarly, the Father is almighty,
 the Son is almighty,
 the Holy Spirit is almighty.

Yet there are not three almighty
 beings;

there is but one almighty being.

Thus the Father is God,
 the Son is God,
 the Holy Spirit is God.

Yet there are not three gods;
 there is but one God.

Thus the Father is Lord,
 the Son is Lord,
 the Holy Spirit is Lord.

Yet there are not three lords;
 there is but one Lord.

Just as Christian truth compels us
 to confess each person individually
 as both God and Lord,
 so catholic religion forbids us
 to say that there are three gods or
 lords.

The Father was neither made nor cre-
 ated nor begotten from anyone.

The Son was neither made nor cre-
 ated;
 he was begotten from the Father
 alone.

The Holy Spirit was neither made
 nor created nor begotten;
 he proceeds from the Father and the
 Son.

Accordingly there is one Father, not
 three fathers;
 there is one Son, not three sons;
 there is one Holy Spirit, not three
 holy spirits.

Nothing in this trinity is before or af-
 ter,

nothing is greater or smaller;
 in their entirety the three persons
 are coeternal and coequal with each
 other.

So in everything, as was said earlier,
 we must worship their trinity in their
 unity

and their unity in their trinity.

Anyone then who desires to be saved
 should think thus about the trinity.

Athanasian Creed (cont.)

But it is necessary for eternal salvation
that one also believe in the incarnation
of our Lord Jesus Christ faithfully.

Now this is the true faith:

That we believe and confess
that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's
Son,

is both God and human, equally.

He is God from the essence of the
Father,

begotten before time;

and he is human from the essence of
his mother,

born in time;

completely God, completely human,
with a rational soul and human flesh;
equal to the Father as regards divinity,

less than the Father as regards humanity.

Although he is God and human,
yet Christ is not two, but one.

He is one, however,
not by his divinity being turned into
flesh,

but by God's taking humanity to
himself.

He is one,
certainly not by the blending of his
essence,

but by the unity of his person.

For just as one human is both rational
soul and flesh,
so too the one Christ is both God and
human.

He suffered for our salvation;
he descended to hell;

he arose from the dead;

he ascended to heaven;

he is seated at the Father's right
hand;

from there he will come to judge the
living and the dead.

At his coming all people will arise
bodily

and give an accounting of their own
deeds.

Those who have done good will enter
eternal life,

and those who have done evil will
enter eternal fire.

This is the catholic faith:

one cannot be saved without believing
it firmly and faithfully.

Glossary of Theological Terms

A

Abrahamic Covenant. The Abrahamic covenant is God's promise to Abraham to have many descendants, to have a good land in which to live, and to have a famous and respected name.

Accommodation. In theology, accommodation refers to God communicating divine ideas to people in a way that they can be understood, if only in a limited sense. A weak form of accommodation is God using human communication methods, which are insufficient to communicate divine ideas. A moderate form of accommodation is God allowing for content in the Bible that is not literally true but is nevertheless the best way to communicate a particular divine truth. A strong form of accommodation is God allowing biblical writers to sometimes affirm false beliefs so as to not create controversy when trying to communicate more important spiritual points.

Adoption. In theology, adoption refers to a converted person being brought into God's spiritual family.

Adoptionism. Adoptionism, also called Dynamic Monarchianism, is the heretical early Christian nontrinitarian theological doctrine that Jesus was adopted by God. Some adoptionists believe that this occurred at Jesus's baptism, others His resurrection, and still others at His ascension.

Adversary. *See Satan.*

Aesthetics. Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of beauty, art, the creation of art, and the appreciation of beauty. Aesthetics is typically concerned with what is pleasing to the senses, especially sight.

Aetianism. *See Anomoeanism.*

Agapism. Agapism is a system of ethics where all moral choices are based on selfless charitable love. The word is derived from the Greek word *agapē* ἀγάπη). It is the highest form of love and can be thought of as a selfless love and how God loves each of us.

Age of Accountability. This refers to the point in a person's life when they are able to make informed moral choices and are therefore

morally accountable for these choices. The age of accountability is typically used to justify infant salvation. Even though infants have original sin and original guilt, some believe that this condition does not condemn them before they reach the age of accountability.

Age of Reason. *See Enlightenment.*

Agnosticism. An agnostic is a person with the belief that God may exist or may not exist and is uncertain which is true.

Alexandrian School. This was an early center of theological education based out of the city of Alexandria, which is located in modern day Egypt. It is closely associated with the Platonic tradition. It drew heavily from the Jewish writer Philo and supplemented a literal interpretation of Scripture with allegorical interpretation. Major theologians associated with the Alexandrian school include Clement (c.150–c.215), Origen (c.185–c.215), and Didymus the Blind (c.313–398).

Allegorical Sense (of Scripture). This is one of the four methods of the Quadriga for interpreting Scripture. The allegorical sense is the spiritual message of what we should truly believe, particularly with regards to how the text is pointing to Christ. The other three are the literal sense, the tropological sense, and the anagogical sense.

Amillennialism. This refers to an interpretation of the thousand-year period discussed in Rv 20, referred to as the millennium. Amillennialism believes that there will not be a literal thousand-year period of Christ ruling on earth before the Final Judgement.

Anabaptism. Anabaptism is the practice of baptizing adults even if the person had been baptized as an infant. The word anabaptism literally means to immerse again (ana = again, baptism = to immerse).

Anagogical Sense (of Scripture). This is one of the four methods of the Quadriga for interpreting Scripture. The anagogical meaning relates to eschatology and the hope of things to come. The other three are the literal sense, the allegorical sense, and the tropological sense.

Anchorite. In Christianity, an anchorite is a man (woman: anchoress) who withdraws from society to live an ascetic life of prayer and devotion to God. Anchorites represented the earliest form of Christian monasticism, with the earliest examples being in the Egyptian desert.

Anima Naturaliter Christiana. This term refers to a naturally Christian soul, and was first used by Tertullian. Like Hellenistic philosophers, Tertullian looks for knowledge of God from the world outside of man and from the world within a man's soul. Thus he appeals even to the witness of the pagan, a witness that he terms the "testimony of the soul naturally Christian." Even the pagan by different exclamations spontaneously testifies to his knowledge of God and of those Christian truths which belong to the sphere of natural knowledge. As used by

theologians, this term has come to mean: (1) that knowledge of God and of the natural moral law belongs to the very essence of man and predisposes him to Christianity; (2) that a cult is an essential anthropologic element; (3) that man is naturally open to a possible divine word-revelation; and (4) that a redeemed Christian has an obediential potency that is actualized by a supernatural grace.

Anomoeanism. Anomoeanism (also known as Heterousianism, Aetianism, and Eunomianism) is an extreme form of Arianism that believe the Jesus of Nazareth was not of the same substance as the Father (*homoousios*) nor of a similar substance (*homoiousios*). Rather, Jesus was of a completely different substance (*heteroousios*). This movement was founded by Aëtius in the fourth century, who was succeeded by Eunomius. This movement disappeared soon after the death of Eunomius at the end of the fourth century.

Angel. The word angel is the English equivalent of Greek word *aggelos* (ἄγγελος) which literally means a messenger. In Christianity, angels are created spiritual beings that have super-human intelligence and moral awareness. In the Bible, angels are often used to deliver messages from God, but angels also have a range of additional functions and offices.

Annihilationism. Annihilationism, also referred to as extinctionism or destructionism, is the doctrine that damned souls will not suffer torment for all eternity. Rather, after the Last Judgement, all damned souls (including Satan and his fallen angels) will be annihilated and therefore cease to exist. An alternate form of annihilationism is that the souls of the damned are annihilated upon death.

Antichrist. The word antichrist typically refers to a false messiah that will appear before the second coming of Christ and will eventually be defeated by Christ. However, there are a number of different doctrines of the antichrist such as the view of many Reformed theologians that the antichrist consists of the office of the Roman Catholic papacy.

Antiochene School. The Antiochene School was a center for theological learning in Antioch. It emphasized a literal interpretation of Scripture and the twofold nature of Christ being both human and divine. The best-known theologians from the Antiochene School are Diodore of Tarsus and his two pupils Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom.

Antinomianism. In Christianity, antinomianism is the belief that Christians are freed from the Law including the requirement to follow the Ten Commandments. None of their earthly actions, including sinful acts or good works, will affect their salvation.

Apatheia. Apatheia is a state of mind where one is in complete control of one's passions. Its achievement is a primary goal of Stoic philosophy and is a quality required before being considered a sage.

Apocalypse. Apocalypse is a translation of the Greek word *apokalupsis* (ἀποκάλυψις), which literally means an uncovering or an unveiling. It can refer to the revealing of divine truths through God's revelation. It also refers to a literary genre that describes supernaturally cataclysmic events that will occur in the future. In Christianity, the book of Revelation is also called the Apocalypse of John since it fits into this literary category. As such, the term apocalypse is sometimes used to refer to the events that are described in the book of Revelation, although this is somewhat of a misuse of the term.

Apokatastasis. In theology, *apokatastasis* (ἀποκατάστασις) is a form of Christian universalism where everyone, including the Devil and his fallen angels, eventually experience salvation. This view is typically associated with Origen, who felt that the remaining presence of evil in hell represented an unacceptable victory of evil over good.

Apocrypha. In addition to the OT books that now constitute the Protestant Bible, the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the OT) contains several additional books that are not found in the Hebrew Bible. These books are called the Apocrypha. The Apocrypha are typically not included in Protestant Bible versions but are found in Bibles used by the Roman Catholic church. Apocryphal books include Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, I and II Maccabees - plus sections of Esther and Daniel that are absent from the Protestant OT. Roman Catholics accept the apocryphal books as part of the inspired canon, but these are rejected as non-canonical by Protestant denominations. *See also Deuterocanonical.*

Apophatic Prayer. Apophatic prayer is prayer without any positive content such as words or images. Apophatic prayer seeks to empty the mind of words and ideas and to directly experience the immediate presence of God. Centering prayer is a type of apophatic prayer.

Apophatic Theology. Apophatic theology (also known as negative theology) seeks to understand God in terms of what cannot be said rather than what can positively be said. Apophatic theology is prominent in Orthodox Christianity. The opposite approach to apophatic theology is kataphatic theology.

Apolinarianism. Apolinarianism is a heretical view about the nature of Christ that was proposed by Apollinaris of Laodicea (c.390 CE). It asserts that Christ incarnate has a human body and soul, but not a human rational mind. As such, Apolinarianism denies the full humanity of Christ and was deemed heretical in 381 CE at the First Council of

Constantinople. Apolinarianism is viewed as an overreaction to Arianism, which denies the full divinity of Christ.

Apologetics. In Christianity, apologetics refers to the rational defense of Christian doctrine to non-Christians. It is derived from the Greek word *apologia* (ἀπολογία) which means a defense.

Apostle. Apostle comes from the Greek word *apóstolos* (ἀπόστολος), which literally refers to one who is sent out. It initially refers to the initial twelve disciples who were chosen by Jesus. Judas then lost this status due to his betrayal and was replaced by Matthias, bringing the total back to twelve. Paul and Barnabas are also called apostles (Acts 14:14), as was James the brother of Jesus (Gal 2:9). That these people were Apostles is generally agreed. Some suggest that other Apostles include Silas (and perhaps Timothy as well; 1 Thes 2:6) and maybe Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7). These are possible Biblical references to Apostolic status, but there may have been others that are not recorded in Scripture.

Apostolic. Apostolic refers to something that originated with the Jesus's apostles and/or have a direct link to Jesus's apostles.

Archangel. Archangel is derived from the Greek word *archaggelos* (ἀρχάγγελος) which literally means a chief angel. It refers to an angel that rules over a group of other angels.

Areopagus Sermon. This refers to the address of the Apostle Paul to the Athenians at the Areopagus. It is described in Acts 17:16–34 and is also known as Paul's Sermon on Mars Hill.

Areteology. Areteology (also called virtue ethics) refers to ethical decisions based on becoming a more virtuous person. In Christianity, areteology is making ethical decision with the goal of becoming more Christ-like. Areteology is one of the three main approaches to ethical goals, the others being deontology and teleology.

Arianism. Arianism is the heretical doctrine that Christ is the first creation of the Father and is therefore not co-eternal with the Father (although this creative act occurred outside of time and before the heavens and the earth were created). The vigorous Arianism debate, famously fought by Athanasius of Alexandria, focused on whether Christ was *homoousios* (of the same substance of the Father) or *homoiousios* (of the similar substance of the Father). This is a key theological issue since Arianism denies the eternal nature of the triune God. Arianism was condemned as heretical at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 CE.

Arminianism. Arminianism teaches that God does not determine every detail that occurs including certain human free choices. Arminianism believes that this must be the case because if a moral choice could not be otherwise, it is not truly a free choice. If moral choices are not

possible, moral responsibility is not possible. Furthermore, if God predestined evil moral choices, God is the author of evil and is responsible for these evil choices. Arminianism was developed in the 17th century by the Dutch Reformed theologian Jacobus Arminius and his supporters known as Remonstrants. Their goal was to moderate the doctrines of Calvinism related to its interpretation of predestination.

Ascension. The refers to the event of Christ, after His resurrection and appearances, being transported to Heaven by being visibly being lifted up into the sky.

Asceticism. *See Self Denial.*

Aseity. Aseity refers to the self-existence of God.

Asah (אָסַח). This is a Hebrew primitive root meaning to do or make in the broadest sense and widest application. *Asah* is used in Genesis along with *bārā*. In the creation account (Genesis 1:1-2:3), both words are used in reference to the ex nihilo creation events, and both are also used in reference to things God made from previously created material.

Assurance of Salvation. This refers to a person having high confidence that they are justified in the eyes of God and will enter paradise and not hell upon death. It is an especially sensitive issue for theological systems believing in predestination of the elect. Many find that not having assurance that they are one of the predestined elect is very disconcerting.

Atheism. Atheism is the positive assertion that God does not exist.

Atonement. Atonement is the Christian word to describe the healing effect of Christ's death on the broken relationship between sinful mankind and God. The term developed in the 16th century and is a combination of "at" and "onement," meaning to "to reconcile." It was used in various early English translations of the Bible (including KJV) to convey the idea of reconciliation and expiation. It is typically used by Christians to speak about the saving significance attributed to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Many theories as to how the Atonement works exist such as ransom-to-Satan, *Christus Victor*, recapitulation, satisfaction, propitiation, penal substitution, and governmental theory.

Aseity. Aseity is the classical Christian attribute of God that refers to independence. It means that that God does not depend on any cause other than himself for his existence, realization, or end, and has within Himself his own reason of existence. The two primary aspects of aseity are that God is both uncaused and completely self-sufficient. An important implication of aseity is that God did not *need* to create the universe or humanity to achieve fulfillment.

Augustine, *On Christian Teaching (De Doctrina Christiana)*. This is a theological text written by Augustine of Hippo. It consists of four books that describe how to interpret and teach the Scriptures. The first three of these books were published in 397 CE and the fourth was added in 426 CE. By writing this text, Augustine identified three tasks for Christian teachers and preachers: to discover the truth in the contents of the Scriptures, to teach the truth from the Scriptures, and to defend scriptural truth when it is attacked. Augustine further states two essential aspects of biblical hermeneutics: the process of discovering what we need to learn, and the process of presenting what we have learned.

***Auriga Virtutum*.** This is a Latin phrase that literally means the charioteer of virtues. It is sometimes used to refer to the cardinal virtue of prudence because prudence (i.e., common sense) can be used to guide the other virtues.

Authority, of Scripture. Authority of Scripture is the belief that the texts of the Christian canon are normative for the speech, thought, and practice of Christians. This is true because Scripture is the apostolic and prophetic witness to God's self-revelation. As the instrument through which divine authority is present and operative in the church, Scripture is primary in the church's governance and fundamental to instruction in the Christian religion as well as to the church's theological self-articulation and its processes of discernment and judgement.

Autograph. An autograph is a document that was written by the original author. With regards to ancient manuscripts, this refers to the original document. There are currently no autographs available with regards to any biblical content. That is, no original biblical manuscripts have been discovered.

Axiology. Axiology is the philosophical study of value and the determination of value. It examines issues such as how to classify values and what things in life have value. It is derived from the Greek word *axia* (ἀξία), meaning value or worth.

B

Baptism. Baptism is derived from the Greek word *baptizō* (βαπτίζω) which literally means to dip, sink, or immerse. In Christianity, baptism refers to a sacrament where someone is immersed, dipped, or sprinkled in water according to the Great Commission given by Jesus to his disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in

the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:18-19).

Bārā (בָּרָא). This Hebrew word meaning to shape or create. It is used in Genesis along with *asah*. In the creation account (Genesis 1:1-2:3), both words are used in reference to ex nihilo creation events, and both are also used in reference to things God made from previously created material.

Barmen Declaration. This is a document authored almost exclusively by Karl Barth that opposed the German Christian movement that strongly supported the Nazi regime. The Barmen Declaration advocates for the following six positions: (1) the only source of revelation is the Word of God; (2) there should be no other authority in life other than Jesus Christ; (3) churches should not be influenced by politics; (4) there is no hierarchy in the church and it should therefore not be ruled by a leader; (5) church and state should remain separate; and (6) the church should therefore not be subordinate to the state. The Barmen Declaration was the primary position document of the Confessing Church, a group of German church leaders and theologians opposed to Hitler.

Barthian. Barthian means that something is associated with Karl Barth, particularly his view on neoorthodox theology.

Beauty. The quality or aggregate of qualities of something that gives pleasure to the senses or pleasurably exalts the mind or spirit. Beauty is synonymous with loveliness. Thomas Aquinas attributes four aspects to beauty: consonance/harmony, brightness/brilliance, integrity/perfection, and pleasant to contemplate. Beauty is philosophically identified as one of the four transcendental qualities, along with goodness, unity, and truth. They are first concepts since they cannot be logically or deductively traced back to a prior metaphysics.

Beelzebub. *See Satan.*

Believer's Baptism. This is the view that baptism should only be administered to those who are old enough to consciously choose to repent of their sins and to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. This position is sometimes called credobaptism and is against the practice of infant baptism.

Bema. *See Final Judgement.*

Benediction. A benediction is a short prayer asking for God to bless someone or something. A benediction prayer is commonly said at the end of a liturgical church service.

Biblical Theology. Biblical Theology (BT) studies the teachings of theological topics based on specific books and/or specific authors. For example, BT will produce a “theology of Paul,” a “theology of James,” and a “theology of Hebrews.” In addition, BT will then look at the

historical development of theological topics from historically earlier to historically later books in the Bible. For example, BT will look at the historical development of the teaching about the kingdom of God as it is seen throughout the history of the Old Testament and then of the New Testament. Last, BT is typically seen as a historical-critical approach that avoids dogmatic presuppositions.

Binding and Loosing. Among Jewish rabbis, “binding” and “loosing” are idiomatic terms to denote certain types of conduct that are either prohibited/forbidden (“bound”) or permitted/authorized (“loosed”). The Bible uses these terms in Matthew. “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven” (Mt 16:19; see also Mt 18:18).

Bishop. Bishop is derived from the Greek word *epískopos* (ἐπίσκοπος), which literally means an overseer or a superintendent. In Christianity, bishop can refer to the leader of a local church, making it synonymous with pastor and elder. Bishop more commonly refers to a person who oversees a group of churches and is in this context hierarchically above that of a pastor or elder.

Blameless. In the OT, an animal to be sacrificed is said to be blameless if it is without any defects or blemishes. In the NT, the quality of being blameless is applied to Christ as being morally perfect. Striving to be increasingly blameless and therefore Christlike is the purpose of the sanctification process.

Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit. This particular sin is mentioned in Mt 12:31, Mk 3:28-29, and Lk 12:10. It is described as a sin that is eternal and unforgivable. “Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come” (Mt 12:31). Exegetes commonly interpret blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan. Anyone who does this is incapable of receiving the saving work of the Holy Spirit and is therefore unable to receive forgiveness.

Blood of Christ. The blood of Christ refers to the actual blood that Christ shed during his crucifixion and can also refer to the death of Christ and its redemptive function. This is what is meant by our sins being washed away by the blood of Jesus and similar sayings.

Body of Christ. There are two ways in which this phrase is used. With regards to the Lord’s Supper, the Body of Christ refers to the actual human body of Christ that was crucified. The Body of Christ can also

refer to the invisible Church consisting of all believers with Christ as its head.

Born Again. This term refers to what occurs when a person is regenerated and thereby transforms from being spiritually dead to spiritually alive through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This term is based on what Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:3). Being born again is sometimes referred to as being born of the Spirit.

Born of the Spirit. *See Born Again.*

Bosom of Abraham. *See Refrigerium.*

C

Calvinism. *See Reformed Theology.*

Canon (of Scripture). Canon refers to the books that properly belong in the Bible. The term comes from the Greek word *kanon*, meaning a reed or a measurement. A canonical book is one that measures up to the standard of Holy Scripture. Thus, the canon of Scripture refers to the books that are considered the authoritative Word of God. By the end of the second century, all but seven books (Hebrews, 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, Jude, James, and Revelation) were recognized as apostolic, and by the end of the fourth century all twenty-seven books in our present canon were recognized by all the churches of the West. After the Damasine Council of Rome in 332 CE and the third Council of Carthage in 397 CE, the question of the Canon was closed in the West. By the year 500CE, the all Greek-speaking churches had also accepted all the books in our present NT as canonical.

Canonical Interpretation. This is a hermeneutical approach recommended by Brevard Child in his book *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. It consists of the following elements: (1) the Bible should be read as sacred Scripture and not just another work of literature; (2) the Bible should be interpreted based on the text and not by theological presuppositions; (3) one should try to understand what the text says, not what might be behind the text; and (4) one should be rigorously attentive to every word of Scripture.\

Cappadocian Fathers. The Cappadocian Fathers were three Byzantine theologians: Basil the Great (330–379), Basil's younger brother Gregory of Nyssa (c.335–c.395), and their close friend, Gregory of Nazianzus (329–389). The Cappadocia region is in modern-day Turkey.

Cardinal Virtues. *See Virtue.*

Cataphatic Prayer. *See Kataphatic prayer.*

Cataphatic Theology. *See Kataphatic Theology.*

Catechism. A catechism is a summary of doctrine in question-and-answer format.

Catholic. When capitalized, Catholic is synonymous with the Roman Catholic church. When not capitalized, catholic refers to something that is all-inclusive, universal, or worldwide. For example, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed states, “I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.” In this context, catholic means that there is only one church in the eyes of God, a church that consists of all Christian believers.

Cavalry. *See Golgotha.*

Cenobite. A cenobite is a member of a community that lives together in a life dedicated to God and prayer. It commonly refers to monks living in monasteries.

Centering Prayer. A centering prayer is a type of contemplative prayer that seeks to empty the mind and to center oneself completely in the presence of God. It involves choosing a sacred word that serves a similar function as a mantra. Centering prayer then involves relaxing and quieting, mentally repeating the sacred word, and coming back to the sacred word whenever anything else enters your thoughts. Centering prayer is a type of apophatic prayer.

Cessationism. Cessationism argues that certain spiritual gifts ended with the apostolic age. This view came about as a result of the Reformation arguing against claimed Catholic miracles. Today Cessationism typically argues that healing, speaking in tongues, and prophesy are no longer spiritual gifts. The counter view to Cessationism is Continualism, which argues that all spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit gave in the apostolic age have continued up to the present day.

Chalcedonian Definition. The Chalcedonian Definition (CD) was produced at the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) and is considered, along with the Nicene Creed, to be the most important ecclesiastical council writing ever generated. The CD asserts the following four fundamental theses about Christ: (1) Christ is numerically one person; (2) Christ is both fully human and fully divine; (3) the human and divine natures of Christ are distinct; and (4) Christ unifies His human and divine natures. The CD directly refutes a number of heresies including adoptionism, Docetism, Arianism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, and monophysitism.

Charismatic: This is a form of Christianity with a focus on the work of the Holy Spirit in a person’s daily life and the use of spiritual gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit. Charismatic Christianity is different from Pentecostalism in that it does not believe that a person needs to speak in tongues to show evidence of being baptized in the Holy Spirit,

although some consider Pentecostalism a form of Charismatic Christianity. Charismatic Christians are sometimes called Renewalists.

Cherubim. A cherub (plural = cherubim) is a type of angel and is the most common type of spiritual being referred to in the OT. Cherubim are said to have many functions including guarding the entrance to the Garden of Eden after the expulsion of Adam and Eve. Ezekiel describes the cherubim he sees in his vision as follows, “And this was their appearance: they had human form. Each of them had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight and their feet were like a calf’s hoof, and they sparkled like polished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides were human hands” (Ez 1:5-8).

Chiasm. A chiasm is a verse with a chiastic structure. This means that topics or motifs progress to the middle of the verse, and then reverse so that the last topic or motif corresponds to the first, the penultimate topic or motif corresponds to the second, and so forth. For example, if letters correspond to a motif, an example chiastic structure is ABCDCBA.

Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. *See ICBI.*

Chiliasm. *See Millennialism.*

Christening. *See Infant Baptism.*

Critical Text. This refers to Bible translations based on all of the available manuscripts and that use critical scholarly techniques to infer what the original manuscripts likely said (none of the original manuscripts exist).

Christus Victor. *See Ransom-to-Satan Theory.*

Claritas Scripturae. *See Perspicuity of Scripture.*

Clarity of Scripture: *See Perspicuity of Scripture.*

Commercial Theory. *See Satisfaction Theory.*

Common Grace. This refers to the blessings that God gives to all people, not just believers.

Communicable Attributes. A communicable attribute is a characteristic that God perfectly embodies and is additionally given by God to man in an imperfect way.

Communicatio Idiomatum. This term is Latin for the communication of idioms (properties). It to the relationship of Christ’s divine and human natures given that Christ is a single person. *Communicatio Idiomatum* holds that since Christ is a single person, his human and divine attributes and experiences are characteristic of His other nature as well. Lutheranism and Reformed theology differ in their understanding of *Communicatio Idiomatum*, with Lutherans believing in a more comprehensive communication of properties.

Communion: *See Eucharist.*

Communion of Saints: This refers to the spiritual union of all Christians including the living and the dead.

Compatibilism. This is the belief that free will is compatible with determinism. Compatibilism therefore defines free will as a person's ability to do what they desire to do. Therefore if A and B are choices, the compatibilist position is that a person cannot choose freely between these options (the choice is predetermined), but the choice is nevertheless free if it is the choice that the person wants to make.

Complementarianism. This is the view that men and women have equal moral status but different and complementary roles in life. For example, a common Christian complementarianism position is that women should not hold church leadership roles that involve teaching men or having authority over men.

Conciliarism. Conciliarism is a legacy Roman Catholic doctrine that the rulings of ecumenical councils have ultimate authority, even over the Pope. Conciliarism emerged when the Roman Catholic was facing the two claimed Popes, one in Avignon and one in Rome. Today, the Pope is viewed as the Vicar of Christ and has ultimate authority over the Roman Catholic church and conciliarism views are condemned.

Concordism. *See Day-Age Theory.*

Concupiscence. In theology, concupiscence refers to sensual desire (often but not exclusively sexual desire) that is corrupted, opposed to reason, and/or contrary to the will of God. In this sense, concupiscence can be thought of as the human tendency to sin. The KJV translates concupiscence from the Greek word *epithumia*, (ἐπιθυμία), which means a lust or longing for something that is forbidden (Rom 7:8; Col 3:5; 1 Thes 4:5). Other common Bible translations of *epithumia* include coveting, evil desire, and lustful passion.

Conditionalism. Conditionalism (also called Conditional Immortality) is the belief that only saved souls will experience immortality. As unsaved souls will cease to exist at either death or at the Final Judgement, conditionalism is, in a practical sense, the same as annihilationism.

Confession. Most commonly, confession refers to formal statements of Christian faith written by Protestants since the Reformation. Other theological uses of confession include: (1) the idea of acknowledgement and praise of the character and glorious works of God; (2) the admission to God of our sins; (3) part of the term Confession of Faith, which originally referred to the testimony of martyrs about to be put to death; and (4) part of the term "Confessing Church," which was a German anti-Hitler movement primarily associated with the German Protestant church.

Consubstantiation. This is the belief that the eucharistic elements coexist with the body and blood of Christ. Consubstantiation is primarily associated with Lutheranism.

Contemplation, Disinterested. Immanuel Kant argues in his *Critique of Judgment* that aesthetic judgments must have four key distinguishing features, one being disinterest. We take pleasure in something because we judge it beautiful, rather than judging it beautiful because we find it pleasurable. Essentially, disinterested contemplation means that the contemplator is contemplating the object itself and not what she can get out of an object.

Conversion. Conversion refers to the stage in the Order of Salvation when a person repents of their sins and puts their trust in the redemptive power of Christ.

Coredemptrix. Coredemptrix (also known as Co-Redemptrix) refers to a title used by some Roman Catholic theologians for Mary, the Mother of Jesus. It refers to their belief in the role that Mary plays in the redemption of mankind, such as freely consenting to bear Christ, and sharing his life, suffering, and death.

Correlation, Theology of. This theological method, developed by Paul Tillich, connects theological answers with philosophical/existentialist questions. In Tillich's correlation theology, man and God are all involved in the structure of being. God is the structure of being, but God is not subject to, or determined by, the structure of being. God is the inexhaustible depth within this structure. Man and all of nature participate in the structure of being, but man distorts it through sin. Christologically speaking, God and man meet decisively in Jesus as the Christ.

Covenant. In Christianity, a covenant is an agreement between God and His people. There are disagreements as to the number of covenants that occur in the Bible, but examples include the Noahic (God will never again flood the earth), the Abrahamic (land and many descendants), the Mosaic (Israel as God's chosen people), and the New Covenant (salvation through trust in Christ).

Covenant of Grace. The covenant of Grace is the belief that the salvific mechanism after the Fall has always been the same. Mankind is not deserving of redemption but through God's grace can receive salvation through repentance and trust in the redeeming power of God.

Covenant of Redemption. In Reformed theology, the covenant of redemption refers to agreement of the three persons of the triune God to provide for the redemption of mankind. The Father chose an elect people to save, the Son agreed to perform the required works of

redemption for the elect, and the Holy Spirit agreed to apply this redeeming work to the elect.

Covenant Theology. Covenant theology (also called covenantalism, federal theology, and federalism) is an interpretive method that organizes historical eras of the Bible based on different covenants between God and His people. The most common approach to covenant theology is to recognize two covenants: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The covenant of works was in place between God and Adam and Eve before the Fall. The covenant of grace has been in place for all of mankind after the Fall. Some reformed theologians add the covenant of redemption. This is a covenant between God the Father and God the Son where the Son agrees to redeem the elect by voluntarily assuming the penalty of their sins.

Covenant of Works. In Reformed theology, the covenant of works refers to the agreement between Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden where disobedience to God (i.e., not eating the forbidden fruit) would result in death.

Covenantal Nomism. This is the belief that God will be faithful to his promises to Israel, but the nation is required to obey Him. The structure of covenantal nomism consists of the following eight items: (1) God has chosen Israel; (2) God has given Israel the Law. The Law implies both (3) God's promise to maintain the election; and (4) the requirement to obey; (5) God rewards obedience and punishes transgression; (6) the Law provides for means of atonement, and atonement results in (7) maintenance or re-establishment of the covenantal relationship; and (8) all those who are maintained in the covenant by obedience will be saved.

Covenantalism. *See Covenant Theology.*

Creatio Continua. This term refers to God's continuing creative activity throughout the history of the universe. Most theologians accept *creatio continua* since creation is the dependence of the whole of space-time on God. But more traditional views hold that because God is timeless and immutable, there is only one divine creative act. Those who speak of *creatio continua* think of creation taking place in many successive acts, partly in response to events in time. Thus, at any particular time God's creation has not been completed, and the future is partly open (in some theological views) even for God.

Credobaptism. *See Believer's Baptism.*

Creed. In Christianity, a creed is a summary of the Christian faith that generally applies to all denominations. Examples include the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. These Creeds are provided in the previous section (p. 401).

Critical Realism. Critical realism distinguishes between external reality on the one hand and human knowledge on the other. The former exists objectively, but it is only accessible through the filter of knowledge and/or worldview. Far from being objective, knowledge is the ever-changing matrix that connects mental consciousness to external realities, with the latter holding the former accountable. Almost by definition, critical realism rejects any dichotomy between scientific and non-scientific knowledge.

Critical Text. Bible translations that are based on all of the available manuscripts (there are currently more than 5000) and that use critical scholarly techniques to infer what the original manuscripts likely said (none of the original manuscripts exist) are referred to as critical text. Examples of popular critical text translations include the New American Standard Bible (NASB), the English Standard Bible (ESV), the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), the New International Version (NIV), and the New Living Translation (NLT). Critical text translations are distinguished from *textus receptus* translations, which are based on the eight Greek manuscripts available to Erasmus for his Greek NT translation.

Criticism, Historical (of Scripture). At its most basic level, historical criticism is a method used to understand the concretely human element of texts. Because the Bible is, notwithstanding its divine content, a fully human document, historical criticism is a useful tool for analyzing its human character. Written in human speech by specific individuals at specific times in specific places, in specific languages and with specific motives and intentions, historical criticism insists that the Bible requires critical historical investigation.

Culture. Culture consists of the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group. It is the characteristic features of everyday existence shared by people in a place or time including attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization.

D

Day-Age Theory. This is the belief that the days of creation in the book of Genesis refer to long periods of time, or ages. This view is sometimes called concordism since it seeks accord between the Bible's account of creation and scientific data.

Davidic Covenant. The Davidic covenant was the promise of God to David to establish His kingdom and to have the lineage of David rule forever. This covenant was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Deacon. Deacon is derived from the Greek word *diákonos* (διάκονος), and literally refers to a servant or a minister. In Christian churches, deacon is typically a non-pastoral position that is responsible for a specific ministry.

Deconstruction, Faith. Faith deconstruction is the process of re-examining one's faith by questioning every held belief. This practice became popular within American evangelicalism, where it is sometimes referred to as evangelical deconstruction.

Degree Christology. This is the belief that Jesus Christ was a normal human but possessed certain attributes to a superior degree than normal people. For example, normal people have the ability to resist temptation, but Jesus Christ possessed this ability to a much higher degree.

Deification. *See Theosis.*

Deism. Deism is the belief in an impersonal god that created the universe but does not intervene.

Dei Verbum. This is a Roman Catholic document that is referred to in English as the "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation." It was approved by the Second Vatican Council in 1965 CE and has the highest level of authority in the Roman Catholic Church. A more recent publication summarizing these teachings is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994 CE).

Demons. Another name for fallen angels.

Demythologization. In theology, demythologization is a hermeneutical approach that interprets supernatural elements of the Bible existentially. That is, the mythical element is not interpreted literally. Rather, the mythical element is interpreted anthropologically in a way that provides insight into the teachings of Jesus. This term was coined by Rudolph Bultmann.

Deontology. Deontology refers to ethical decisions based on rules and principles. In Christianity, deontology is primarily about making ethical decisions based on the two greatest commandments: to love God and to love others. These rules are typically supplemented with additional specific rules that are based on scriptural teachings. Deontology is one of the three main approaches to ethical goals, the others being areteology and teleology.

Destructionism. *See Annihilationism.*

Determinism. Determinism is the materialistic belief that only the universe exists and everything that happens is due strictly to the universe and its physical laws, including everything that seems to be a free choice.

Deus Artifex. This means God the Artist, a term originally from Pythagorean cosmology.

Deuterocanonical. Deuterocanonical refers to the books recognized by the Roman Catholic Church as canonical in addition to the original “protocanonical” books. It is thought that this term was first used by in 1566 by the Roman Catholic Sixtus of Sienna. The deuterocanonical writings consist of twelve books: Tobit, Judith, additions to the Book of Esther, the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, the Letter of Jeremiah (added to the book of Baruch), the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men (added to the book of Daniel), Susanna (added to the book of Daniel), Bel and the Dragon (added to the book of Daniel), and 1 and 2 Maccabees. The Eastern Orthodox Church also recognized three additional books as authoritative: 1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh. Collectively, these fifteen books are known as the Apocrypha.

Devil. *See Satan.*

Devotio Moderna. *Devotio Moderna* (Latin for Modern Devotion) was a religious reform movement started in the 14th century by Gerard Groote. It emphasized the importance of pious living including a focus on personal humility, obedience, simplicity of life, and community focus rather than self-focus. The principles of *Devotio Moderna* are most famously captured by Thomas à Kempis in *The Imitation of Christ*.

Dichotomist. The dichotomist view is that soul and spirit refer to the same thing and that a person therefore consists of two elements: a body and a soul/spirit.

Dictation, Divine. This is the belief that God alone was responsible for each word that was written in the original manuscripts of each book in the Bible.

Didache. The Didache (also known as The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations) is a short document that was most likely written at the end of the first century. It is written in koine Greek and has sections on Christian virtues, vices, rituals, and church organization. The Didache is commonly referenced in the writings of the early church fathers.

Dispensational Theology. *See Dispensationalism.*

Dispensationalism. Dispensationalism is a theological framework that interprets the Bible based on how God interacts with His chosen people in different ways at different times, called dispensations. Dispensationalism uses a very literal interpretation of the Bible, makes a stark distinction between the Church and Israel, believes in a pretribulational rapture, believes in the future literal fulfillment of all OT prophecies regarding Israel, and typically suspects that the Rapture will happen sooner rather than later. There are seven dispensations in classical dispensationalism: innocence, conscience, human government,

promise, the Law, the Church Age (current dispensation), and the Kingdom Age. Dispensationalism was formalized by John Nelson Darby (1800–1882 CE), taught extensively at independent seminaries such as the Moody Bible Institute and the Dallas Theological Seminary, and was introduced to a wider audience through the Scofield Reference Bible.

Docetism. Docetism is the heretical teaching that the humanity of Jesus was an illusion. The strong form of Docetism teaches that the corrupt world is so evil that Jesus's physical body was an illusion. The weaker form of Docetism teaches that Jesus was a physical man, and that Christ entered this body at Jesus's baptism. A corollary of Docetism is that God cannot and did not suffer. Docetism was ruled as heretical at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE.

Doctrine. Doctrine is the official beliefs of a community of believers. Christian doctrine is therefore what a group of Christians believe based on Scripture. Groups could be denominational (e.g., Catholic versus Methodist), theological (e.g., Barthian versus Calvinist), or something else (e.g., liberal versus conservative). Doctrines are sometimes classified into first order and second order. First order doctrines counter false teachings that amount to heresy. Second order doctrines allow for differences that do not amount to heresy. Doctrines are often stated in creeds and catechisms.

Dogma. Dogma is a core set of beliefs held by a religious community and that members must believe to be in good standing with this community. Dogma serves as the basis for the broader concept of doctrine, of which communities tend to afford member more flexibility in belief.

Dogmatic Theology. This term is widely used by modern Catholic theologians to describe the branch of theology that concerns itself with setting forth and explaining the dogmas received by Catholic faith. The term is also common to Protestant theologians in the sense of a scientifically elaborated interpretation of the Christian religion. In the 20th century, the term became prominent in the Protestant world with the publication of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. By this term, Barth meant the theological task of ensuring that the content of the preaching of the Church conforms to the Word of God.

Donation of Constantine. This refers to an alleged decree from Emperor Constantine that gave authority over Rome and the western part of the Roman Empire to the Pope. This document was used up until the 15th century to support the claims of political authority of the Pope over heads of state. In 1440, Lorenzo Valla used the techniques of textual criticism to show that this document was not authentic, and was probably forged in the 9th century, 500 years after the death of Constantine.

Donatism. Donatism was a Christian movement that started in North Africa and was named after the Christian bishop Donatus Magnus. It held that the administration of sacraments was only valid if performed by faultless clergy.

Double Predestination. *See Predestination.*

Doxology. A doxology is an expression of praise to God, typically referring to each member of the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Dream Vision (also called Dream Allegory). A dream vision is a narrative (usually but not always in verse) in which the narrator falls asleep and dreams the events of the tale. The story is often a kind of allegory, and commonly consists of a tour of some marvelous realm in which the dreamer is conducted and instructed by a guide. Perhaps the most famous example of a dream vision is Dante's *Divine Comedy*, where Dante is led through hell by Virgil. Significant examples in prose include Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and William Morris's vision of socialism in *News from Nowhere*. A more modern example of a dream vision is C.S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*.

Dualism. Dualism is the belief in both a good supreme power and in an evil supreme power. These powers are in constant tension with each other, and the universe is their eternal battlefield.

Dynamic Monarchianism. *See Adoptionism.*

Dyophysitism. Dyophysitism position that Jesus Christ has both a divine nature and a human nature. This is the belief of most Christian denominations including Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Methodist.

Dyothelitism. *See Monothelitism.*

E

Eastern Church. The Eastern Church (also called the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Church) was the result of the East/West Schism (1054 CE) where the Greek-speaking churches in eastern Europe split off from the Latin-speaking western churches largely over the *filioque* clause in the Nicene Creed. Today, Orthodox churches are primarily affiliated by country such as Russian Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox, and Greek Orthodox.

Eastern Orthodox Church. *See Eastern Church.*

Ebionitism. The Ebionites were an early Jewish sect that rejected the divinity and virgin birth of Jesus. They lived a voluntary life of poverty and focused on a life of obedience to both the Law of Moses and to the moral teachings of Jesus. They viewed Jesus as a normal human

who perfectly fulfilled the Law of Moses and was therefore adopted by God as His Son.

Economic Trinity. *See Trinity, Economic.*

Ecumenical Council. An ecumenical council (also called general council) is a meeting of Roman Catholic bishops and other church authorities to debate and rule on questions of Christian doctrine, administration, discipline, and Church practices. The attendees of an ecumenical council represent the whole world and the rulings are therefore considered authoritative. The position that the authority of an ecumenical council is greater than the Pope is called conciliarism. Conciliarism was condemned at the Fifth Lateran Council (1512–1517). Therefore, the Pope since this time is understood to have a higher authority than ecumenical council rulings.

Ecumenism. This refers to a movement or tendency toward worldwide Christian unity or cooperation. The term emphasizes what is viewed as the universality of the Christian faith and unity among churches. The word ecumenism is derived from the Greek words *oikoumenē* (“the inhabited world”) and *oikos* (“house”) and can be traced from the commands, promises, and prayers of Jesus. After the International Missionary Conference held at Edinburgh in 1910, Protestants began to use the term ecumenism to describe the gathering of missionary, evangelistic, service, and unitive forces.

Effective Calling. Effective Calling (also called Effectual Calling and Internal Calling) is part of the Order of Salvation in Reformed theology where God calls a person to Himself through an internal feeling that results with certainty in saving faith.

Effectual Grace. *See Irresistible Grace.*

Efficacious Grace. *See Irresistible Grace.*

Egalitarian. In Christianity, this is the view that women can serve in the same church functions and roles as men. This view is in contrast to complementarianism.

Eisegesis. Eisegesis is the interpretation of a text (such as the Bible) that projects the readers ideas, thoughts, and/or presuppositions into the interpretation. Eisegesis is considered bad biblical interpretation.

Ekklēsia. This Greek word is typically translated to either “church” or “assembly” in the NT. It literally means “a calling out” and typically refers to a meeting of people, especially a religious assembly. *Ekklēsia* in the NT can refer to either the visible church or the invisible church depending upon the context. It should be noted that some NT scholars believe that “church” is an improper translation of *ekklēsia* since it is a non-religious term for an assembly or gathering and “church” improperly attributes religious connotations.

Elder. Elder is a translation of the Greek word *presbuteros* (πρεσβύτερος), which literally means someone of advanced age. In the NT, elders were appointed to churches to teach, preach, and provide training. Today, an elder is typically a member of a governing body of a church.

Election. This refers to God choosing certain people for eternal salvation, which is assured. These people are referred to as the elect.

Enabling Grace. *See Preventive Grace.*

Enlightenment. The Enlightenment (also called the Age of Reason) was the intellectual and philosophical movement that occurred in Europe from the mid-17th century to the early 19th century. The Enlightenment focused on rational thinking, empirical evidence, and the scientific method.

Epistemology. Epistemology is the philosophical area related to knowledge. This includes the nature of human knowledge, how human knowledge is obtained, and the limits of human knowledge. As such, epistemology is sometimes referred to as the theory of knowledge.

Eremit. An eremite is a Christian recluse or hermit.

Eschatology. Eschatology comes from the Greek word *éskhatos* (ἔσχατος), which means last. It is the theological study of last things, such as Christ's second coming and the Final Judgement.

Eschatology, Inaugurated. *See Inaugurated Eschatology.*

Essential Trinity. *See Trinity, Essential.*

Essentialism. This word refers to a philosophical theory ascribing ultimate reality to essence embodied in a thing perceptible to the senses. It regards something (such as a human trait) as having an innate existence or a universal validity rather than being a social, ideological, or intellectual construct.

Eternal Security. *See Perseverance of the Saints.*

Ethics. *See Christian Ethics.*

Eucharist. Eucharist is translated from the Greek word *evcharistía* (εὐχαριστία) which means thanksgiving. In Protestant Christianity, it is one of the primary sacraments (the other being baptism) and is also referred to as Holy Communion, the Blessed Sacrament and the Lord's Supper. Eucharist is based on the scriptural account of Jesus's last supper with his apostles on the night before his death. Jesus consecrated bread and wine and gave them to his disciples, saying "this is my body" and "this is my blood." He also commanded his followers to repeat this rite in his memory. The understanding of the Eucharist has caused much division within Christianity with regards to the doctrines of transubstantiation, consubstantiation, and the view that the elements are merely symbolic.

Eunomianism. *See Anomoeanism.*

Eutychianism. Eutychianism is a heretical teaching that Christ incarnate only had a single nature rather than a divine and human nature. This nature is neither fully human nor fully divine, but a third type of nature that is a mixture of the human and divine. Eutychianism is sometimes referred to as Real Monophysitism. Its founder, Eutyches, maintained that Christ was *of* two natures but not *in* two natures. Christ incarnate was *homoousian* with the Father but was not *homoousian* with the man. Eutychianism was deemed heretical by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE.

Evangelical. Evangelicalism refers to an interdenominational Christian movement that focuses on spreading the gospel message (i.e., evangelizing). Beyond this, the term is not well-defined but typically refers to a conservative Christian who believes in the authority of the Bible, the inerrancy of the Bible, and the importance of following the teachings of Christ in all aspects of life.

Evangelist. Evangelist comes from the Greek word *euaggelistés* (εὐαγγελιστής), which means a bringer of good news. In Christianity, an evangelist is someone who seeks out unbelievers, proclaims the Gospel message to them, and tries to convert them to the Christian faith.

Evil One. *See Satan.*

Exaltation of Christ. This is one of the two states of Christ, the other being humiliation. The state of exaltation includes four aspects of his work: his resurrection, ascension into heaven, session at the right hand of God, and return in glory and power.

Examen Prayer. This is a method of prayer developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola. Ignatius actually taught two distinct spiritual exercises: a Particular Examen and a General Examen, which are both supposed to be performed twice per day. The General examen prayer consists of the following five parts: (1) become aware of God's presence; (2) review the day with gratitude; (3) reflect on your emotions; (4) choose something from the day and pray about it; and (5) reflect on how the lessons of today can impact tomorrow. The particular examen prayer consists of reflecting on a particular fault or spiritual weakness such as to heighten awareness and lead to spiritual improvement.

Excommunication. Excommunication is a severe church disciplinary act in which a person's membership with the church (i.e., communion) is revoked.

Exegesis. This term refers to the critical interpretation of biblical text to discover its intended meaning. A given text may yield a number of very different interpretations according to the exegetical presuppositions and techniques applied to it. The study of these methodological

principles themselves constitutes the field of hermeneutics. A person who practices exegesis is called an exegete.

Existentialism. Existentialism is a school of philosophical thought that is most concerned with mankind's existence including its meaning, purpose, and value. Existentialism was a reaction against abstract academic philosophies that were far removed from actual human experience. Søren Kierkegaard is considered the first existential philosopher. Some others associated with this philosophy include Friedrich Nietzsche, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Paul Tillich.

Ex Nihilo. This is a Latin phrase that literally means out of nothing. In Christianity, *ex nihilo* refers to God creating the material universe out of nothing and not out of existing energy and matter.

Ex Opere Operato. This is a Latin phrase meaning "in the work performed." In Christianity, it refers to the efficacy of a sacrament being independent of the piety of the performing clergy and solely due to the administration of the sacrament itself as an instrument of God. The term was coined at the Council of Trent in response to the Donatist controversy, where the Donatists claimed that sacraments that were performed by impious clergy (specifically baptism) were invalid and must be repeated by clergy in good standing. The Donatist position was rejected and the doctrine of *ex opere operato* maintained that blessings are always conferred during sacraments.

Extinctionism. *See Annihilationism.*

Exorcism. Exorcism is from the Greek word *exorkismós* (ἐξορκισμός), which means binding by oath. It generally refers to the banishing of a malevolent spirit from a person or from a haunted area. In Christianity, exorcism is the practice of banishing demons.

Extramundane. Existing outside or beyond the physical universe.

External Calling. External calling refers to the Gospel message being communicated to someone with the invitation to accept this message. External Calling is also referred to as a Gospel Call.

Extreme Unction. Extreme unction is a Roman Catholic sacrament that is also referred to as anointing of the sick. According to the Code of Canon Law, extreme unction is to be administered to a member of the Roman Catholic church who, "having reached the age of reason, begins to be in danger due to sickness or old age." This sacrament is administered by a priest or a bishop and is most commonly given to those who are near death. The Catechism of the Catholic Church lists the following effects of extreme unction: uniting the sick person to the passion of Christ; strength to endure sufferings; the forgiveness of sins; the potential restoration of health; and preparation for eternal life.

Eyes of the Heart. This phrase comes from Eph 1:18, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” Paul uses the figurative expression *toús ophthalmóús tes kardías* (“the eyes of the heart”) to refer to the capacity of the believer’s mind to understand.

F

Fact. A fact is a piece of information presented as having objective reality, especially something for which proof exists.

Faith. In the NT, faith is a translation of the Greek word *pistis*. *Pistis* refers to the condition of having been persuaded of something to the point of conviction and assurance. When reading the NT, it is often helpful to understand the translated term “faith” as meaning “faith/trust.”

Faithfulness of God. This refers to the unchanging nature of God as it relates to His promises. God can be fully trusted to keep His promises forever, no matter how likely this might seem at any given point in time.

Fasting. In Christianity, fasting is a spiritual discipline involving the severe restriction of diet, often with the full elimination of caloric intake for a period of time. Fasting is a common practice in the OT, Jesus Himself fasted for forty days in preparation for His public ministry, and Jesus assumes that His followers will practice fasting. “But the days will come when the groom is taken away from them, and then they will fast” (Mt 9:15).

Fatalism. Fatalism (more precisely called theological fatalism) is the view that what happens is beyond the control of humans. Things happen because of fate or destiny, not because of human decisions or actions. Fatalism is very similar to determinism, but determinism tends to retain the idea of moral accountability whereas fatalism tends to minimize the idea of moral accountability beyond simply resigning oneself to fate.

Father of Lies. *See Satan.*

Federal Theology. *See Covenant Theology.*

Federalism. *See Covenant Theology.*

Filiation. In theology, filiation refers to the second Person of the triune God (the Son) being eternally begotten by the first Person of the triune God (the Father).

Filioque. *Filioque* is a Latin term meaning “and from the Son.” The original Nicene Creed stated that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. In the late 6th century, some Latin Churches added the term *filioque* so

that the Holy Spirit was now said to proceed from the Father and the Son. The eastern churches strongly objected to this addition, ultimately resulting a split between the eastern (Greek) and western (Latin) churches, referred to as the Great Schism.

Final Judgement. The Final Judgement is when Christ will pass judgement upon the living and the dead. This is sometimes referred to as the *Bēma* (βῆμα). In ancient Greek, a *bēma* (βῆμα) was a platform used in tribunals from which orators addressed the citizens as well as the courts of law. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat (*bēmatos*) of Christ, so that each one may receive compensation for his deeds done through the body, in accordance with what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10).

Firstfruits. Firstfruits are the first part of a harvest. In the OT, firstfruits are to be offered to God. “Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce” (Prv 3:9 ESV). In the NT, Christ’s resurrection is referred to in this context. “But the fact is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who are asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). This is an indication that the dead will be resurrected in a manner similar to Christ’s resurrection.

Foreknowledge. With respect to God, foreknowledge refers to God knowing everything that will happen in the future. In this sense, God’s perfect foreknowledge is part of God’s omniscience. The Arminian view is that people have a free choice to accept or reject the Gospel message, but God has perfect foreknowledge of these free choices.

Forensic. In the context of theology, something is forensic if it relates to God’s legal treatment. Forensic is commonly used to categorize initial justification where one becomes positionally justified before God even though one’s sinful nature remains. That is, a person is legally free from the consequences of sin but is still not free from the practical consequences of sin.

Forgiveness. There are two Greek words that are used in the NT for forgiveness. One is the word *charidzomai* and the other is *aphiemi*. *Charidzomai* comes from the Greek word, *charis*, which means grace. This represents forgiveness as the cancelling of a debt. *Aphiemi* means to loose or to let go. This represents what God does for us when we confess our sins. *Aphiemi* means that the wrong is let go, it is not brought up again, and it does not take over one’s heart.

Form Criticism. Form interpretation (also called form interpretation) is the study of the genre of the various oral history and developments of individual stories. This type of study is grounded in a belief that one can examine the layers of a story to arrive at the earliest form of a primitive OT or NT story that circulated in oral tradition and was

specifically remembered by the community for particular reasons. Redaction criticism is then the study of how a later editor (e.g., Matthew, Luke, or the editor of the Pentateuch) pieced together the individual oral or textual sources into a unified document that is preserved for us in our Bibles today.

Form Interpretation. *See Form Criticism.*

Freedom of Inclination. This is a term that is similar to compatibilism in that it deems a choice as free if it is what the decider most wants to do. However, freedom of inclination does not allow for libertarian free choices. If A and B are choices, Freedom of Inclination does not allow either A or B to be chosen.

Futurism. Futurism is the understanding that the book of Revelation refers to future events that have not yet happened. The only part of the book that refers to historical events are the letters to the seven churches in the first three chapters. The other predominant ways to understand the book of Revelation are historicism, preterism, and idealism.

G

Gap Theory. Gap theory is the belief that a large period of time (i.e., a gap) elapsed between the events of Gn 1:1 and the events of Gn 1:2. This theory assumes that God's initial creation was perfect, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gn 1:1). Something then happened, perhaps over a very long period of time, to ruin this perfect creation. "And the earth was a formless and desolate emptiness" (Gn 1:2).

Gehenna. Gehenna is from the Greek word *geenna* (γέεννα), which literally refers to the Valley of Wailing on the southwest side of Jerusalem (*ben-hinnom* in Hebrew). Jeremiah refers to this valley as follows, "They have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the Valley of Ben-hinnom (Gehenna), to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire" (Jer 7:30-31). It was also common for dead animals to be brought to the valley to be burned. Gehenna is therefore used as a term for Hell with its eternal hellfire.

General Council. *See Ecumenical Council.*

General Examen Prayer. *See Examen Prayer.*

General Revelation. General revelation is how God reveals aspects of Himself through physical nature and through human nature.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are discussed in 1 Cor 12 and include wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophesy, distinguishing spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Other more consolidated groupings appear in 1 Cor 12:28,

Eph 4:11-13, Rom 12:6-8, and 1 Pt 4:10. These lists are not thought to be exhaustive, but merely representative. Spiritual gifts are given to every believer (1 Cor 12:7) and are meant to be used for ministry. They are merely tools and should not be used as a source of personal pride or used as a measure of spiritual maturity.

Glorification. Glorification is the last step in the redemptive process of justification then sanctification then glorification. Glorification occurs when believers are raised from the dead, their souls reunited with perfect bodies, and then residing in paradise in the presence of God and in the complete absence of sin.

Glory. Glory refers to praise or distinction extended by common consent. Glory can be demonstrated by worship, honor, and thanksgiving. In the NT, glory is commonly translated from the Greek word *doxa*., which refers to a good opinion about something. For example, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). Similarly, the angels proclaimed upon Christ’s birth, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased” (Lk 2:14).

Glossolalia. *See Speaking in Tongues.*

Gnosticism. Gnosticism is a dualistic belief system where spiritual things are good and material things are evil. Everyone has a spark of good within their evil material bodies and need special knowledge from the spiritual world to be aware of this good.

God. In Christianity, God is the single eternal and infinite supreme being that created the universe out of nothing, sets the standard for what is good and evil, and cares about the moral behavior of His people.

God-Breathed. God-breathed is a translation of the Greek word *theopneustos* (θεόπνευστος), which is sometimes translated as inspired. “All Scripture is inspired by God (or God-breathed) and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Tm 3:16). Many interpret this verse to mean that the original manuscripts of the Bible were inerrant through divine dictation.

Golgotha. Golgotha (Place of the Skull) was located just outside of the walls of Jerusalem and is where Jesus was crucified. “They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, carrying His own cross, to the place called the Place of a Skull, which in Hebrew is called, Golgotha” (Jn 19:17). In the Latin Vulgate, Jerome translates Golgotha as *Calvariae*, which corresponds to Cavalry in English.

Goodness. In Christianity, goodness is anything that is in accordance with the will of God. Goodness is philosophically identified as one of the four transcendental qualities, along with beauty, unity, and truth. They

are first concepts since they cannot be logically or deductively traced back to a prior metaphysics.

Gospel Call: *See External Calling.*

Governmental Theory. This is the theory of atonement that Christ's suffering was a substitute for the punishment humans deserve, but it did not consist of Christ receiving the exact required punishment due to sinful people. Instead, God publicly demonstrated his displeasure with sin through the suffering of his own sinless and Son as a propitiation. On this basis, God extends forgiveness while maintaining divine order, having demonstrated the seriousness of sin and thus allowing his wrath to pass over. The governmental theory arose in opposition to Socinianism. Hugo Grotius originally formulated this theory by using governmental semantics drawn from his training in law and his general view of God as the moral ruler of the universe.

Grace. In the context of Christianity, grace is the unmerited divine assistance given to humans for their regeneration and sanctification. In NT, grace is a translation of the Greek word *charis*, which means kindness.

Grace, Economy of. The economy of grace is sometimes referred to as the divine economy. In Eph 3:2, Paul writes to the early Christian community: "You have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for their benefit." The word that Paul uses for stewardship is *oikonomia* (οἰκονομία). *Oikonomia* derives from two roots, *oikos* (οἶκος) and *nomos* (νόμος). *Oikos* is a word that has multiple meanings. It can mean "home" in the sense of the building or it can mean the abstract concept. It also can mean "household" in the sense of an estate or the goods and possessions of the house, and it also means "house" in the sense that we would talk about a ruling house to refer to a politically powerful family or a dynasty. *Nomos* refers to a "custom," "rule," or "law." These roots combine in *oikonomia* to mean "the law or management of a house," typically referring to house in the sense of an estate. In the context of Ephesians, Paul is stating that he has been given management of God's grace as though grace were a good of God's household. In Eph 1:9, the word translated as favor is the same word translated as grace in Eph 3, and in Eph 1:10 the word translated as plan is *oikonomia*.

Grand Narrative. *See Metanarrative.*

Great Commission. This refers to Jesus's instructions to His disciples just before His ascension, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to follow all that I commanded you" (Mt 18:18-20).

Great Tribulation. This refers to the period of time that Jesus says will indicate His second coming. “For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will again. And if those days had not been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short ... For false christs and false prophets will arise and will provide great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.” (Mt 24:21-24).

Great White Throne of Judgment. This refers to the Final Judgement as described in the Book of Revelation, “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it ... and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds” (Rv 20:11-12).

H

Hades. In Christianity, Hades is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *Sheol* and refers to the intermediate state of the soul after death but before the general resurrection. Some believe that Hades is an actual place for souls after death but before the general resurrection. Still others believe that this place is divided into two sections: a section for saved souls and a section for damned souls.

Hamartiology. Hamartiology is the theological study of sin including how we sin, why we sin, and the effects of sin. The word hamartiology is derived from the Greek word *hamartia* (ἁμαρτία) which literally means to miss the mark.

Harrowing of Hell. Harrowing of Hell refers to the teaching that Christ descended into Hell after His crucifixion but before His resurrection. When in Hell, Christ breaks down the gates, freeing the imprisoned souls of the just.

Hate. Hate refers to intense hostility and aversion usually deriving from fear, anger, or sense of injury. The Bible has many examples of personal hatred. A husband may hate his wife (Gn 29:31). Joseph’s brothers hated him (Gn 37:4). Amnon’s lust turned to hate after he raped his sister (2 Sam 13:15). A parent may hate a son (Prov 13:24). Neighbors, nations, and classes of people, such as the poor may be hated (Dt 19:11). Personal hatred is an indication of evil in the world, as it is contrary to the command to love. However, the Bible also instructs us to hate certain things, especially in the Psalms. We are to hate evildoers (Ps 26:5), idolaters (Ps 31:6), the false way (Ps 119:104), falsehood (Ps 119:163), and anything that is evil (Ps 97:10).

Heaven. Heaven is the dwelling place of the God and the blessed dead. For later Judaism and Christianity, heaven is the destination of the faithful after a general resurrection of the dead, in contrast to hell, the place of punishment for the wicked.

Hell. In Christianity, Hell is the nether realm of the Devil and his demons in which condemned people suffer everlasting punishment. In its archaic sense, the term hell refers to the underworld, a deep pit or distant land of shadows where the dead are gathered. More broadly, hell figures in religious cosmologies as the opposite of heaven, the place where God is not.

Hell, Harrowing of. In Christian theology, the Harrowing of Hell refers to the period of time between the Crucifixion of Jesus and his resurrection. Jesus's descent into the place of the dead is referred to in the Apostles' Creed and in the Athanasian Creed, which state that Jesus descended into the underworld. His descent to the underworld is also mentioned in the 1 Pt 4:6, "The gospel was preached even to those who are now dead."

Hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the study of the principles of biblical interpretation. This commonly involves the acknowledgement of both human and divine authors. Scripture can therefore be interpreted as (1) what the human author intended to communicate to the intended audience; and (2) its spiritual meaning or meanings.

Hesychasm. Hesychasm is a monastic tradition of the Eastern Orthodox church that seeks stillness through uninterrupted contemplation and prayer. It is derived from the Greek word *hēsychia* (ἡσυχασμός), which means stillness.

Heterousianism. *See Anomoeanism.*

Hexameron. Hexameron literally means six days and is used in theology to refer to the six days of creation as described in Genesis.

Hierophany. This is a very general term that refers to the manifestation of something divine or sacred.

Historical Theology. Historical theology traces the historical developments of a particular topic from the days of the early Church to present day.

Historicism. Historicism understands most of the book of Revelation as referring to past history. The first three chapters refer to first century churches. The next part of the book going up to and including the Millennium are describing the patristic, medieval, Reformation, and modern church ages. The Millennium is therefore not a literal thousand-year period, but a long period of time that continues to the present day. The other predominant ways to understand the book of Revelation are futurism, preterism, and idealism.

Holy: In the OT, holy is translated from the Hebrew word *qadosh* (קֹדֶשׁ) which literally means separated or apart from. The Greek equivalent in the NT is *hagios* (ἅγιος). God's perfect holiness therefore means that God is completely separated from the world. In terms of Christianity, something is holy to the extent that it is separated from this world for God. More generally, holy is used to refer to something that is sacred and/or morally pure.

Holy Communion. See *Eucharist*.

Holy Orders. Holy Orders is one of the seven sacraments recognized by the Roman Catholic church. This is a sacrament of apostolic ministry that is given to someone becoming a bishop, a priest, or a deacon.

Holy Spirit. The third person of the triune God who is particularly associated with sanctification.

Homo Faber. This term refers to a human being as a maker or creator. In Henri-Louis Bergson's philosophy, the human being is *homo faber* both in terms of transforming the self morally and in transforming material things.

Homoousios. This is a Greek word meaning of the same substance. This term is typically used in an anti-Arian context to describe Christ as being of the same substance as the Father.

Homoiousios. This is a Greek word meaning of a similar substance. This term is typically used in a pro-Arian context to describe Christ as being of a similar substance as the Father but not the same substance.

Humanism. In contemporary usage, humanism is a philosophy that emphasizes human welfare, a way of life centered on human interests or values, and a rejection of supernaturalism. This philosophical humanism also stresses an individual's dignity and worth and capacity for self-realization through reason. However, in the middle ages the term humanism referred to learning focused on the humanities, especially on classic Greek, Latin, and Patristic literature. It is in this sense that Erasmus of Rotterdam was considered a Christian humanist.

Humiliation of Christ. From the time of His incarnation to the time of His ascension, Christ is said to have been in a state of humiliation. A common approach to describing Christ's state of humiliation is to divide it into five stages: incarnation, suffering, death, burial, and His descent into hades.

Hypostatic Union. This is the doctrine of Christ as a single person consisting of the combination of His perfect divine nature and His perfect human nature. It is derived from the Greek word *hypostasis* (ὑπόστασις), which means a substance. In this sense, Christ is a single substance consisting of the union of two natures.

I

ICBI. This acronym refers to the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, which was a group of conservative evangelical Christians who drafted the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (1978). This statement asserts that the Bible is literally true and without any errors. It reads, “[We deny that] Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.”

Iconoclasm. This term refers to the doctrine, practice, or attitude of an iconoclast (a person who attacks settled beliefs or institutions). An iconoclast is typically a person who destroys religious images or opposes their veneration.

Icon. In Eastern Orthodoxy, an icon is a religious work of art, most commonly a painting of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the saints, and angels. This presence of icons in churches was seen by some as idolatry, and their use was challenged by the Byzantine Emperor Leo III in the 8th century. This is referred to as the Iconoclast Period.

Idealism. Idealism is the view that most of the events in the book of Revelation do not necessarily represent a sequence of events that have happened throughout history. Instead, most of the book of Revelation symbolically represent the conflict between Christ and Christianity on one hand and Satan and his evil forces on the other hand. The only future events that are described are the second coming of Christ, the general resurrection, the white throne judgement, and the creation of the New Heaven and the New Earth. The other predominant ways to understand the book of Revelation are historicism, futurism, and preterism.

Idol. An idol is an object of worship and is typically a likeness of something. In Christianity, an idol is a false conception that should not be worshipped according to the first and second commandments. Worshipping idols is referred to as idolatry.

Immutability. The immutability of God refers to His unchangeableness.

Image of God. Gn 1:26-27 says that God made humankind in his image and likeness. Both terms mean the same thing, and so this is usually referred to as the image of God (*imago Dei*). Many understand the image of God to mean those qualities that make us human. Examples include possessing a soul, higher-order reasoning, self-consciousness, consciousness of God, and the ability to have a relationship with God.

Imago Dei. See *Image of God*.

Immaculism. Immaculism is the belief that Mary, the Mother of God, was born without original sin. The birth of Mary is therefore referred to by immaculism as the immaculate conception. The opposite view is called maculism.

Immanent. In theology, God's immanence means that God is present in all places at all times, although God remains separate from the created universe. This word is not to be confused with imminent.

Immersion. Immersion is the practice of baptism in which the person being baptized is put completely under the water and then brought back up again.

Imminent. Something is imminent if it can happen at any time without the need for something else to happen first. Different theological systems, for example, hold that the rapture is imminent, or that the second coming of Christ is imminent. This word is not to be confused with immanent.

Immutability. Something is immutable if it is not able to be changed. Immutability is considered an incommunicable attribute of God.

Impassibility. The secular definition of impassibility is being incapable of experiencing suffering or pain. Some believe that God is impassible since God is unchangeable and therefore cannot be changed by the feeling of any emotion, including suffering.

Impeccability. Something is impeccable if it is free from fault or blame. In the context of Christianity, impeccability is the absence of sin. Since Christ is God and therefore impeccable, Christ was not able to sin.

Impute. In theology, to impute is to ascribe to someone a similar quality in another. For example, many theologians hold that Adam's original sin is imputed to all people and that Christ's righteousness is imputed to believers.

Inaugurated Eschatology. This is the belief that the Kingdom of God was initiated with Jesus but will not be fully consummated until the His second coming. Therefore, the Kingdom of God has both an "already here" and a "not fully here yet" aspect.

Incarnation. Incarnation is the result of taking on a particular physical form or state. In Christianity, the Incarnation refers to the second person of the Trinity becoming man.

Incommunicable Attributes. An incommunicable attribute is a characteristic of God but not of man such as omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence.

Indulgences, Sale of. The Roman Catholic understands indulgences as a way to serve as penance for sins. The Catechism defines an indulgence as "a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins

whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions.” Indulgences are most often a specified prayer, but could also include a pilgrimage, the visitation of a sacred place, or the performance of good works. During the time of the Reformation, the sale of indulgences for money was widely abused by encouraging people to donate money to the church to reduce the time that deceased loved ones will spend in Purgatory before entering Heaven.

Inerrancy. When applied to the Bible, inerrancy typically refers to the belief that the Bible is completely without error including its representation of history and science.

Infallibility. When applied to the Bible, infallibility typically refers to the belief that the Bible is completely without error in matters of faith and practice, but not necessarily in all matters of historical accuracy and scientific representation.

Infant Baptism. This is the practice of baptizing infants or young children. Some of the branches of Christianity that practice infant baptism are Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Methodists. Infant baptism is also referred to as paedobaptism and christening.

Infralapsarianism. This is the view that God’s decree to save mankind was logically after his decree to create the world and permit the fall. The opposing position is called supralapsarianism.

Inherited Corruption. *See Original Pollution.*

Inherited Guilt. *See Original Guilt.*

Inherited Sin. *See Original Sin.*

Inspiration, of Scripture. Inspiration of Scripture means many things to many people. The concept is derived from 2 Tim 3:16, “All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching.” Many Christians apply this to all books in the Bible even though most of the NT had not been written when Paul wrote this verse. Paul was almost certainly referring to parts of the OT (e.g., the Pentateuch and the prophetic books). The word inspiration is translated from the Greek word *theopneustos* (θεόπνευστος), which means divinely breathed. Opinions on what an inspired text means range from divine dictation of each word to the author having a certain amount of divine insight to the text itself allowing the reader to experience divine revelation.

Institutes of the Christian Religion. Often referred to as *Calvin’s Institutes*, these writings were John Calvin’s magnum opus, a summary of his theology that became the normative statement of the Reformed faith. It was first published in 1536 and was revised and enlarged by Calvin in several editions before the definitive edition was published

in 1559. The final edition was more than four times longer than the first edition. It is organized into four books concerning Creator, Redeemer, Spirit, and church. The dominating themes deal with God's sovereignty, his grace, and his redemption of undeserving sinners.

Intelligent Design. Intelligent Design is the position that the development of the universe is directed by something intelligent rather than through undirected and random processes (e.g., Darwinism). For Christians, the intelligence that directs the development of the universe is God.

Intercession. In Christianity, intercession refers to Christ's continuing representation of humanity and the Church before the Father as part of His role as High Priest. Paul writes, "Christ Jesus is He who died, but rather, was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us" (Rom 8:34).

Intermediate State. In Christianity, a person is in an intermediate state from the time of death until the general resurrection.

Internal Calling. *See Effective Calling.*

Interpretation, Christological. This type of scriptural interpretation assumes that certain passages refer to Christ, especially in the OT. This approach was common for second century Christians, who used the OT in three ways to demonstrate that Jesus is Messiah: (1) OT proof texts were cited to demonstrate that prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus; (2) a typological approach that found in the OT a collection of figures, events, and institutions which foreshadowed Jesus; and (3) interpretations of OT theophanies as apparitions of the pre-incarnate Son of God.

Interpretation, Critical. Critical biblical interpretation is typically referred to as historical-critical interpretation. In its earliest form historical criticism was primarily text criticism. Text criticism examines scribal trends and available extant manuscripts, with the aim of identifying the best possible inference of the original text. Basing itself on the oldest and best manuscripts, textual criticism seeks to establish, according to fixed rules, a biblical text as close as possible to the original.

Interpretation, Post-Critical. *See Interpretation, Postmodern.*

Interpretation, Postmodern (Post-critical). Postmodernism rejects the idea that there is a final account, an assured and agreed-on interpretation, of some one thing, including the biblical text or any part of it. No final or essential interpretation of the text can ever be produced. Other readings are always possible, and often invited. Postmodern interpretation of Scripture (also called post-critical interpretation) does not reject the need for rigor in the analysis of actual texts, but it does call for

the acknowledgment of one's approach, including its underlying assumptions and its goals and limitations.

Interpretation, Historical-Critical. *See Interpretation, Critical Biblical.*

Interpretation, Pre-Critical. *See Interpretation, Premodern.*

Interpretation, Premodern. Premodern interpretation of Scripture (also called pre-critical interpretation) is commonly associated with the early Church fathers focuses more on theology and preaching rather than critical exegesis. This approach takes the view that Scripture could be looked at as human words with a human message, but also with additional theological and spiritual truths.

Interpretation, Trinitarian. This approach to scriptural interpretation involves the interpreter's commitment to the orthodox expressions of trinitarian doctrine found in the early church creeds and the rule of faith. Theological interpretation of Scripture, especially in its trinitarian form, has recently played a key role in efforts to bridge the modern divide between biblical studies and systematic theology.

Intellectual Humility. Saint Augustine famously called humility the foundation of all other virtues. One variety of humility, intellectual humility, is perhaps the most foundational. Intellectual humility is a mindset that guides one's intellectual conduct. In particular, it involves recognizing one's intellectual limitations in the service of pursuing deeper knowledge, truth, and understanding. Intellectual humility speaks to people's willingness to reconsider their views, avoid defensiveness when challenged, and moderate their own need to appear right. Intellectual humility is sensitive to counterevidence, realistic in outlook, strives for accuracy, and shows little concern for self-importance.

Invisible Church. The invisible church consists of all true Christian believers both alive and dead. It is the church as God sees it as opposed to the church as how man sees it, which is called the visible church.

Irresistible Grace. Irresistible grace (also called effectual grace and efficacious grace) is the belief that God predestined the elect to be saved and therefore the elect are not able to resist becoming believing Christians. It is closely associated with Calvinism and correspond to the I in TULIP. Irresistible grace is in contrast to prevenient grace, which is closely associated with Arminianism.

Ichthys. *Ichthys* is a Greek word meaning fish (ΙΧΘΥΣ). During times of persecution, Christians used a simple fish symbol to secretly identify Christian churches and other Christians. The symbol consists of an upward swooping arc and a downward swooping arc that connect to look like a fish. A Christian when encountering a stranger could discretely trace one of the arcs on the ground. The stranger could then

complete the ichthys to indicate he is a Christian. The ichthys is also known as the Jesus fish. IXΘΥΣ can be thought of as a Greek acronym for Jesus Christ God's Son Savior (Ἰησοῦς Χριστός Θεοῦ Υἱός Σωτήρ).

J

Jansenism. Jansenism is a controversial Roman Catholic movement in the 17th and 18th centuries related to the issue of how human free will can coexist with divine grace. That is, if God's grace alone is responsible for salvation, what is the role of free will in salvation? The Jansenism movement was primarily in France and Italy and was later associated in France's attempts to restrict papal power.

Joy. Joy is a state of happiness or felicity. Biblical joy is choosing to respond to external circumstances with inner contentment and satisfaction with the assurance that God will use these experiences to accomplish His work in and through our lives. James writes, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials" (Jam 1:2). James is telling his readers that they can choose to respond with joy, even during times of trials and sufferings.

Judgment of the Nations. This refers to a future event that Jesus describes. "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, just as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, but the goats on the left" (Mt 25:31-33). Some believe that this passage is a parable stressing the importance of helping the poor and oppressed. Others think that this refers to the Final Judgement. Still others, such as dispensationalists, believe that this refers to a real judgement that is separate from the Final Judgement.

Justice: *See Righteousness.*

Justification. Justification is the first stage in the process of salvation and is followed by sanctification and then glorification. Justification makes a person positionally righteous before God and therefore not subject to the penalty of sin.

K

Kataphatic Prayer. Kataphatic prayer is prayer that has positive content such as words, images, and/or ideas. Kataphatic prayer is what most western Christians think of as simply prayer.

Kataphatic Theology. Kataphatic theology (also known as cataphatic theology) seeks to understand God in terms of what can positively be asserted. The opposite approach to kataphatic theology is apophatic theology.

Kenosis. Kenosis is translated from the Greek word *ekénōsen* (ἐκένωσεν) which literally means a self-emptying. The word is used in Philippians, “[Jesus] emptied Himself (*ekénōsen*) by taking the form of a bond-servant and being born in the likeness of men” (Phil 2:7). The interpretation of kenosis in this verse varies widely among theologians. One interpretation is that Jesus emptied his own desires, becoming entirely receptive to God’s divine will. Another interpretation is that Jesus emptied himself of certain divine attributes that could not co-exist with certain human attributes.

Kerygma. Kerygma refers to the core of the early church’s teaching about Jesus. It is derived from the Greek word *kērugma* (κήρυγμα), and literally means to cry or proclaim as a herald.

Keys of the Kingdom. This phrase appears in Mt 16:19 when Jesus says to Peter, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” In the NT, the use of a key as a metaphor always symbolizes the authority to open a door and give entrance to a place. In Mt 16:19, Peter is given authority to preach the Gospel and therefore opens the proverbial door to the Kingdom of Heaven to others. Since this verse uses the plural, it is implied that Peter is given additional authority, commonly thought to be that of church discipline.

Koine Greek. Koine Greek is the dialect of Greek that was spoken and written from the 4th century BCE until about the 6th century. Both the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) and the NT are written in Koine Greek.

Koinonia. Koinonia refers to the fellowship that should exist between believers who constitute the body of Christ. It is a transliteration of the Greek word *koinónia* (κοινωνία) and is related to the word communion. In the NASB, *koinónia* is translated as fellowship twelve times, as participation twice, and as contribution twice.

Krypsis. This is the belief that Jesus Christ secretly used his divine powers while on earth. This accounts for the fact that the gospels do not recount Jesus using many divine attributes, such as omniscience. The major competing belief to account for this is kenosis.

L

Latin Vulgate. *See Vulgate.*

Lectio Divina. *Lectio divina* (Latin for divine reading) is a Benedictine practice that originated in the desert monasteries. *Lectio divina* treats the reading of Scripture as an act of prayer and meditation. Modern practice typically involves the contemplation of a short passage using the following steps: preparation, reading, reflecting, responding, and resting.

Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi. This is a Latin phrase that literally means the law of what is prayed is the law of what is believed. More generally, this phrase emphasized that the way in which Christians worship and pray affect what they believe, and what Christians believe also affect how they worship and pray.

Liberal Theology. Friedrich Schleiermacher is often called the father of liberal theology. He maintains that all religion is ultimately a personal experience. Therefore, one's personal religious experiences take precedent over every other source including Scripture. The religious goal of Schleiermacher is to have a feeling of ultimate dependence on God, which has been criticized as being subjective. Today liberal theologies tend to view knowledge and experience as having a higher authority than Scripture when forming doctrine. The Bible is therefore treated as a historical work of humans without divine authority, and that living a Christ-like life is more important than doctrine.

Libertarian Free Will. Libertarian free will is what most people think of as free will. It means that actual choices are possible. For example, if A and B are choices and a person picks A, it was possible that the person could have chosen B. Theologians and philosophers have started using this term because so many theories use the term free will when the possibility of different choices does not exist (e.g., compatibilism).

Liberation Theology. Liberation theology is religious movement started by some in the Roman Catholic church with concerns about socioeconomic conditions in Latin America. It places a focus on oppressive socioeconomic governments and structures and encourages engagement in political and civic affairs to achieve change. Liberation theology also holds that God has a special concern for the poor and that the Bible can only be fully understood when viewed from the perspective of the poor and oppressed. Various offshoots of the original liberation movement include black liberation theology and feminist liberation theology.

Limbo. In Roman Catholic theology, limbo is the border place between heaven and hell where souls, though not condemned to punishment, are deprived of the joy of eternal existence with God in heaven. The concept of limbo probably developed in Europe in the Middle Ages

but was never recognized as church dogma. Two distinct kinds of limbo have been supposed to exist: (1) the *limbus patrum* which is the place where the OT saints were thought to be confined until they were liberated by Christ in his descent into hell, and (2) the *limbus infantum* (or *limbus puerorum*) which is the abode of those who have died without actual sin but whose original sin has not been washed away by baptism. Traditionally, this “children’s limbo” includes not only dead unbaptized infants but also the mentally impaired.

Limbus Infantum. Although this is not official Roman Catholic doctrine, some Roman Catholic theologians believe that the souls of unbaptized infants go to *Limbus Infantum* after death. This is a place absent of the eternal torture of Hell, but also absent of the beatific vision of God.

Limbus Patrum. Although this is not official Roman Catholic doctrine, some Roman Catholic theologians believe that the souls of OT believers went to *Limbus Patrum*, where they remained until freed by Christ in His descent to the dead after His crucifixion.

Limited Atonement. The position that Christ died only for the elect is called limited atonement. The position that Christ died for everyone is called unlimited atonement (also called general atonement or universal atonement). Limited atonement, the Reformed position, typically views Christ’s death as removing the effects of sin from the elect at the time of its occurrence. That is, the Atonement was immediately effective. Unlimited atonement, the Arminian position, views the Atonement as conditionally effective. Christ died for everyone’s sins, but this atoning act only becomes effective when someone repents and puts their trust in Christ. An intermediate view is that Christ’s death was for everyone, but God only gives the elect the ability to realize its saving benefits. This is also referred to as particular redemption.

Liturgy. Liturgy refers to the content and order of a religious worship service.

Literal Sense, of Scripture. This term refers to the surface meaning of the text, or the communicative intent of the author to the intended audience. Thomas Aquinas famously stresses the primacy of literal interpretation, but in doing so he appeals to semantics and context. He includes metaphor in literal interpretation. For example, when Scripture mentions God’s arm, the literal meaning is not that God has body parts, but the power to act. Aquinas’s focus on literal interpretation was a criticism of earlier allegorical interpretation, which he did not think was a solid foundation for theology.

Literary Criticism. *See Source Criticism.*

Literary Framework Theory. This view (also known as the framework interpretation, framework theory, or framework hypothesis) is the

view that the creation stories of Genesis are not literally true but a literary device that allegorically describes God as the creator of the universe. This theory points to the literary structure of the six days of creation, with the first three days corresponding to the last three days (first and fourth days = lights; second and fifth days = water and sky; third and sixth days = land).

Logos. In Christianity, Logos is another name for the second person of the triune Godhead (i.e., Christ). It is a Greek word that means spoken word.

Loosing. *See Binding and Loosing.*

Lord's Supper. *See Eucharist.*

Love (*agap *). This is a translation of the Greek word       . It is the highest form of love and can be thought of as a selfless love and how God loves each of us. It can also be thought of as the traditional meaning of charity.

Love (*eros*). This is a translation of the Greek word      . *Eros* is physical love or sexual desire. The word *eros* is still used in psychology today to refer to sexual desire or the libido. The words erotic and erogenous, which both have to do with sexual desire or arousal, are derived from *eros*. *Eros* does not appear in the Bible.

Love (*philia*). This is a translation of the Greek word       . It refers to the kind of love that good friends feel toward each other.

Love (*storge*). This is a translation of the Greek word         . *Storge* is familial love, the natural love that family members have for one another. *Storge* does not appear in the Bible.

Lucifer. *See Satan.*

M

Macedonianism. *See Pneumatomachianism.*

Maculism. Maculism is the rejection of the belief in the immaculate conception of Mary, the Mother of God. That is, maculism believes that Mary was born with original sin just like other people. The opposite view is called immaculism.

Mandaeans. The Mandaeans were an early Gnostic sect who believed that John the Baptist was the final and most important prophet. Many believe that the Prologue of John (Jn 1:1-18) is based on a Mandaean hymn that was originally about John the Baptist.

Manichaeism. Manichaeism is a form of dualistic Gnosticism that believes the world is a fusion of spirit and matter, which are the original principles of good and evil. The fallen soul is trapped in the evil, material world and can reach the transcendent world only by way of the

spirit. At death, the soul of a righteous person returns to Paradise. The soul of a person who persisted in things of the flesh is condemned to rebirth.

Maranatha. Maranatha is an Aramaic word that is most commonly translated as “Come, O Lord” or “Come, Lord.” It appears once in the NT. “If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha” (1 Cor 16:22). The most common uses of Maranatha are as a short prayer calling for the return of Christ and as a mantra in Christian meditation.

Mars Hill, Paul’s Sermon on. *See Areopagus Sermon.*

Marcionism. Marcionism is a heretical belief system developed by Marcion of Sinope that the God of the OT was not the same God as the God of the NT. The former, referred to as the Demiurge, is legalistic and vengeful while the latter is loving and forgiving.

Mariology. Mariology refers to the theological study of Mary, the Mother of God. Specifically, Mariology seeks to understand Mary in the context of traditional theological topics.

Marks of the Church. These refer to the characteristics of a true local church. Some consider the marks of the Church to be the four attributes listed in the Nicene Creed: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Since the Reformation, many Protestants consider a true church to be one that correctly preaches the word of God and also correctly administers the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Materialism. Materialism is the view that nothing exists outside of the material universe and everything that happens is due to material interactions of material things, including mental states, consciousness, and moral choices.

Mature Creationism. This view of creation (also called the Mature Universe Theory) holds that God created the universe *ex nihilo* in the recent past, commonly thought to be between 6,000 and 10,000 years ago. But God created the universe with the characteristics of a universe that is much older, including stellar characteristics and earthly characteristics that agree with scientific observations.

Mediator. In Christianity, the term mediator refers Christ’s priestly role in bridging the gap between mankind and the Father. This is taught by both Jesus (Mt 11:27) and by Paul: “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). The Mediatory of Christ is how the broken relationship with God is mended.

Mendicant. A mendicant is a holy person who takes a vow of poverty and obtains support for mission work solely through charitable contributions.

Messiah. Messiah is a Hebrew word meaning anointed one. In the OT, messiah is generally used when referring to a savior or a liberator of people. More specifically, the OT refers to a future Messiah from the lineage of David who will deliver Israel from foreign bondage and restore her to glory. Christians believe that Jesus Christ incarnate was the fulfillment of this messianic prophecy and is therefore the Messiah. The Greek word for Messiah is *Khristós* (or *Christós*, Χριστός), which is translated as Christ.

Metamorphosis. See *Transfiguration*.

Metanarrative. A metanarrative (also called a grand narrative) is a theory that tries to give a totalizing, comprehensive account to various historical events, experiences, and social, cultural phenomena based upon the appeal to universal truth or universal values. It claims to explain various events in history and to give meaning by connecting disparate events and phenomena by appealing to some kind of universal knowledge or schema. The term grand narrative can be applied to a wide range of thought systems such as Marxism, religious doctrines, belief in progress, and universal reason.

Metaphor. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between. Jesus uses many metaphors in His teachings, especially in the book of John. Examples include: “I am the bread of life” (Jn 6:35); “I am the light of the world” (Jn 8:12); “I am the good shepherd” (Jn 10:11); and “I am the true vine; you are the branches” (Jn 15:5).

Miaphysitism. Miaphysitism is the view that Jesus is fully divine and fully human but has only a single nature. This is the position of the Eastern Orthodox churches. It differs from monophysitism, which also holds that Jesus also has a single nature, but that this is the divine nature.

Middle Knowledge. Middle knowledge refers to the belief that God has full knowledge of future counterfactuals. That is, God knows what will happen given any particular situation including free human choices. God’s middle knowledge therefore consists of truths as to what would be the case if various states of affairs were to occur. Arminian theology uses the concept of middle knowledge to reconcile God’s omniscience with mankind’s free will.

Millennialism. Millennialism is the belief that there will be a literal thousand-year period on earth that begins when Satan is imprisoned and ends when Satan is released, there is a final battle, and the Final Judgment occurs (see Rv 20). Premillennialism believes that the second coming of Christ will occur before the millennial period. Postmillennialism believes that the second coming of Christ will occur at the end

of the millennial period. Amillennialism believes that there will not be a literal thousand-year period before the final judgement.

Millennium. This term refers to the period of time mentioned in the following verse from Revelation, “[A]nd they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed” (Rv 20:4-5). Some believe that the millennium will be a literal thousand-year period while others believe that this should be interpreted as a long period of time.

Mimesis. Mimesis refers to imitation or mimicry. It is typically used in aesthetic theory to refer to the attempt to imitate or reproduce reality. Mimesis is derived from the Greek verb *mimeisthai* (μιμέομαι), which means to imitate and which itself comes from *mimos* (μῦμος), meaning mime.

Miracle. A miracle is something astonishing that occurs that is attributed to divine power. Examples of miracles that Jesus performed include turning water into wine, healing the sick, calming a storm, walking on water, feeding thousands of people, and raising people from the dead.

Modalism. Modalism is a form of Monarchism where the single person of God reveals himself through different modes such as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Modern Devotion. *See Devotio Moderna.*

Modernism. Although modernism is often used to describe a genre of literature and art, it more generally refers to a complete rational understanding of the world and the rejection of anything supernatural. Modernism can be viewed as a humanistic worldview where people have the power to use logic and science to create, improve, and reshape their environment and society. Since the goal of modernism is advancement of the human condition through human effort, it has a strong focus on identifying barriers (in its opinion) to this progress, which almost always includes organized religion.

Molinism. Molinism is a “middle way” that tries to reconcile both the complete sovereignty of God and the true free will of man (in a libertarian sense). It is named for the 16th century Jesuit priest Luis de Molina. Molinism assumes that God has three different moments of knowledge: natural knowledge, middle knowledge, and free knowledge. God uses middle knowledge (knowledge of what people will choose in a given certain circumstances) to create circumstances so that people will choose according to God’s divine plan.

Monarchism. Monarchism (see also called Modalism/Patrispassionism/Sabellianism) is the non-trinitarian belief that God is a single person rather than three co-eternal persons of the same substance.

Monergism. This is the belief that only God is involved in an individual's salvation and that human effort plays no role. It is the Reformed position.

Monophysitism. Monophysitism is the doctrine that Christ only has a divine nature and does not have a human nature. It is sometimes called Eutychianism, but Eutychianism typically refers to Christ incarnate having a single nature that is a mixture of human and divine. Monophysitism was declared heretical at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE.

Monotheism. See *Theism*.

Monothelitism. Monothelitism teaches that Christ only has a single divine will and not a human will. This is in contrast to dyothelitism, which teaches that Christ has both a human and a divine will. Monothelitism was advocated strongly by Sergius I in his *Ecthesis* (638 CE). His goal was to present a compromise position regarding the controversy between the monophysitism (Christ only has a divine nature) and the dyophysitism (Christ has a human and a divine nature). The third Council of Constantinople declared monothelitism heretical and affirming that Christ has two wills.

Montanism. Montanism is the heretical belief that new prophesies can occur that go beyond the teachings of the Jesus and the Apostles. This movement was referred to as the New Prophecy.

Moral Influence Theory. The moral influence theory of atonement teaches that the purpose and result of Christ's death was to influence mankind toward moral improvement. This theory denies that Christ died to satisfy divine justice. It instead teaches that Christ's death was designed to impress mankind with a sense of God's love, resulting in softening their hearts and leading them to repentance. This theory was originally formulated by Peter Abelard as an alternative to Anselm's satisfaction theory.

Moral Sense of Scripture. This is one of the four methods of the Quadriga for interpreting Scripture, classically referred to as the tropological sense. This refers to the aspect of scripture that tells us what is good, what is bad, and how God's wants us to behave. The other three are the literal sense, the allegorical sense, and the anagogical sense.

Mortal Sin. Roman Catholics and Lutherans refer to a serious sin as a mortal sin. A mortal sin must be of a grave matter, be committed with full knowledge, and be committed with deliberate consent. A mortal sin is believed to result in a separation from God and can lead to damnation unless repentance for the mortal sin occurs before death.

Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic covenant consists of the Law and sacrificial system given by God to Moses. This covenant was with God and

the nation of Israel where Israel was promised blessing in return for obedience.

Mystical Union. This term refers to the intimate, vital, and spiritual union between Christ and a believer such that He is the source of their life, strength, blessedness and salvation. Some of the Biblical characterizations of this mystical union include Christ as the vine and believers as the branches (Jn 15:5), marriage (Eph. 5:23-32), and as a body of which Christ is the head (Eph. 4:15,16).

Mythopoeia. Mythopoeia refers to the making of myths, either collectively in the folklore and religion of a given culture, or individually by a writer who elaborates a personal system of spiritual principles. The term is often used in a loose sense to describe any kind of writing that either draws upon older myths or resembles myths in subject-matter or imaginative scope. Mythopoeia is the title of a poem by J.R.R. Tolkien, who coined the term.

N

Names of God. The OT refers to God with a variety of names such as Elohim (mighty One, an object of fear), Adonai (judge and almighty ruler), El-Shaddai (all powerful), and Yahweh (I am that I am / I shall be what I shall be).

Narrative Theology. *See Postliberal Theology.*

Natural Theology. This is the branch of theology that infers knowledge of God from the study of nature independent of special revelation.

Nazarenes. The Nazarenes were a sect of Christianity that believed that Christ was the Divine Messiah, but also insisted that strictly following the OT Law and ceremonies was necessary for salvation.

Necessary Will. With respect to God, necessary will refers to everything God must will according to His nature. This is in contrast to God's free will, which refers to things God wills according to His good pleasure.

Negative Theology. *See Apophatic.*

Neoorthodox Theology. The theology of Karl Barth was the first neoorthodox system and has been highly influential. He developed it in reaction against the increasingly liberal theologies of the 19th and 20th centuries. Neoorthodox theologies speak in the same terms of orthodox theologies such as the Trinity, Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and the Kingdom of God. They do not, however believe that the Bible is literally true and inerrant. Neoorthodox theologies also tend to emphasize the ineffability of God, and that God's infinite nature precludes us from describing him in precise and logical ways. Rather,

neoorthodox theologies use a dialectical method where seemingly contradictory or paradoxical metaphysical teachings of the Bible are discussed together and do not necessarily need to be reconciled. Other prominent neoorthodox theologians include Rudolf Bultmann, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Neoplatonism. This term refers to a philosophical school of thought that first emerged in the middle of the 3rd century. Neoplatonism attempts to harmonize a wide range of Greek philosophical thought and religious practices (with the exceptions of Epicureanism and Stoicism). The most fundamental assumption of Neoplatonism is that mindful consciousness is ontologically prior to the physical realm typically taken for ultimate reality. The next important assumption of Neoplatonism is that reality depends on a highest principle which is unitary and singular.

Nestorianism. Nestorianism is the view that Christ incarnate existed as two separate persons, the man Jesus and the divine Son of God. It is named after Nestorius, the patriarch of Constantinople. Nestorius was attacked for his teachings by many prominent church leaders including Cyril of Alexandria, who issued 12 anathemas against him. Nestorius and his teachings were eventually condemned as heretical at the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE, and again at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE.

New Covenant. The New Covenant typically refers to the covenant mediated by Jesus Christ through His death and resurrection. This is in contrast to the Old Covenant, which typically refers to God's covenant with Israel given through Moses at Mount Sinai. In the Old Covenant, the Israelites were subject to the Law. In the New Covenant, all people can be saved through the grace of Christ (see Gal 3).

New Prophecy. *See Montanism.*

Noahic Covenant. The Noahic covenant is God's promise to Noah, made after the flood, to never again flood the earth.

Nominalism. *See Platonism.*

Non-Essentialism. Often synonymous to anti-foundationalism, non-essentialism in philosophy is the non-belief in an essence of any given thing, idea, or metaphysical entity, including God. Non-essentialism might also be defined cataphatically as the belief that for any entity, there are no specific traits or ground of being which entities of that kind must possess to be considered that entity.

Notes of the Church. *See Marks of the Church.*

Numinous. Numinous generally refers to having a divine quality or connection but more specifically refers to a feeling of being in the

presence of God. This typically accompanied by feelings of wonder, awe, and even terror.

O

Old Covenant. Old Covenant typically refers to God's covenant with Israel given through Moses at Mount Sinai. In the Old Covenant, the Israelites were subject to the Law. In the New Covenant, all people can be saved through the grace of Christ (see Gal 3).

Old-Earth Theory. This is the view that the earth is very old as indicated by scientific methods such as radiometric dating and geology. These methods indicate that the Earth is about 4.5 billion years old.

Ontological Argument. The ontological argument is a logical proof of God that was proposed by Saint Anselm of Canterbury in his *Proslogion* (1078 CE). In this argument, God is defined as a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. If such a being fails to exist, then a greater being (a being than which no greater can be conceived, and which exists) can be conceived. Therefore, God exists. Many have challenged the validity of the ontological argument including Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas suggested that people cannot know the nature of God and, therefore, cannot conceive of God in the way Anselm proposed.

Ontological Equality. Ontological equality is a philosophical concept that the essence of two things are of the same value. This can be used to describe things such as the relationship of the persons of the Trinity, the value of all people in the eyes of God, and the specific value of men and women in the eyes of God.

Open Theism. Open theism believes that the future, including moral choices and whether one becomes saved, is not certain and is not part of God's foreknowledge. In Open Theism, God's omniscience mean that God only knows what is possible to know.

Order of Salvation. This refers to the stages involved in the process of salvation and the order in which the occur.

Ordinance. Anabaptists, Baptists, and many Pentecostals refer to the Lord's Supper and baptism as ordinances instead of sacraments. Sacrament is typically used if it is believed that the rite is a means of God delivering a particular grace. In contrast, ordinance is typically used if the rite is simply an act of man.

Original Guilt. This is the belief that everyone is born guilty of Adam's first sin and is therefore condemned before God upon conception. This is sometimes referred to as inherited guilt.

Original Pollution. This is the belief that man's sinful nature is inherited from Adam's fallen nature due to His original sin. This is also referred to as inherited corruption.

Original Sin. This is the belief that all humans are born with a sinful nature due to the original sin of Adam. This sinful nature separates one from God and therefore requires regeneration as a remedy. This is also referred to as inherited sin.

Orthodox. In Christian theology, an orthodox belief is one that is widely accepted to be true. A good test to see whether a belief is orthodox or not is to compare it with the Athanasian or Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed. An orthodox belief is not to be confused with the Eastern Orthodox church.

Orthodox Church. *See Eastern Church.*

Orthopraxy. In theology, orthopraxy refers to the correct practical application of doctrine whereas orthodoxy refers to correct doctrine.

P

Paedobaptism. *See Infant Baptism.*

Paganism. Paganism sometimes refers to any religion that does not worship the God of Abraham (i.e., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). Paganism can also refer to the belief in many gods, none of which are perfect in their goodness and power.

Palamism. Palamism (also known as Palamite theology) refers to the Eastern Orthodox teachings of Hesychasm, especially against the attacks of Barlaam of Seminara, who considered Hesychasm a heresy. Palamism is named after its founder, Gregory Palamas (c.1296–1359). Palamism emphasizes the distinction between divine essence and de-fine energies. Followers of Palamas are sometimes referred to as Palamites.

Pantheism. Pantheism is an imprecise term, but generally means that the universe is God, that everything in the universe is part of God, or that everything in the universe is animated by God (*pan*= all, *theo*=God).

Paraklētos. In Christianity, *Paraklētos* (παράκλητος) is another name for the Holy Spirit. It is a Greek word that refers to someone's advocate in a legal proceeding, and is variously translated as Counselor, Comforter, and Advocate.

Pardes. *Pardes* is a fourfold rabbinical method of interpreting scripture similar to the Quadriga. It is an acronym, The *p* stands for *peshat*, to extend, the literal sense; *r* stands for, *remez*, hint, the canonical sense; *d* stands for *derash*, searching, the moral sense; *s* stands for *sod*, secret, the theological sense.

Parousia. *Parousia* (παρουσία) is a Greek word that literally means a coming or a presence. It typically refers to the return to earth of Jesus from heaven to raise the dead, hold the last judgment, and set up the kingdom of God. The *Parousia* is also referred to as the Second Coming and the Second Advent.

Particular Examen Prayer. *See Examen Prayer.*

Particular Redemption. *See Limited Atonement.*

Particularity, Scandal of. The Scandal of Particularity was a term used by some Enlightenment writers to criticize the Christian belief that people who have not been exposed to the Gospel (e.g., due to geographic location) have no chance to achieve salvation.

Pascal's Wager. Pascal's wager is a philosophical argument developed by Blaise Pascal. It starts with the premise that either God exists or does not exist, and that which of these is true is not discoverable through reason. However, if a person lives as if God exists, there is nothing to gain if God actually exists and little to lose if God does not exist. In contrast if a person lives as if God does not exist, the result is eternal torment if God does exist. Therefore, one should wager that God exists.

Paschal. This is an adjective for something related to Easter or the Jewish Passover. It is derived from the Hebrew word for Passover (*pesach*), which became the Greek word *pascha* (πάσχα) and then the Latin word *paschalis*.

Passion. In Christianity, the Passion refers to the sufferings of Christ between the night of the Last Supper and his death; In terms of biblical Greek, passion is a translation of *pathos* (πάθος), which means a suffering.

Pastor. In the NT, pastor is synonymous with elder, overseer, and bishop. It refers to the leader or a member of the governing group of a local church. The word pastor harkens to the pastoral role of ministering to a congregation in a manner similar to a shepherd caring for his sheep.

Pastoral Epistles. The pastoral epistles refer to three books in the NT: the first and second books of Timothy and Titus. They are called the pastoral epistles since they are written to people with pastoral responsibilities and address issues such as Christian living, Christian doctrine and Christian leadership.

Patience. This word is a translation of the Greek *hupomene* (ὑπομονή), which is a compound of the words *hupo* (ὑπό) and *meno* (μένω). *Hupo* means under, and *meno* means to stay or to remain. Together, the Greek word means endurance or to stay under. It is the picture of a person who is under a heavy load but has resolved to stay put in that one spot, regardless of how hard or heavy that load gets.

Patripassionism. This is a form of monarchism that believes that since there is only one God, God the Father must have suffered on the cross. This was referred to as Patripassionism by the Latin Fathers (*Pater* = Father; *passio* = suffering) and Sabellianism by the Greeks.

Patristic Theologians. This refers to major theologians of the “patristic period,” generally viewed as the period after the NT books were all written (c.100) to the Council of Chalcedon (451). The major theologians of this period were referred to as Church Fathers, with the Latin for father being *pater*.

Pelagianism. Pelagianism is the heretical belief that the Fall did not result in a corruption of human nature, and it is therefore possible to live a sin-free life. Pelagianism believes that this must be true since God would not command people to do something that is impossible.

Penal Substitution. This theory of atonement is the Reformed position as well as the belief of most evangelicals. It holds that the penalty of sin is death. Therefore, Christ died on the cross in our place to satisfy God’s justice. Christ’s death is a perfect substitutional sacrifice, similar to the burnt offering sacrifices in the OT where animals were sacrificed to God to atone for sins. “[Jesus] has been revealed to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb 9:26; see also Heb 10:12; Eph 5:2).

Pentecost. Pentecost is translated from the Greek word *pentecostē* (πεντηκοστή), which means fiftieth day. Pentecost is celebrated on the Sunday that falls on the fiftieth day of Easter and is used to commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and other disciples following the Ascension of Christ. It is also used to commemorate the beginning of the Christian church’s mission to the world. In the Jewish tradition, Pentecost was originally a thanksgiving celebration for the first wheat harvest but was later used as a remembrance of when the Law given by God to Moses.

Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism is a charismatic Christian movement that is best known for its belief that speaking in tongues is evidence of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalism is highly decentralized and without any central authority, but many denominations are affiliated with the Pentecostal World Fellowship. It is estimated that there are more than 600 million people in the world who identify as Pentecostal Christians and it is also estimated to be the fastest growing religion on earth. This rapid growth is partly due to the ability of Pentecostal worship to adapt to different cultural settings, particularly in third-world countries.

Perfectionism. In Christianity, perfectionism is typically understood as unblemished character with moral and spiritual integrity. The Pelagian

heresy teaches that sinless perfection is possible in this life, which can also be considered a form of perfectionism. Some Christians link perfectionism to Mt 5:48, “Be perfect ... as your heavenly Father is perfect.” But perfect in this verse is a translation of the Greek word *teleios* (τέλειοι), which means full grown or complete. Therefore, this verse is not advocacy perfectionism. Rather, it is a command to become fully mature Christians just as God is a fully mature deity.

Perichoresis. Perichoresis refers to the intimate relationship between the persons of the Triune God, particularly between the Father and the Son. Perichoresis corresponds to the Greek word *perikhōrēsis* (περιχώρησις), which means rotation. A perichoretic understanding of the Trinity holds that part the divine essence of one Person of the Trinity is eternally in the other two. That is, there is a circulation or rotation of divine essence.

Perseverance of the Saints. Perseverance of the saints is the belief that once someone becomes saved, they can never lose this salvation. This is a core belief of Reformed theology, where it corresponds to the P in TULIP.

Personal Eschatology. Personal eschatology is the area of theology addressing what happens to a person after death. This includes issues such as the intermediate state between death and the Final Judgement, reunification of the soul with a glorified body, heavenly rewards, and glorification.

Perspicuity of Scripture. The doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture (also called Clarity of Scripture and *claritas scripturae*) teaches that the important spiritual content of the Bible can be understood by people of normal intelligence by normal means. A common framework is that biblical content related to salvation can be understood by a child. biblical content related to living a good Christian life can be understood by pastors. Furthermore, some biblical content is intentionally difficult and obscure to ensure humility with regards to the Word of God.

Pervasive Depravity. *See Total Depravity.*

Pharisees. The Pharisees were a Jewish sect in the time of Jesus. The Pharisees were very focused on rabbinical law and sought to integrate it into all aspects of everyday life, not just things related to the Temple. The Pharisees are distinguished from the other major Jewish sect of the time, the Sadducees, in that they believed in angels, spirits, and resurrection and the Sadducees did not.

Philosophical Theology. Philosophical theology is the examination of theological issues based on reasoning rather Scripture. Stated differently, philosophical theology explores what can be known about God

and God's relationship to things from observation of the universe combined with philosophical reasoning. Philosophical theology is a type of metaphysics.

Pietism. Pietism is an approach to the Christian life that focuses on the development of individual piety and the living of a holy Christian life. Pietism started as a Lutheran movement in Germany in the late 17th century. Methodism began as a moderate form of pietism, and an example of a more extreme form of pietism is the Mennonite Brethren Church.

Platonism. Platonism is a philosophical system that believes in the existence of abstract objects that exist in a third realm distinct from both the sensible external world and from the internal world of consciousness. Abstract object can be things like properties, types, propositions, meanings, and numbers. Philosophers who affirm the existence of abstract objects are called Platonists. Philosophers who deny the existence of abstract objects are called nominalists.

Plenary Inspiration. With regards to the Bible, plenary inspiration simply means that all of the Bible is inspired by God. A more specific view is Verbal Plenary Inspiration, which holds that each word in the original manuscripts that now constitute the Bible were dictated by God.

Pluralism, Religious. The weak form of religious pluralism refers to the toleration of all religions and the ability of all people to practice their chosen religion. The strong form of religious pluralism holds that all religions are equally legitimate ways of understanding metaphysical truths (e.g., Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism are equally valid in their understanding of the ultimate reality).

Pneumatomachianism. This refers to a heretical belief that denies the full divinity of the Holy Spirit and/or the full personhood of the Holy Spirit. It is from the Greek words *pneuma* (πνεῦμα) and *machē* (μάχη) which literally means spirit battle or to do battle with the Holy Spirit. Pneumatomachianism is also known as Macedonianism, after Macedonius, who was twice bishop of Constantinople (342–346 and 351–360). Pneumatomachianism was enabled by the vague statement about the Holy Spirit in the original version of the Nicene Creed, which stated that one is only to believe in the Holy Spirit. Council of Constantinople expanded this section to affirm the full divinity of the Holy Spirit, thereby condemning pneumatomachianism.

Polytheism. See *Theism*.

Postliberal Theology. Postliberal theology (also referred to as narrative theology) focuses on the narrative form of the OT and NT in the development of systematic theology. It views Christianity as best understood as an overarching story rather than a set of dogmatic truth

statements. Postliberal theology is closely associated with the late 20th century works of the Yale Divinity School.

Postmillennialism. This is the belief that the second coming of Christ will occur after the millennium period that is described in Rv 20:4-5.

Postmodernism. Postmodernism is an ambiguous term but can generally be understood as philosophical and religious worldviews that break from modernism. Typically, postmodernism believes that objective truths are only understood through the filter of one's mental state, which is in turn a function of one's life experiences and culture. Therefore everyone has their own truth that cannot legitimately be challenged, or even fully understood, by others. With regards to religion, Postmodernism tends to support pluralism, where all religions and lifestyles tolerate and respect each other. In terms of Christianity, some are optimistic that postmodernism thought should be more open to the Christian message than modernistic thought, which tends to dismiss it outright.

Prayer. Prayer is the act of spending deliberate time with God and trying to feel His presence. This can be through verbal or mental talking, the recitation of written prayers alone or in groups, and even through Christian meditation techniques. Prayer should be a central part of every Christian's life and Paul instructs us to "[P]ray without ceasing" (1 Thes 5:17).

Praxis. Praxis is the practical application of a theory. In theology, orthopraxy refers to the correct practical application of doctrine whereas orthodoxy refers to correct doctrine.

Preceding Grace. *See Prevenient Grace.*

Predestination. In theology, predestination is the belief that God has determined who will be saved and, therefore, it is not possible for some to people to be saved. A variant of predestination is that God predestined some to be saved (the elect) and predestined all others to be damned (the reprobate), called double predestination. This doctrine is closely associated with Reformed Theology.

Premillennialism. This is the belief that the second coming of Christ will occur before the millennium period that is described in Rv 20:4-5.

Preterism. Preterism is the view that most of the events in the book of Revelation have been fulfilled in the distant past. The seals, trumpets, and witnesses in Chapters 4-11 refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE. The dragon, beasts, bowls, and Armageddon in Chapters 12-19 refer to the fall of Rome in the fourth century. The Millennium is not a literal thousand-year period, but a long period of time that began after the fall of Rome and continues to the present day.

The other predominant ways to understand the book of Revelation are futurism, historicism, and idealism.

Prevenient Grace. Prevenient grace (also called preceding grace or enabling grace) is the belief that God gives all people sufficient grace so that they are able with God's help to repent and believe in the Gospel message.

Priest. Generically, a priest someone who is authorized to perform the sacred rites of a religion and is a mediatory agent between people and God or gods. In the OT, a priest was authorized to offer sacrifices, prayers, and praises to God on behalf of the people. One of Christ's offices is that of High Priest, in which he offered himself as a perfect sacrifice and serves as the mediator between people and the Father.

Primogeniture. Primogeniture can refer to being the firstborn son and/or the right of succession that belongs to a firstborn son.

Prince of Power and the Air. *See Satan.*

Process Theology. Process theology is the view that God in some aspects is not fully non-temporal, unchanging, and impassible. Rather, God interacts in a temporal world along with other free agents. In this sense, process theology is similar to open theism in that the future is not certain or known. Process theology is the religious form of the process philosophy developed by Alfred North Whitehead. Process theology is a type of dipolar theism, where God has both a changing aspect (e.g., God's existence in a temporal world) and an unchanging aspect (e.g., God's eternal essence).

Progressive Creationism. This is the belief that God periodically creates new species of plants and animals, which then persist for a long period of time and can diversify through microevolution, but not into new species.

Prolegomena. Prolegomena simply means the prefatory remarks in a written work. In theology, prolegomena specifically refers to the assumed starting point for theological inquiry. For example, fundamentalists believe that the starting point of theology is Scripture, Fredrich Schleiermacher a feeling of absolute dependence, Paul Tillich the correlation of philosophical questions with theological answers, and human nature for Karl Rahner.

Prophecy. A prophesy is the relaying by a prophet of something communicated to him by a divine source, often involving portents of the future.

Propitiation. The generic meaning of propitiation is appeasement: the act of gaining or regaining the favor or goodwill of someone or something. In the context of Christian atonement, propitiation means averting the wrath of God by the offering of a gift. It is a term used to the

turning away of the wrath of God as the just judgment of our sin by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Propitiation is used four times in the new testament (Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17; 1 Jn 2:2; 1 Jn 4:10). All usages are typical of Heb 2:17, “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brothers so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

Prosperity Gospel. *See Prosperity Theology.*

Prosperity Theology. Prosperity theology (also called prosperity gospel, faith movement, and word-faith movement) is the belief that wealth and success in a Christian’s life is a reward from God for being a good Christian, often with a focus on being generous with donations to the church. That is, if a person is a good Christian and a generous giver, they will be rewarded financially by God. In contrast, a Christian that is financially struggling is likely not living a good Christian life since they have not been financially rewarded by God.

Providence, of God. Providence is a word that does not appear in the Bible but is a theological concept relating to God’s role in the universe. The doctrine of providence maintains that the world and our lives are ruled not by chance of fate but by God. God has a divine plan and God’s providence is assurance that this plan will be realized. Providence can be viewed in several ways such as God’s divine plan being predestined or God selectively intervening in history to assure the completion of His plan.

Psychopannychy. This is the belief that after physical death, the soul continues to exist but in an unconscious state. John Calvin wrote against this belief in a treatise called *Psychopannicia*.

Purgatory. Purgatory is a translation of the Latin *purgare*, which means to make clean or purify. In Catholic theology, purgatory is a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God’s grace, are, not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions. Purgatory can also be used generally to refer to a place or state of temporary suffering or misery.

Puritanism. Puritanism was a church movement of the 16th and 17th centuries in England. Puritans sought to rid the Church of England many of the practices that they felt were unnecessary carry-overs from Roman Catholicism. Puritanism was never viewed as a separate denomination but tended to have a focus on purity of worship, personal piety, and corporate piety. It was primarily Puritans who resettled in New England in the early 17th century, founding the Massachusetts Bay Colony and other settlements in New England.

Q

Quadrigma. Medieval theologians codified a fourfold way of reading Scripture called Quadrigma (“chariot drawn by four horses”). In this method, each verse contains a literal meaning and three possible spiritual meanings. Possible spiritual meanings include the allegorical (the gospel-centered meaning that points to Christ), the tropological (the moral meaning of how to think and act), and the anagogical (what we should hope for in light of the text).

Quadrilateral, Wesleyan. See *Wesleyan Quadrilateral*.

R

Radical Corruption. See *Total Depravity*.

Ransom-to-Satan Theory. Although theories of the Atonement were not discussed extensively by early church patricians, the most common view was the ransom-to-Satan theory. This theory was first developed by Origen (c.185–c.253) and is also known as *Christus Victor*. This theory assumes that the Fall somehow left all of mankind in legal bondage to Satan. Christ offered Himself as a ransom payment to Satan, thereby freeing mankind from this bondage. However, Satan was not able to retain his hold on Christ, and Christ emerged as the supreme Victor over Satan and his evil forces. Biblical support for this theory come from the words of Jesus: “[T]he Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28 NASB), and from the words of Paul, “[Christ] gave Himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim 2:6).

Rapture. This is the event believed by some to consist of Christ appearing in the sky and transporting all believers to paradise. It is based on Paul writing, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven ... and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who remain, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thes 4:16-17). The term “caught up” is translated from the Greek word *harpazó* (ἁρπάζω), which was translated by Jerome into the Latin word *rapiemur*, a form of the Latin verb *rapturo*, from which the term rapture is derived.

Reading, Figural. This is an approach to reading Scripture that looks throughout the Bible to find correspondence, resonance, and moral similarity. An example is the figural connection between Adam and Christ. In figural reading, words, sentences, narratives, and images in

Scripture correspond to things that appear in other parts of the Bible. Figural reading includes both typology and allegory.

Real Presence. The doctrine of the Real Presence asserts that in the Eucharist Jesus is literally and wholly present under the appearances of bread and wine. According to Roman Catholic dogma, this occurs by transubstantiation, the transformation of the substance of bread and wine into Christ's body and blood. For Lutherans, the true body and blood of Christ are really present under the form of bread and wine. The doctrine of real presence is in contrast to the belief in spiritual presence and the belief in symbolic presence.

Reality. Reality is the totality of real things and events, both of which have an objective existence. The philosophical position that reality exists is called realism. There are two general aspects to realism. First, there is the claim that things exist such as objects and the properties of objects. Second, the existence of things is independent of anyone's thoughts and awareness of them. The opposite philosophical position to realism is called non-realism.

Reason. In philosophy, reason is the faculty or process of drawing logical inferences. Reason is in contrast to sensation, perception, feeling, and desire. Immanuel Kant refers to reason that gives *a priori* principles pure reason. Pure reason is distinguished from practical reason, which is concerned with actions. In theology, reason (as distinguished from faith) is the logical examination of religious truths.

Recapitulation Theory. This theory of atonement, developed by Irenaeus (c.130–c.202), holds that the disobedience of Adam that resulted in the fallen nature of man was rectified by Christ through His perfect obedience to God. Since Adam was the head of humanity, Adam's sin is shared by everyone. Christ is the new head of humanity. As Adam's sinful and disobedient nature was shared by all, Christ's sinless and perfectly obedient nature can now be shared by all. This theory has its focus on the incarnation rather than the crucifixion. Biblical support for recapitulation comes from verses contrasting the role of Adam and Christ. "For if by the offense of the one, death reigned through the one, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:17; see also 1 Cor 15:45-50).

Reconciliation. In the NT, reconciliation is translated from the Greek word *katallagē* (καταλλαγή), which derives from *katá* (an intensifier) and *allásso* (to exchange). *Katallage* therefore literally means to exchange and then a profit from exchange. *Katallage* is used only by the apostle Paul in four passages (Rom 5:11; Rom; 11:15; 2 Cor 5:18; 2

Cor 5:19). In all four uses of *katallage*, God is portrayed as the Reconciler and sinners as the ones reconciled.

Redaction Criticism. *See Form Criticism.*

Redemption. In Christianity, redemption refers to the entire saving work of God, referred to as God's redemptive history. God's redemptive history culminated in the work of Christ, who secured our redemption through His incarnation, death, and resurrection.

Reformed Theology. This is a conservative protestant theological system often called Calvinism and strongly associated with the doctrine of predestination. Reformed theology teaches that, before creation, God predestined a certain number of people (the elect) to be saved with the remainder predestined not to be saved (the reprobate). Reformed theology is the preferred label since it can be argued that John Calvin would not agree with certain elements of Reformed theology in either importance or substance. Reformed theology is closely associated with the Presbyterian denomination.

Refrigerium. Refrigerium is the Latin equivalent of the Greek word ἀνάψυξις (refreshment). This term was used among pagans and to signify both spiritual solace and the banquet celebrated for the memory or wellbeing of a deceased person. In Christianity, *Refrigerium* refers to the place or state of the soul after death while awaiting the Last Judgement. Later Christian writers referred this place as the Bosom of Abraham. This phrase is used in the NT by Luke (Lk 16:24) in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man.

Regeneration. Regeneration is that act of God by which the principle of the new life is implanted in man and the governing disposition of the soul is made holy. It can generally be described as the start of the Christian life. Reformed theology teaches that regeneration precedes saving faith, whereas Arminian theology teaches that saving faith precedes regeneration. Many medieval theologians thought that regeneration was a result of baptism.

Remonstrant. The followers of Jacobus Arminius were called Remonstrants (or the Remonstrant Brotherhood). Therefore, the terms Remonstrant and Arminian are synonymous. The term Remonstrant comes from the Five Articles of Remonstrance of 1610, wherein the followers of Arminius documented their points of disagreement with Reformed theology.

Renaissance. This refers to the transitional movement in Europe between medieval and modern times generally understood to have lasted from the beginning in the 14th century through the 17th century. The Renaissance was characterized by a revival of classical influences, by the

flourishing of the arts and literature, and by the beginnings of modern science.

Renewalist. *See Charismatic.*

Repentance. Repentance is a translation of the Greek word *metanoëō* (μετανοέω). This is a compound word formed from *meta*, which means amid, and *noëō*, which means to exercise the mind. Thus, *metanoëō* literally means, “accompanied by an exercise of the mind,” or “with understanding.” It is common to hear that Christian repentance as the turning away from sin, but it is more properly understood as a transformative change of heart and mind resulting in a spiritual conversion.

Replacement Theology. Replacement theology (also called supersessionism) is the view that that some-or-all of the OT promises for Israel have been fulfilled in the Church. That is, Israel was replaced by the Church in the NT. This is also known as supersessionism, since it holds that the Church has superseded Israel in terms of God’s soteriological plan.

Reprobate. This is the term used in the doctrine of double predestination for those who are predestined by God to spend eternity in Hell.

Resurrection. The general meaning of resurrection is to restore something that is dead back to life. The Resurrection (capital R) typically refers to the resurrection of Christ. The General Resurrection (also called the Universal Resurrection) refers to the resurrection of all of the dead at the end of times.

Revelation, of God. Revelation is the act of God revealing aspects of Himself to us. Revelation can be classified as general and special. General revelation is a self-disclosure of God to all humans through His creation and through our human nature. Special revelation is additional information that God reveals about himself to specific individuals.

Righteousness. God’s righteousness is the same thing as God’s justice. God will always act in a way that is right and in accordance with the Law that He has instituted. God also expects us to conform to His moral standards and will impartially ensure that all moral and immoral acts are responded to in the most appropriate way possible.

Romanticism. Romanticism refers to an attitude that is characteristic of the predominant works of literature, painting, music, and architecture in Western civilization from the late 18th to the mid-19th century. Romanticism emerged as a rejection of the order, calm, harmony, balance, idealization, and rationality that typified Classicism. It was also to some extent a reaction against the Enlightenment and against rationalism and materialism. Romanticism emphasizes the individual,

the subjective, the irrational, the imaginative, the personal, the spontaneous, the emotional, the visionary, and the transcendental.

Rule of Faith. Each of the early churches had a Rule of Faith. This was a set of basic doctrines, primarily about the triune God, that was learned and confessed at baptism. In the mind of the early churches, Jesus had given the first rule of faith in Mt 28:19, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Over the years, churches expanded Jesus’s statement of faith to address specific heresies. The early church Fathers taught that Scriptures are to be read and interpreted according to the Rule of Faith

S

Sabellianism. Sabellianism is a heretical teaching that is similar to modalism. It was developed by Sabellius, who was possibly a presbyter in Rome in the third century. Sabellius taught that God is a single person who expresses himself in three ways: as Father in creation; as Son in redemption, and as Holy Spirit in sanctification. The primary motivation of Sabellianism is to ensure the unity and indivisibility of God.

Sacrament. In Christianity, a sacrament is a rite that is believed to have been ordained by Christ and that is held to be a means of divine grace or to be a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality. Protestants believe that the Bible identifies two sacraments: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Roman Catholicism believe in seven sacraments: baptism, eucharist, confirmation, reconciliation, anointing of the sick, marriage, and holy orders. Many Christians, including Catholics, feel that real divine work takes place through sacraments. Many others believe that sacraments are simply forms of ritual, such as infant baptism celebrating a baby joining the Christian community and adult baptism being an outward sign that a person has given their life to Christ.

Sacrifice. A sacrifice is an offering of something precious to a deity, especially the killing of a victim on an altar. In a non-ritualistic sense, a sacrifice can be thought of as giving up something desired. In the OT, the sacrificial system was central to the Jewish religion, although several verses minimize the value of sacrifices to God (Prov 21:3; Hos 6:6). In the NT, Jesus specifically says that He has not come for sacrifices. “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice” (Mt 9:13). Christ’s death, however, is characterized several times as a sacrifice (1 Cor 5:7; Heb 10:12). Christians are also instructed in the NT in a variety of ways to offer figurative sacrifices to God. “I appeal to you therefore, brothers,

by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1).

Sadducees. The Sadducees were a Jewish sect in the time of Jesus. They oversaw many formal affairs of the Jewish community such as tax collection, interaction with the Roman government, and mediation of Jewish grievances. The Sadducees are distinguished from the other major Jewish sect of the time, the Pharisees, in that they did not believe in angels, spirits, and resurrection whereas the Pharisees did.

Salvation, History of. Also called the History of Redemption, this phrase refers to the story of God’s plan to save human beings from sin and bring them to eternal life. Some people divide the Bible’s account of salvation history into eight major periods: primeval history, patriarchs/matriarchs, Egypt and the exodus, settling the promised land, the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, exile and return, the life of Jesus Christ, and the early Christian church.

Sanctification. Sanctification literally means to make holy. Holy means set apart, such as something set apart from an earthly purpose to a heavenly purpose. Sanctification is therefore the process of increasingly setting your life apart for God. In theological terms, sanctification is increasing one’s Christian maturity after justification.

Sanctification, of Scripture. Sanctification of Scripture is the belief that the Holy Spirit guided all stages of the development of the Bible including oral tradition, writings, and canon formation. The concept of sanctification of Scripture allows the text to remain a creaturely product that has been guided through all stages by the Holy Spirit, resulting in an authoritative work that is the prophetic and apostolic witness of God’s special revelation.

Satan. The personal name of the head of the demons. Other common names for Satan include Adversary (1 Pt 5:8-9), Beelzebub (Lord of Flies), Devil (from the Greek *diabolos*, διάβολος), Evil One (1 Jn 5:19), Father of Lies (Jn 8:44), Lucifer (morning star, see Ez 28:13-15), and Prince of the Power of the Air (Eph 2:2).

Satisfaction Theory. This theory, developed by Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), is that mankind’s sin robbed God of honor and glory. Christ was sinless and was under no obligation to die. His death therefore brought infinite glory and honor to God, restoring what was lost. This theory is sometimes called the commercial theory: mankind owed a debt to God that was paid by the death of Christ on the Cross. “Having canceled the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col 2:14). Biblical support for this theory comes

from the descriptions of Christ's death as a propitiation for people's sins (Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17; 1 Jn 2:2; 1 Jn 4:10).

Saving Faith. Saving faith is a Protestant related to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Saving faith has (1) an understanding of the Gospel message, (2) an intellectual assent that the essential message of the Gospel message is true, and (3) trust in the redemptive power of Jesus Christ.

Scholasticism. In theology, scholasticism refers to the method of theological inquiry used by the major medieval schools. Some of the major scholastic theologians include Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham.

Scripture, Holy. In common usage, Holy Scripture is synonymous with the Holy Bible including the NT and the OT. When Holy Scripture is referred to in the NT, it is always referring to the OT (the NT did not yet exist).

Second Advent. *See Parousia.*

Second Coming. *See Parousia.*

Self-Attesting. This is a view of the Bible (also called Self-Authenticating) where its contents are sufficient evidence to show that it is the revealed Word of God. This aspect of the Scripture was emphasized by John Calvin, "Scripture indeed is self-authenticated; hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And the certainty it deserves with us, it attains by the testimony of the Spirit." (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I., vii., 1, 2, 5).

Self-Authentication. *See Self-Attesting.*

Self-Denial. The practice of self-denial involves a restraint or limitation of one's own desires or interests. A lifestyle focusing on self-denial is called asceticism, which is the practice of the denial of physical or psychological desires in order to attain a spiritual ideal or goal. Almost all religions contain at least some features of asceticism. Jesus instructs us to practice self-denial as follows: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23).

Semi-Pelagianism. Semi-Pelagianism is a middle view that falls between Pelagianism and Reformed theology. Whereas Reformed theology holds that the Fall resulted in the total depravity of man and Pelagianism holds that the Fall did not impact the nature of man at all, Semi-Pelagianism believes that the Fall damaged the nature of man, but not to the extent that he cannot still choose on His own to repent and believe in the Gospel. This view is similar to Arminianism, but Arminianism believes that the ability of Fallen man to repent and believe in the Gospel is due to the prevenient grace that God gives to all people.

Separation, Doctrine of. This is the teaching of some churches that their members should not associate closely with non-believers or even believers that have a different theological understanding of Scripture. Justification for this doctrine is typically the verse, “Do not be mismatched with unbelievers” (2 Cor 6:14).

Septuagint. The Septuagint is the earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible and is typically what is quoted in the NT. It is sometimes called the Greek Old Testament, the Translation of the Seventy, or simply by the Roman number LXX. The Septuagint contains several books that are not found in the Hebrew Bible, called the Apocrypha.

Seraphim. Seraphim (singular = seraph) are a class of angel and are typically viewed as the highest by Christians in the angel hierarchy. Isaiah writes, “Seraphim were standing above Him, each having six wings: with two each covered his face, and with two each covered his feet, and with two each flew” (Is 6:2). The Book of Revelation also seems to refer to Seraphim. “And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, ‘HOLY, HOLY, HOLY IS THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, who was and who is and who is to come’” (Rv 4:8).

Sheep and the Goats. *See Judgement of the Nations.*

Shema. This refers to the OT verse, “Hear, Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one” (Dt 6:4)!

Sheol. *See Hades.*

Simony. Simony is the act of a church selling sacred offices or sacred objects. The term is derived from the NT story of Simon Magus, who offered to pay Peter and John for the ability to confer the Holy Spirit to people through the laying on of hands (Acts 8:9-24).

Sin. Sin is simply a moral evil (as opposed to a physical evil). Evil is anything opposed to God, and so sin can also be viewed as thoughts and actions that are opposed to God’s moral standards.

Sinless Perfection. *See Perfectionism.*

Situation Ethics. Situation ethics is a moral framework where it is considered impossible to assess a moral situation according to absolute moral standards and therefore only the particulars of the specific situation should be considered.

Socinianism. This heretical belief rejects the pre-existence of Christ and holds that Jesus did not exist until he was conceived as a human being.

Sola Fide. A Latin term referring to the doctrine that salvation is through faith alone rather than faith plus works.

Sola Scriptura. A Latin term referring to the doctrine that the Bible is the sole infallible source of authority for Christian faith and practice. This

is opposed to the Roman Catholic church that considers both Scripture and church tradition to be authoritative.

Soul. Soul is a translation of the Greek word *psychē* (ψυχή). It refers to the spiritual part of a human being. In Greek mythology, *Psychē* was the goddess of the soul. Born a mortal woman, her beauty rivaled that of Aphrodite and inspired the love of Aphrodite's son, Eros, the god of desire. After completing a series of seemingly impossible tasks to be with Eros, Psyche was granted immortality and made into a goddess herself.

Soul Sleep. Soul Sleep is the belief that the soul enters a state of unconscious existence after death until the general resurrection. The basis of this is 1 Thes 4:13-18, where Paul refers to Christians that have died as being asleep. This doctrine is not prevalent as there are many NT passages that strongly imply that the soul remains aware after death.

Source Criticism. Source criticism (also called literary criticism) is the historical-critical study of proposed pre-Biblical sources for Biblical materials.

Speaking in Tongues. In Christianity, speaking in tongues (also called glossolalia) is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor 12-14. It is understood to be a manifestation of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that results in unintelligible utterances that can be understood by those with the gift of interpretation. Cessationists typically believe that the gift of tongues is no longer given by the Holy Spirit in the present day, and therefore view those who claim to speak in tongues with suspicion.

Special Revelation. Special revelation is how God reveals aspects of Himself to specific individuals such as prophets and apostles.

Spiration. In theology, spiration refers to the third Person of the triune God (the Holy Spirit) eternally proceeding from the first Person and the second Person of the triune God (the Father and the Son, respectively).

Spirit. Spirit refers to something sentient that is immaterial. For example, the Bible says that "God is spirit" (Jn 4:24). Dichotomists believe that soul and spirit refer to the same thing and that a living person consists of a unified body and soul/spirit. Trichotomists believe that soul and spirit refer to different things and that a living person consists of a unified body plus soul plus spirit.

Spiritual Presence. This is the doctrine that Christ is spiritually present in the eucharistic elements. It is in contrast to the belief in real presence (most closely associated with Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism) and the belief in symbolic presence (i.e., the elements are simply a way to remember the death of Christ).

States of Christ. From the time of His incarnation to the time of His ascension, Christ is said to have been in a state of humiliation. From the time of His ascension onward, Christ is said to be in a state of exaltation. Christ's state of humiliation is typically divided it into five stages: incarnation, suffering, death, burial, and His descent into hades. Christ's state of exaltation is typically divided into four stages: the resurrection, the ascension, Christ at the right hand of God, and the physical return of Christ to earth.

Stoicism. Stoicism is a philosophical school of thought that flourished in Greek and Roman history of antiquity. Stoics believe that the good life strives for tranquility of mind and certainty of moral worth. In modern usage, stoicism can refer to the philosophy of the Stoics, but can also be used to mean indifference to pleasure or pain.

Subordinationism. This is the belief that First person of the Godhead (the Father) has authority over the second and third persons (the Son and the Holy Spirit). In some forms, subordination also has the third person subordinate to the second person. Subordinationism was condemned as heretical at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553.

Supersessionism. *See Replacement Theology.*

Supralapsarian. This is the view that God's decree to save mankind was logically prior to his decree to create the world and permit the Fall. The opposing position is called infralapsarianism.

Sufficiency of Scripture. The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is that the Bible contains all of the necessary divine truths that are needed by Christians. It has all that is needed for a sufficient understanding of who God is, who man is in relation to God, what God expects from us, and how we can live a life that gives glory to God.

Symbolic Presence. This is the doctrine that the eucharistic elements are simply a symbolic way to remember the death of Christ. This is in contrast to the belief in real presence and the belief in spiritual presence.

Synoptic Gospels. The synoptic gospels are Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They are called the synoptic gospels since they all generally give the same account of the life of Jesus, as compared to the gospel of John, which is significantly different.

Synergism. This is the belief that a person cooperates with God in the process of salvation. It is the Arminian position.

Systematic Theology. Systematic theology answers questions about what the whole Bible teaches us today about any given subject. Systematic theology is also organized by topics such that doctrines that can be compared with each topic for consistency in methodology and absence of contradictions in the relationships between the doctrines.

T

Take up the Sword. This phrase appears in Mt 26:52, “Then Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword will perish by the sword.’” It is generally agreed that these words of Jesus are based on Gn 9:6, “Whoever sheds human blood, by man his blood shall be shed.” This verse is often used as the basis for Christian pacifism, but this use is questionable. The context of this verse is Jesus’s arrest, which must occur in order for the crucifixion, death, and resurrection to come to pass. Therefore, Jesus’s use of this proverb is based on the specifics of the situation and cannot be generalized to mean that Christians can never use violence, although Jesus often discourages violence.

Tanakh. *Tanakh* is a Hebrew work (תנ"ך) referring to the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament contain the same books but are arranged in different orders.

Tarry. In eschatological discussions, tarrying refers to Christ delaying His second coming. The word is used in the parable of the ten virgins when the bridegroom delays his meeting (Mt 25:1-12). The word is translated as tarry from the Greek word *chronizō* (χρόνος) in the KJV and ASV but is translated as delayed in most other translations.

Tartarus. In the NT, tartarus is used in 2 Pt 4 to refer to where fallen angels have been sent by God to be held for judgement. In Greek mythology, it was a place of horrible torture, located far below Hades, where the most wicked of the dead were sent and where the titans were imprisoned.

Taxis. *Taxis* (τάξις) is a Greek word meaning an arrangement, order, or rank. It is used to describe the Trinity by those who believe that the Father has authority over the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Teleological. In theology, something is teleological if it relates to the purpose or goal of something. For example a teleological view of the material world tries to understand how it was designed for its intended purpose.

Teleology. In an ethical context, teleology refers to ethical decisions based upon a desired goal. An example of a secular teleology is utilitarianism, which strives to achieve the greatest good for the most people. In Christianity, teleology typically strives to give the most glory to God and/or to have the closest possible relationship with God. Teleology is one of the three main approaches to ethical goals, the others being areteleology and deontology.

Tetragrammaton. This refers to the four-letter name of God in the Hebrew Bible: YHWH. The predominant modern view is that this word is pronounced Yahweh, but the pronunciation Jehovah also has wide usage.

Textual Variants. Textual variants occurs when ancient manuscript copies based on the same original manuscript contain differences. Examples of types of textual variants include different word spellings, similar looking words in the same location, similar sounding words in the same location, transposed words, missing words, repeated words, different words, and mistaken corrections.

Textus Receptus. *Textus Receptus* is a Latin phrase meaning received text. It refers to Bible translations that are based on the Greek NT Translation of Erasmus. *Textus Receptus* translations are therefore based on the eight Greek manuscripts that were available to Erasmus. Examples of *textus receptus* translations include the Tyndale Bible (1534), Coverdale Bible (1535), Geneva Bible (1560), King James Version (KJV, 1611), and New King James Version (NKJV, 1982). *Textus receptus* translations are to be distinguished from critical text translations, which are based on all of the manuscripts that are now available.

Theanthropos. This term means God-man, (*theo* = God; *ánthrōpos* = human), and is used to refer to Jesus Christ.

Theism. Theism is the belief in a God or gods who are personal in nature and play an active role in the universe and in people's lives. Monotheism is the belief in one such God and polytheism is the belief in more than one such god.

Theistic Evolution. This is the view (also called theistic evolutionism and God-guided evolution) that the scientific theory of evolution is correct but was designed by God who did not and does not interfere with the process once it had begun.

Theodicy. A theodicy is an argument that attempts to solve the problem of evil, which is the seeming incompatibility of an all-benevolent and all-powerful God and the existence of evil and unnecessary suffering in the world. Examples include free will theodicy (evil is due to the free human choices) and soul-making theodicy (pain and suffering are required for people to morally develop).

Theological Virtues. See *Virtue*.

Theology, Narrative. See *Postliberal Theology*.

Theology, Natural. See *Natural Theology*.

Theology of Crisis. This is a term sometimes used to refer to the teachings of Karl Barth and his followers. Barth taught that when a person encounters the Word of God it, the result is a crisis that forces a decision.

A person in this time of crisis must either choose obedience to God or rebellion against God.

Theology of the Cross. This term originated with Martin Luther, who understood the event of Christ dying on the cross as the only source of understanding of how God can save fallen man.

Theology, Postliberal. *See Postliberal Theology.*

Theopaschism. Theopaschism is the belief that God can suffer.

Theopaschitism. Theopaschitism is the heretical belief that the entire Triune God suffered during the crucifixion, not just the human nature of Christ. It is considered a variant of Monophysitism.

Theophany. Theophany refers to the manifestation of God in a way that can be sensed, typically visibly.

Theopoiesis. *Theopoiesis* (θεοποίησις) means being made divine.

Theoria. *Theoria* (θεωρία) is the Greek word meaning spectatorship. The term used in theology to describe the experience of being a spectator, looking at and comprehending through consciousness. In this sense, the meaning of *theoria* is similar to contemplation.

Theotokos. *Theotokos* is a title of Mary the Mother of Jesus. It consists of the combined Greek words *theos* (Θεός) and *tokos* (τόκος), which literally means she who gave birth to God. It is commonly understood to mean the Mother of God.

Theosis. *Theosis* (θέωσις) is the Greek word meaning divine state. In theology, *theosis* refers to the understanding that human beings can have a real union with God, and so become like God to such a degree that we participate in divine nature. It is primarily a term found in Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox theology. *Theosis* does not imply that we become gods, but rather, that we are to become the fullness of the divine image in which we were created. It is similar to the Protestant concept of sanctification but goes further with what may be expected in this life, emphasizing the element of our mystical union with God in Christ. The terms *theosis* and deification may be used interchangeably.

Thomism. Thomism refers to the theology and philosophy of Thomas Aquinas.

Total Depravity. Total depravity (also called radical corruption, pervasive depravity, and total inability) is the doctrine that the Fall resulted in the inability of any unregenerated person to do anything that is good in the eyes of God, including accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Total depravity is closely associated with Reformed theology and represents the T in TULIP.

Total Inability. *See Total Depravity.*

Tradition. In religion, tradition can refer to either a social custom (i.e., an inherited pattern of thought, action, or behavior) or a narrative custom (i.e., stories relating to the past that are commonly accepted as historical though not verifiable).

Traditores. This is a Latin term that means “those who handed over.” In theology, *traditores* refers to clergy who, under the persecution of Diocletian (ruled 284–305), handed over church scriptures to be burned. This led to the Donatist controversy, where the Donatists argued that sacraments administered by *traditores* were not valid.

Traducianism. This is the doctrine that the soul of a new baby is created from the mother and the father at the time of conception in a similar manner as to how the body is created.

Transcendence. Transcendence refers to something that exists or extends beyond the limits of ordinary experience. Immanuel Kant used this term to describe things that are beyond the limits of all possible experience and knowledge. In classical Western philosophy, the three attributes of truth, goodness, and beauty are referred to as the three transcendentals. For Christians, this means that truth, goodness, and beauty come from God and nothing else. All truth is God’s truth. All goodness is God’s goodness. All beauty is God’s beauty.

Transcendentals. In philosophy the four transcendentals are truth, goodness, beauty, and unity (oneness). The transcendentals are considered first principles since they cannot be logically derived from other principles.

Transfiguration. Transfiguration is translated from the Greek word *metemorphōthē* (μετεμορφώθη), which means “he is transformed.” Transfiguration refers to Jesus becoming radiant in glory on a mountaintop in the presence of three of His disciples. This event is recounted in Mt 17:1–8, Mk 9:2–8, and Lk 9:28–36. It is also referred to in 2 Pt 1:16–18. During His transfiguration, Jesus is seen speaking with Moses and Elijah. God the Father is then heard saying, “‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’” The transfiguration is clearly linked to Jesus’s Baptism, where God the Father is heard saying exactly the same thing. In Greek Orthodoxy, the transfiguration event is called the metamorphosis.

Transposition. Transposition is a theological concept developed by C.S. Lewis concerning the limited ability of a concept described in a richer medium to be fully described in a lower medium. A transposition occurs when a richer set of conceptual categories must necessarily be represented by a poorer set of conceptual categories. When a transposition takes place, higher concepts cannot be mapped smoothly and precisely onto the lower ones. This concept is similar to the

mathematical process of projection, where a higher-dimension mathematical object can only project a “shadow” of itself onto a lower dimension. Lewis views the Word of God as having a higher dimension than human language such that human language cannot communicate full divine understanding.

Transubstantiation. This is the doctrine of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches where the eucharistic elements at their consecration become the actual body and blood of Christ while keeping only the appearances of bread and wine. The doctrine of transubstantiation was incorporated into the documents of the Council of Trent (1545–63). There were subsequent debates in Roman Catholicism about whether the real presence of Christ was in the elements. But in 1965, Pope Paul VI asserted the real presence Christ in the elements through transubstantiation.

Trichotomist. The trichotomist view is that the soul and spirit are different and that a person therefore consists of three elements, a body, a soul, and a spirit.

Trinity. The Trinity is another name for the Triune God consisting of a three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Trinity, Economic. The Economic Trinity has to do with active role of the triune God in securing the salvation of mankind. Although this term does not appear in the Bible, the term economic comes from the Greek word *oikonomia* (οἰκονομία), which literally means household management. A common theological view of the economic trinity is that all three persons of the Trinity always act in perfect harmony together, but that aspects of divine work are particularly associated with each: creation with the Father, redemption with the Son, and sanctification with the Holy Spirit. The economic trinity refers to what God does, as opposed to the ontological or immanent Trinity that describes what God is.

Trinity, Essential. Essential Trinity refers to God as He exists outside of history. This is in contrast to the Economic Trinity, which refers to God as He acts throughout history.

Trinity, Immanent. The immanent Trinity refers to the eternal, essential, and ontological aspects of the Trinity. The orthodox view is that there is a single God consisting of three separate persons who are all fully God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All are of the same substance, the Son is eternally begotten by the Father, and the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son (the Eastern Orthodox church teaches that the Holy Spirit only proceeds from the Father).

Trinity, Ontological. *See Trinity, Immanent.*

Tritheism. Tritheism is a form of polytheism that believes in three separate Gods (as opposed to monotheism and ditheism). A heretical form of Christianity would be the tritheistic view that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three separate gods.

Tropological Sense, of Scripture. *See Moral Sense of Scripture.*

Truth. Truth is something in accordance with facts, real things, events, propositions, and ultimate reality. Truth is philosophically identified as one of the four transcendental qualities, along with beauty, unity, and goodness. They are first concepts since they cannot be logically or deductively traced back to a prior metaphysics.

TULIP. This is an acronym representing the five major theological positions of Reformed theology. The letters stand for total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints.

Twenty-Four-Hour Day Theory. This is the belief that the six days of creation describes in Gn 1 are six literal days consisting of twenty-four hour that are similar to the length of a day today.

Typology. In theology, typology is interpreting certain things in the OT (i.e., types) as prefiguring things in the NT. For example, typology would understand Jonah emerging from the belly of the fish after three days as prefiguring Christ's resurrection three days after His crucifixion.

U

Unity. Unity (also referred to as oneness) refers to the indivisibility of something, particularly with regards to the indivisibility of God. God is simple in the sense that God does not consist of a system of parts, but rather is a single and indivisible entity. Unity is philosophically identified as one of the four transcendental qualities, along with goodness, beauty, and truth. They are first concepts since they cannot be logically or deductively traced back to a prior metaphysics.

Universalism. This is the doctrine that God's love for us will ultimately result in the salvation of everyone. Universalism typically believes in the possibility of salvation after death. The strong form of universalism states that everyone will eventually be saved. The weak form of universalism states that everyone who is not yet saved still has the possibility of being saved (also called hypothetical universalism).

Unlimited Atonement. *See Limited Atonement.*

Unpardonable Sin. This refers to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And

whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come” (Mt 12:31-32). Theologians disagree as to what constitutes blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and whether one can lose salvation by committing this sin.

Utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is a secular ethical framework that values ethical choices based on the advancement of happiness and the avoidance of unhappiness. The best moral choice, according to utilitarianism, is the one that results in the most happiness for the most people. Utilitarianism was founded by the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1747–1832 CE). Utilitarianism was popularized through the writings of John Stuart Mill (1806–1873 CE).

V

Venial Sin. In Roman Catholicism, major sins are called mortal sins and minor sins are called venial sins. Mortal sins result in the loss of salvation until repented. Venial sins weaken the sinner’s relationship with God and if unrepented can be cleansed in Purgatory.

Verbal Plenary Inspiration. *See Plenary Inspiration.*

Vicarious Repentance. This theory of atonement, developed by John McLeod Campbell, holds that the Atonement is Christ’s perfect repentance performed on behalf of all sinners. Biblical support for this view relates to Christ assuming our sin, which therefore requires repentance. “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin in our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5:21).

Vincentian Canon. This refers to a threefold test to ensure that a Christian teaching is faithful to original apostolic teachings. This includes universality, antiquity, and consensus. This threefold test was first developed by Vincent of Lérins in the 5th century.

Virgin Birth. This refers to Mary the Mother of Jesus being a virgin at the conception of Jesus, with the conception being due to the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.

Virtue. A virtue is a commendable moral quality or trait. The four traditional “cardinal virtues” include prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Christianity typically adds the three additional “theological virtues” of faith, hope, and charity (love). These together result in seven fundamental virtues.

Virtue Ethics. *See Areteology.*

Visible Church. The visible church consists of all people who claim to be Christians. It is the church as man sees it as opposed to the church as

how God sees it, which is called the invisible church. Visible church can also refer to a physical church facility and its members, some of whom may not be true believers.

Vision. A vision occurs when a something is communicated to a person in a dream, a trance, or an ecstatic experience. This could be a revelation, a thought, a concept, or a visual scene. The Bible has many instances visions. Some examples where the Bible specifically refers to people having visions include: Abraham (Gn 15:1), Jacob (Gn 46:2-4), Balaam (Num 24:2-9), Samuel (1 Sam 3:2-15), Nathan (2 Sam 7:4), Daniel (Dan 7-12); Ananias (Acts 9:10-11); Paul (Acts 9:11-12, Acts 16:9-10; Acts 18:9-10; Acts 22:17-21; 2 Cor 12:1-4), Cornelius (Acts 10:3-6); Peter (Acts 10:9-17; Acts 11:5-10).

Vulgate. The first Bible translation based solely on original manuscripts was the Latin Vulgate. The translations were done by the scholar Jerome, who was commissioned to do so in 382 CE by Pope Damasus I.

W

Watchers. In the Bible, a watcher is a type of angel referred to in the book of Daniel. ““I was looking in the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed, and behold, an angelic watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven” (Dn 4:13). Watchers are also referred to in the apocryphal book of Enoch, which discusses both good watchers and bad watchers, with an emphasis on the latter.

Wesleyan Quadrilateral. This concept, developed by John Wesley, recognizes four legitimate sources of doctrine. Scripture is the primary source, but it is also appropriate to consider reason, tradition, and experience.

Western Church. This term is a result of the Great Schism where the Greek churches of the East separated from the Latin churches of the west, resulting in the Western Church and the Eastern Church. Since the Western Church was headed by the Bishop of Rome, the Western Church today is synonymous with the Roman Catholic Church.

Wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to understand non-technical things that most other people cannot understand, typically based on extensive and diverse life experiences. In the OT, wisdom is translated from the Hebrew word *chokmah* (חִכְמָה), which also has a connotation of skill. In a Biblical sense, wisdom is the skill to do life well. In the NT, wisdom is translated from the Greek work *sophia* (σοφία), which has the same means of *chokmah*: knowledge resulting in the skill to live life well.

Word Movement. *See Prosperity Theology.*

Word-Faith Movement. *See Prosperity Theology.*

Word of God. In common usage, the Word of God typically refers to the contents of the Bible. However., the Bible is clear that Jesus Christ is the Word of God (Jn 1:1). To be theologically precise, Christ is the Word of God, and the Bible is the prophetic and apostolic witness to the Word of God.

Worship. Worship is the activity of glorifying God in his presence with our voices and hearts.

Will, Freedom of. This refers to the capacity of a person to choose freely between options. If A and B are options, freedom of will asserts that a person can choose either A or B. There are other usages of the term free will that do not allow a person to choose either A or B, such as with compatibilism. To avoid ambiguity, the term libertarian free will is preferred.

X

Xenoglossia. See *Xenolalia*.

Xenolalia. Xenolalia (also known as xenoglossia) is the term used for glossolalia (speaking in tongues) when it is believed that the sounds uttered refer to an unknown but previously unlearned language. The term derives from the Greek word *xenos* (ξένος, foreigner), *glōssa* (γλῶσσα, tongue or language). Xenolalia takes two forms. Recitative xenolalia is the use of an unacquired language incomprehensibly; speakers do not comprehend what they are saying, although the sounds would make sense to someone familiar with the corresponding language. Responsive xenolalia is the use of an unacquired language comprehensibly; speakers can understand what they are saying and can converse.

Y

Yatsar (יצר). *Yatsar* is a Hebrew word that literally means to take shape by squeezing (it is a potter's term). In OT usage it means to form or fashion something. It is the word used to describe what God did in Genesis when He formed Adam (Gn 2:8).

Young Earth Theory. This theory (also called young earth creationism) attempts to determine the age of the earth through a literal interpretation of the OT from the Genesis creation story up until events of known historical date. This method typically results in an estimated earth age between 6,000 and 10,000 years.

Z

Zionism. Zionism generally refers to the position that the Jewish people are deserving of their own state and specifically refers to that state being the promised land of Palestine. Zionists were strong supporters of the creation of the Jewish state of Israel in 1948 after the Nazi atrocities of World War II. The word Zionism comes from a hill in Jerusalem named Zion (*Tzi-yon* in Hebrew), which is commonly used to symbolize the land of Israel.

Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrianism is a dualistic religion based on the teachings of Zarathustra and was prominent in Persia in the first century. The magi (μάγοι) who visited Jesus in Mt 2 were presumably Zoroastrian priests, as this is what Zoroastrian priests are called.

16.1 Further Reading

A good resource for information on theological terms and other theological issues is the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, which is edited by Daniel Treier and Walter Elwell. This is closer to an encyclopedia than a dictionary, as each entry consists of a mini essay written by an expert in the area (over 350 experts contributed to this work). Also recommended is the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, which is edited by Kevin Vanhoozer. This is also more of an encyclopedia and includes many entries on the specific books of the Bible.

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End Notes

- ¹ The phrase “faith seeking understanding” originated with Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) who created the motto for theology with the equivalent Latin phrase *fides quaerens intellectum*.
- ² In 1879, Pope Leo XIII issues an encyclical letter titled “On the Restoration of Christian Philosophy.” This letter established the teachings of Thomas Aquinas as the foundation for all Roman Catholic study, and the primary basis for the refutation of (in the view of the Roman Catholic church) theological errors.
- ³ John Wesley made some modifications to Arminian theology, resulting in Wesleyanism and Arminianism being not quite the same. Examples include Wesleyanism’s belief in entire sanctification, its belief that salvation can be lost by those living a deliberately sinful life, and the belief in the Governmental theory of atonement rather than substitutionary atonement.
- ⁴ Those interested in a succinct overview of the history and substance of Eastern Orthodox theology are directed to the following article: Gerald Bray, “Eastern Orthodox Theology in Outline,” *Evangel*, Vol. 14, Spring 1996: 14-22.
- ⁵ This is an undergraduate textbook that McGrath wrote with the benefit of teaching theology at Oxford for over 30 years. The book is written from an “outsider theology” perspective, and has heightened emphases on Eastern Orthodoxy, neoorthodox theology, and liberal theology as compared to this book.
- ⁶ Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 6th Edition, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2017: 121.
- ⁷ John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003: 23.
- ⁸ Kenneth Oakes “Revelation and Scripture,” in Paul Dafydd Jones, and Paul T. Nimmo (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Karl Barth*, Oxford: Oxford Academic 2020: 246.
- ⁹ John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003: 22-23.

- 10 C.S. Lewis, "Transposition," *Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church*, Lesley Walmsley, ed., London: HarperCollins, 1944/1962/2000: ¶11.
- 11 Paul Brazier, "C S Lewis: a Doctrine of Transposition," *Heythrop Journal*, Vol. 50, no. 4, July 2009: 673.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 682-683.
- 13 The term Septuagint is derived from the Latin phrase *Vetus Testamentum ex versione Septuaginta Interpretum*, which means "The Old Testament from the Version of the Seventy Translators." Hebrew tradition was that six scholars from each of the twelve tribes of Israel were summoned to each individually translate the Hebrew Bible into Greek, for a total of 72 translations. Tradition goes on to say that each of these translations was identical. The Septuagint is often referred to by the Roman numeral LXX (seventy), and also by G.
- 14 The Roman Catholic version of the OT contains the following apocryphal content: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, I Maccabees, II Maccabees, and some sections of Esther and Daniel which are absent from the Protestant OT.
- 15 Gabriel Andrade, "Marcion of Sinope's Relevance in the Contemporary World Vis-À-Vis Religious Violence," *Acta Theologica*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2018: 19.
- 16 Justo González, *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1, The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 210: 75.
- 17 This figure is based on a similar figure in Stephen Miller's book *The Complete Guide to the Bible* (2007, p. 298).
- 18 Eric Barreto, "The Canon: Open or Closed? Closed: A Historical Commitment," *Word & World*, vol. 29, no. 4, Fall 2009: 419-421.
- 19 Karl Barth, "Scripture as the Word of God," *Church Dogmatics*, 1.2, tr. G.T. Thompson and Harold Knight, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956: 475-476.
- 20 There are innumerable study bibles to choose from. For the study of theology, my preference is the *ESV Study Bible* published by Crossway. Its notes and articles are scholarly, unbiased, and extremely well edited. A good supplement is the *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* published by Zondervan (available in NIV, NRSV, and NKJV). This version is also scholarly and unbiased, but with a focus on how to properly interpret passages in the context of the culture of the time.

- 21 An example of something included in *textus receptus* translations but not in critical text translations is the ending of Mark (Mk 16:9-20). Critical text translations end with the discovery of Christ's empty tomb. *Textus receptus* translations continue with several appearances of Christ including His command to his disciples to go into the world and preach the Gospel. Another example is the story of Jesus and the prostitute where Jesus instructs the crowd, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (Jn 8:1-11). This appears in *textus receptus* translations but not in critical text translations.
- 22 A fantastic old-school tool for becoming familiar with key Hebrew and Greek words in Scripture is the *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*, published by AMG Publishers. This is the 1977 NASB translation with key words underlined and tagged with their corresponding Strong's reference number. The Strong's *Hebrew Dictionary of the Old Testament* and the Strong's *Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* are included.
- 23 Irenaeus, *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, ¶75.
- 24 St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Ch. 35, ¶40.
- 25 Herman Ridderbos, "The Structure and Scope of the Prologue to the Gospel of John," *Novum Testamentum*, April 1966: 184.
- 26 Peder Borgen, "Logos was the True Light: Contributions to the Interpretation of the Prologue of John," *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 14, no. 2, April 1972: 116.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 118.
- 28 Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1-5*, tr. Fabian Archer and James Weisheipl, Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1270/2010: Lectures 1-11.
- 29 Karl Barth, *Witness to the Word: A Commentary on John 1, Lectures at Münster in 1925 and at Bonn in 1933*, ed. Walther Fürst, tr. Geoffrey Bromiley, Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1933: §1.
- 30 *Ibid.*, §4.
- 31 Rudolph Bultmann *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1971: 43.
- 32 Augustine of Hippo, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, tr. John Gibb from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff, Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 406/1888: 1, 19.

- 33 John Chrysostom, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 14, tr. Charles Marriott, ed. Philip Schaff, Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 407/1889: H8.1.
- 34 Luther, Martin, *Christ's Titles of Honor; His Coming: His Incarnation; and the Revelation of His Glory*, a sermon by Martin Luther from his Church Postil, 1521: ¶63. <https://sermons.martinluther.us/sermons11.html>.
- 35 Based on Mt 11:10 and Mk 1:2 using the term “messenger” to describe the Baptist, which is a translation of the Greek *angelos* (ἄγγελος).
- 36 Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1-5*, tr. Fabian Archer and James Weisheipl, Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1270/2010: L3-103.
- 37 *Kolpos* in John 1:18 has many different translations including “bosom,” (KJV, NKJV), “at the Father’s side” (ESV), “in closest relationship with the Father,” (NIV), and “near to the Father’s heart,” (NLT).
- 38 Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1-5*, tr. Fabian Archer and James Weisheipl, Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1270/2010: L1-221.
- 39 Origen of Alexandria, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 9, TR. Allan Menzies, ed. Allan Menzies, Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 253/1896: Book 2, §6.
- 40 Van der Merwe, Dirk, “Divine fellowship in the Gospel of John: A Trinitarian spirituality,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, vol. 75, no. 1, 2019: 7.
- 41 John Calvin, *Commentary on John*, vol. 1, Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1545: §17.
- 42 *Ibid.*, §16.
- 43 Brown, Jeannine, “Creation’s Renewal In the Gospel of John,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 72, no. 2, April 2010: 277.
- 44 Garton, Alexander, “‘Very Truly, I Tell You, Before Abraham was, I am:’ A Theological Treatise on the Concept of Time in John’s Gospel,” *Modern Theology*, vol. 35, no. 4, Oct. 2019: 632.
- 45 Rudolph Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1971: 13.
- 46 N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992: 355.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 360.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 368.

- 49 *Ibid.*, 356.
- 50 The Chi Rho symbol consists of the Greek Letters Chi (X) and Rho (P). These are the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ, *Christos* (χριστός).
- 51 There is currently a negative perception of the Crusades, but perspectives have tended to change in line with the thinking of the time. For example, the 16th century produced more romantic, even entertaining view of the Crusades. During the early 17th century the Crusades were viewed as a historical phenomenon. The intellectualism of the 18th century resulted in extreme negativity towards the Crusades. The romantic nostalgia of the 19th century led to the Crusades being admired again. The current trend is more balanced, but with the Crusades still being regarded as more negative than positive. Generic objections to war can be made of the Crusades, such as the inevitable atrocities, but it is worth noting that atrocities occurred on both sides.
- 52 Tertullian, “Prescription against Heretics,” tr. Peter Holmes, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994): 8.
- 53 Lollard now refers to a follower of John Wycliffe. But it was originally used as a generic derogatory term for someone uneducated. Synonymous terms were Lollardi and Loller. These terms are most likely derived from the Middle Dutch verb *lollen*, which means to mutter or mumble.
- 54 Micheal Massing, *Fatal Discord: Erasmus, Luther, and the Fight for the Western Mind*, New York, NY: Harper Perennnial, 2018: 195.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 275.
- 56 Caleb Cangelosi, “The Mouth of the Morningstar: John Wycliffe’s Preaching and the Protestant Reformation,” *Puritan Reformed Journal*, vol. 6, no. 2, July 2014: 208.
- 57 For a more complete description of Marxism as a secular replacement for Christianity, see Robert Schwarzwald’s “Marx’s New Religion,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, vol. 62, no. 4, Dec. 2019: 775-788.
- 58 For a more complete description of Marxism as a form of the Pelagian heresy, see William Oddie’s “Christian Socialism: An Old Heresy?” *Crisis Magazine*, Oct. 1984.

- 59 For a more complete description of Marxism as a form of Gnosticism, see Nicholas Healy's "Socialism: A Christian Heresy?" *New Oxford Review*, vol. 87, no. 3, Apr. 2020: 20-24.
- 60 C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York, NY: HarperOne, 1952/2002: 27.
- 61 A good introduction to epistemology can be found in Part I of Stumpf and Abel's *Elements of Philosophy*, which provides an overview of the subject and then provides selected readings from Plato, Descartes, Hume, Kant, and James.
- 62 The major exception is the Reformed theologian Charles Hodge, who categorizes attributes based on the Westminster Catechism. In Vol. 1 of his *Systematic Theology*, Hodge summarizes the Westminster Catechism as follows: "God is a self-existent and necessary Being; and it is affirmed of Him, (1) That He is a Spirit. (2) That as such He is in-finite, eternal, and immutable. (3) that He is infinite, eternal, and immutable in his being; in all that belongs to his intelligence, namely in his knowledge and wisdom; and in all that belongs to his will, namely, his power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." Hodge then groups divine attributes according to these three topics and associated sub-topics.
- 63 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, Mackintosh, H.R. and Stewart, J.S., ed., Berkeley, CA: Apocryphile Press, 1830/2011: §167.1; §165.4.
- 64 The third Beatitude in Mt 5:5 is typically translated as "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." However, mercy in this verse is a translation of *eleēmōn* (ἐλεήμων), not *oiktīrmōn* (οἰκτίρμων). The words are synonymous.
- 65 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1932: II/2, x.
- 66 *Ibid.*, IV/3, 482.
- 67 Eberhard Jüngel, *Karl Barth, A Theological Legacy*, tr. Garrett Paul, Westminster Press, 1986: 44-45.
- 68 Catechism of the Catholic Church, ¶731-732.
- 69 *Ibid.*, ¶600.
- 70 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 1941: 68.
- 71 Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, London: Penguin Books, 1677/1996.
- 72 C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York, NY: HarperOne, 1952/2002: 170-1.

- 73 Our mathematical model of space-time breaks down at the begin-
 ning of the universe when matter and energy become concentrated
 at a single point with infinity density. A classic and accessible book
 on the topic is Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*. Since
 God has always existed, He must (at a bare minimum) experience
 time in a manner that is completely different from the human expe-
 74 rience.
- 74 Angel is a translation of the Greek word *aggelos* (ἄγγελος), which
 means messenger.
- 75 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology: Vol. 1, Theology*, Peabody,
 MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1871/2013: 573.
- 76 Pavol Bargár, "And Beauty Will Make You Free: On the Transform-
 ative Power of Beauty," *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Theologica*,
 Vol. 12 Issue 2, 2022: 41.
- 77 Benjamin Crowe, "Hutcheson on Natural Religion," *British Journal*
for the History of Philosophy, Vol. 19 Issue 4, July 2011: 725.
- 78 Richard Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts: Encountering God*
through Music, Art and Rhetoric, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press: 13.
- 79 George Steiner, *Real Presences*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago
 Press, 1989: 201.
- 80 *Ibid.*, 215.
- 81 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aes-
 thetics*, vol. 1, tr. T&T Clark, San Francisco: Ignatius Press,
 1697/1982: §1.1.
- 82 Trevor Hart, *Between the Image and the Word: Theological En-
 gagements with Imagination, Language and Literature*, Farnham:
 Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013: 75.
- 83 Pavol Bargár, "And Beauty Will Make You Free: On the Transform-
 ative Power of Beauty," *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Theologica*,
 Vol. 12 Issue 2, 2022: 41.
- 84 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic*,
 Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980: 170.
- 85 John Keats, *Endymion*, Book I.
- 86 In Gn 1:26-28, God refers to Himself as "Us" and "Our." This is
 generally considered to be a foreshadowing of the triune God con-
 sisting of three persons.

- 87 “Living person” in Gn 2:7 is frequently translated into “living soul.” It is a translation of the Hebrew term *nephesh chayyah*, which is also applied to lower animals in Gn 1:21, 24, 30. Therefore, this term does not refer to “soul” as the spiritual component of man. Rather, the phrase in this context simply means a something that is animated to life.
- 88 The Documentary Theory (DT), also called the JEPD Theory, holds that the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch) are a redaction of four separate sources: a source that refers to God as Yahweh (abbreviated J from the German word for Yahweh), a source that refers to God as Elohim (abbreviated E), a priestly source that emphasizes ritual, temple worship, and the role of the Levites (abbreviated P), and the book of Deuteronomy (abbreviated D).
- 89 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 1941: 200.
- 90 *Ibid.*, 206.
- 91 Augustine, “A Treatise On The Grace Of Christ, And On Original Sin,” in *Augustine’s Writings on Grace and Free Will*, ed. John Hendryx, West Linn, OR: Monergism Books, 418/2021: Bk. 2, Ch. 34.
- 92 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 1941: 279.
- 93 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology: Vol. 2, Anthropology*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1872/2013: 371-372.
- 94 The original Hebrew word for the English translation of messiah is *mashiach* (מָשִׁיחַ). The original Greek word for the English translation of Christ is *Christós* (χριστός).
- 95 Exegesis on “Son of Man” is fascinating but beyond the scope of this book. Those interested in scholarly treatment are referred to the following journal articles: Paul Danove, “The Rhetoric of the Characterization of Jesus as the Son of Man and Christ in Mark,” *Biblica*, 84 no 1, 2003: 16-34; and Elizabeth Malbon, “Narrative Christology and the Son of Man: What the Markan Jesus Says Instead,” *Biblical Interpretation*, 11 no 3-4, 2003: 373-385.
- 96 John Leith, *Creeds of the Church*, Chicago: Doubleday, 1963): 35-36. Translation from Albert Outler, based on the text in *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*.
- 97 P.H. Brazier, “The Pittenger-Lewis Debate: Fundamentals of an Ontological Christology,” *The Chronicle of the Oxford University C.S. Lewis Society*, Vol. 6, Issue 1, 2009: 15.

- 98 *Ibid.*, 9.
- 99 Morna Hooker, “Chalcedon and the New Testament,” *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993: 73-79.
- 100 Thomas Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1986: 162.
- 101 More detailed treatment of the Divine Preconscious Model can be found in the following journal articles by Andrew Loke: “On Dyothelitism Versus Monothelitism: The Divine Preconscious Model,” *Heythrop Journal*, Vol. 57 Issue 1, Jan. 2016: 135-141; “On the Coherence of the Incarnation: The Divine Preconscious Model,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, 51 no. 1, 2009: 50-63.
- 102 *The Westminster Larger Catechism*, Answer to Q. 50, “How was Christ humiliated after his death?”
- 103 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 1941: 347.
- 104 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 1871/2013: 460.
- 105 Jim Davison, “Jeremiah Burroughs on the Excellency of Christ the Mediator,” *Puritan Reformed Journal*, 6 no. 1, Jan. 2014: 155.
- 106 Colin Gunton, “One Mediator ... the Man Jesus Christ: Reconciliation, Mediation and Life in Community,” *Pro Ecclesia*, 11 no. 2 Spring 2002: 153 (citing Calvin).
- 107 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 1872/2013: 604.
- 108 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 1941: 390-391.
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- 111 *Ibid.*, 56.
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 128 *Book of Concord*, Article 9, *Of Baptism*. The Augsburg Confession is the fourth document in the Lutheran *Book of Concord*.
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 130 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 1871/2013: 26.
 131 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 1941: 532.
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- 137 Alister McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2017: 164.
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- 150 Steven Griffin, "The Holy Spirit and the Church as the Ordinary Means of Salvation," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 42, no. 3, July 2018: 256.
- 151 Kurt Hendel, "No Salvation Outside the Church' in Light of Luther's Dialectic of the Hidden and Revealed God," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, Vol. 35, no. 4, August 2008: 250.

- 152 Glenn Siniscalchi, "Thomas Aquinas, Natural Evil, and 'Outside
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- 153 Ola Tjørhom, "The Church as the Place of Salvation: On the Inter-
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- 154 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, Peabody, MA: Hen-
drickson Publishers Marketing, 1873/2013: 230.
- 155 Lutheran theology teaches that baptism is necessary for salvation,
but not absolutely necessary. That is, baptism is the normal means
of salvation, but God is not prevented from regenerating someone
outside of baptism in certain circumstances.
- 156 *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, Nashville,
TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016: 69.
- 157 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, Peabody, MA: Hen-
drickson Publishers Marketing, 1873/2013: 499.
- 158 Unofficial Roman Catholic tradition sometimes taught that unbap-
tized infants sin, go to Limbo, where the beatific vision of God is
absent but also absent is the eternal torture of Hell. The official po-
sition of the Catholic Church, as stated in the 1992 Catechism of the
Catholic Church is that there is reason to hope for infants that die
without baptism to experience the beatific vision of God, but there
is not sure knowledge on this issue.
- 159 Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum*; on the Publication of the
Catechism of the Catholic Church; Prepared Following the Second
Vatican Ecumenical Council, 1982: 312.
- 160 Book of Concord, Article 9, *Of Baptism*. The Augsburg Confession
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- 162 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, Peabody, MA: Hen-
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- 163 *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, Nashville,
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- 165 The Works of James Arminius: The London Edition, James Nichols
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- 166 John Wesley, *Sermon 101: The Duty of Constant Communion*: §I.1.
 167 Some community churches are very large and have multiple locations. In these situations, there will still be a single board of directors that has ultimate authority over all of these locations. It is therefore more appropriate to view this as a single church with multiple locations than a group of separate churches that are members of a larger organization.
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- 169 William Braud, "Empirical Explorations of Prayer, Distant Healing, and Remote Mental Influence," *The Journal of Religion and Psychological Research*, April 1994: 64.
- 170 Craig Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, vol. 2, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing: 752-756.
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- 172 Wallace McLaughlin, *We All Believe In One True God: A Summary of Biblical Doctrine*, Midland, MI: Cross of Christ Press, 1978: Section 18 – Last Things.
- 173 Paul Yeulett, "With Me in Paradise - Questions About the So-Called Intermediate State: Is it Biblical and it is Pastorally Helpful?" *Foundations: An International Journal of Evangelical Theology*, Autumn, 2021, Issue 81: 47.
- 174 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 1873/2013: 790-791.
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- 182 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 3, Ch. 25.
- 183 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 1941: 712-718.
- 184 *Methodist Book of Discipline*, Article XII.
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- 186 There are many variations of dispensationalism, and it is beyond the scope of this book to address them all. Therefore, this section describes "normative dispensationalism" such as is taught at the Dallas Seminary and the Moody Bible Institute. My discussion of normative dispensationalism is primarily based on the classic book *Dispensationalism: Revised and Explained*, by Dr. Charles Ryrie.
- 187 This order of events is based on a document from Dr. J.B. Hixon called the "Sequential Order of End Times Events." It is available for free download at Dr. Hixon's website notbyworks.org.
- 188 Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism: Revised and Explained*, Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007: 14.
- 189 Proceedings of the Fourth Lateran Council, Article 1, Confession of Faith, 1215.
- 190 *Augsburg Confession*, Article XVII. Concerning the Return of Christ to Judgment.
- 191 David Scaer, "Luther's Concept of the Resurrection in His Commentary on I Corinthians 15," *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 3, July 1983: 221.

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- 193 *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Question 87.
- 194 *The Arminian Confession of 1621*, Ch. 19, ¶2.
- 195 Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, Article XII (contained in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 2016).
- 196 *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Summary*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992: ¶681-682.
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- 200 *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Summary*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992: ¶671.
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- 208 *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016: 66.
- 209 C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York, NY: HarperOne, 1952/2002: 5-6.

210 *Ibid.*, 7-8.

211 The Israelites are descendants of Jacob, whose name was later changed to Israel. The Israelites are therefore also referred to as the House of Jacob and the Sons of Israel. They are also generally referred to as Hebrews.

212 The Old Testament commandment is found in Exodus 21:23–27: “But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.” This commandment is typically interpreted as the principle of reciprocal justice.

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220 Louis Lotz, “Perplexing texts: Matthew 5:48,” *Reformed Journal*, Vol. 29, no. 4, April 1979: 8.

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- 232 Livingston, Gretchen, "The Demographics of Remarriage," Pew Re-
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- 233 Stanton Jones and Alex Kwee, "Scientific Research, Homosexual-
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- 319 Although Peter’s death as a martyr does not appear in Acts, it is attested to by Pope Clement I (d.99), in his “Letter to the Corinthians,” by Tertullian (c.155–c.240) his *Prescription Against Heretics*, by Origen (184–253) in his *Commentary on the Book of Genesis III*, and many other later writers.
- 320 Gary Habermas and Michael Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications: 59.
- 321 The writings of Hegesippus are lost, but these parts of his writings are quoted by Eusebius of Caesarea (c.263–c.339).
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- 324 Tertullian, *De Spectaculis*, T.R. Glover, tr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931: 113.
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- 326 Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*, 2nd ed., Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022: 583.

- 327 H.G. Wells, *The Outline of History, Revised*, Garden City, NY: International Collectors Library, 1971: 509.
- 328 *Ibid.*, 512.
- 329 Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*, 2nd ed., Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022: 662.
- 330 Islam means “submission” in Arabic.
- 331 Faraz Sheikh, “Being an Intelligent Slave of God,” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, March 2019, vol. 47, issue 1, 2019: 140.
- 332 *The Quran*: 22:38.
- 333 Daniel Treier and Walter Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 3rd ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017: 432.
- 334 Of course, one should be a Christian because it represents the truth and should choose not to be a Muslim because it does not represent the truth where it disagrees with Christianity. But apologetic engagement will typically occur when someone is still uncertain about the truth claims of Christianity and/or Islam.
- 335 John Grula, “Pantheism Reconstructed: Ecotheology as a successor to the Judeo-Christian, Enlightenment, and postmodernist Paradigms,” vol. 43, no. 1, *Zygon*, March 2008: 171.
- 336 C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York, NY: HarperOne, 1952/2002: 26-27.
- 337 Advaita Vedanta Hinduism is properly classified as a form of non-dualistic pantheism. The term non-dualistic refers to reality only consisting of a single substance, typically understood as a form of energy. Dualism refers to reality consisting of two substances, typically matter and spirit.
- 338 John Noss, *Man’s Religions*, 4th ed., London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd, 1969: 205-206.
- 339 James Madaio, “The Instability of Non-dual Knowing: Post-gnosis Sādhana in Vidyāranya’s Advaita Vedānta,” *Journal of Dharma Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, Oct. 2018: 12.
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- 341 The terms premodern, modern, and postmodern are often used in the context of literature and art. The reader should be aware of this, but it is beyond the scope of this book to address the artistic and creative aspects of premodernism, modernism, and postmodernism.

- 342 The postmodern view of reason builds on that of Immanuel Kant in
his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant believed in objective reality (nou-
mena), but that humans can only understand objective reality
through the filter of our human senses (phenomena). For Kant, all
humans process sensory knowledge in the same way, making phe-
nomena the same for everyone. The postmodernist view is that eve-
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experiences and culture, making phenomena different for everyone.
- 343 Stewart Kelly, "Postmodernism," *Journal for Baptist Theology &*
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- 344 James Marriott, "Postmodernism and Mission," *Mission Matters*,
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- 346 G. Lee Ramsey, "Ronald J. Allen Greets Doris Betts and Mr.
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- 348 Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Chris-*
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51.
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- 350 C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York, NY: HarperOne,
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- 351 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human All-Too-Human*, tr. Helen Zimmern,
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- 352 Douglas Groothuis, *Unmasking the New Age*, Nottingham: Intervar-
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- 353 John Morehead, "The Truth is Out There: Postmodern Myth and Ar-
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report “Global Christianity – A Report on the Size and Distribution
of the World’s Christian Population,” Dec. 19, 2011.
- 355 Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, Crestwood,
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- 356 *Ibid.*, 23-24.
- 357 Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*,
Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1976: 8.
- 358 www.anglicancommunion.org/theology/doctrine.aspx
- 359 “The Baptist Faith and Message,” Southern Baptist Convention,
2023: §1 The Scriptures.
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vention. Resolution 3 in the convention proceedings is titled “On the
Scandal of Southern Baptist Divorce.” This resolution affirms the
position of the “The Baptist Faith and Message” by stating, “We
have affirmed in our confession of faith our belief in the sanctity and
permanence of marriage. However, the resolution essentially en-
couraged people to take marriage vows seriously but does not con-
demn either divorce or remarriage.
- 361 baptistworld.org/beliefs
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and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population,” Dec. 19,
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- 366 Mookgo Kgatle, “Go Deeper Papa, Prophecy, Do Something: The
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