



## Karl Rahner (1904-84)

A German Roman Catholic Jesuit who influentially argued for an inclusivist view of Christianity which greatly influenced the Vatican Council (1962-5). He was a prolific writer.

**BIG Question:** What is religious pluralism and theology?

1: Pre-reading: What is inclusivism?

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2: Pre-reading: How does this differ from exclusivism?

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3: Retrieval: What is Rahner's view on grace?

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### Rahner's Theology of Grace

Rahner is the twentieth century's pre-eminent theologian of grace. In his view, grace is primarily God's universal self-communication, not the sporadic bestowal of certain divine gifts, and all human beings are the addressees of this communication.

Therefore, all truly human activity is a free, positive or negative, response to God's offer of self—the grace at the heart of human existence. Because God offers nothing less than God's very own self to everyone, the human person is, to Rahner's way of thinking, homo mysticus, mystical man. This relationship stamps all personal experiences with at least an implicit, yet primordial, experience of God. Because 'we do have an immediate, preconceptual experience of God through the experience of the limitless breadth of our consciousness', Rahner writes, 'there is such a thing as a mystical component to Christianity'. In fact, he holds the theological position that, ... in every human person ... there is something like an anonymous, unthematic, perhaps repressed, basic experience of being oriented to God ... which can be repressed but not destroyed, which is 'mystical' or (if you prefer a more cautious terminology) has its climax in what the classical masters called infused contemplation. Therefore, all human experiences tend towards 'an intensification which is directed towards something which one could in fact call mystical experience'. In fact, 'mysticism as the experience of grace' grounds not only the ordinary Christian's life of faith, hope and love but also that of anyone living according to his or her conscience. This view of mysticism as the experience of grace permeates not only Rahner's mystical theology but also much of Rahner's overall theology.

Harvey D. Egan, *The Mystical Theology of Karl Rahner*.

4: Retrieval: Why and how does Rahner argue everyone knows God?

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5: Reflect: In your own words, explain why Rahner is an inclusivist.

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## David Ford (1948-)

Former Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University until 2014. He is the founding Director of the Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme and one of the two founding members of the Society for Scriptural Reasoning.

**BIG Question:** How has the Christian Church responded to other faiths?

1: Pre-reading: What is inclusivism?

2: Pre-reading: What is the difference between SI and RI?

3: Retrieval: Why is difference so important to inter-faith dialogue?

David Ford is an Anglican, scholar and inter-faith pioneer. He argues from a structural inclusivist standpoint. He believes that theological inter-faith dialogue works most effectively once the common ground has been established.

Differences are a blessing because they make theists think hard about their beliefs; they create an environment of study, discussion, debate and friendship. This is his 'ecology of blessing' – each person comes from their own environment but shares the same world of religion. This 'ecology of blessing' is demonstrated in the story of Abraham (regarded in Judaism, Christianity and Islam as the epitome of faith). Ford believes this biblical covenant (agreement) means all three religions can teach each other. Two key publications illustrate this:

***Dabru Emet*** ('*Speak the truth*'): Published in 2000. A 'Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity' signed by over 150 rabbis and scholars from the USA, Canada, UK and Israel. It encourages Jews 'to learn about the efforts of Christians to honour Judaism' but also challenges Christians to rethink its teachings, how it reads scripture, the nature and language of its worship, its education and church policies.

***A Common Word Between Us and You*** (*A Common Word*): Published in 2007 as a letter from 138 Muslim scholars to Christian churches. The title is based on the Qur'an 3:64, the 'common word' being the love of God and neighbour in the quest for peace and justice. *A Common Word* has generated extensive inter-faith dialogue and shows cooperation and dialogue at an international and institutional level.

Wilkinson, M. and Wilcockson, M, *Religious Studies for A Level Year 2* (2017).

4: Retrieval: What two publications show considerable evidence of inter-faith dialogue?

5: Reflect: What are the similarities and differences between inclusivist and exclusivist ideas on ifd?



**Michel Foucault (1926-84)**

A French philosopher, historian and social theorist. He argued language, values, systems and thought are governed by the control of power. The article below is from an anonymous student and provides a useful insight into *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*.

**BIG Question: What role does gender play in society?**

1: Pre-reading: what are Foucault's views on gender and power?

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2: Retrieval: when did attitudes to sexuality change?

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Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* explains power and ultimately demonstrates that sexuality is a construct created by discourse. To begin to understand Foucault's argument, we must start by learning why he believed that our widely held theory on sexuality was erroneous. The repressive hypothesis is a prevalent theory that analyzes how our current notions of sexuality developed. This hypothesis assumes that during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance a free and easy attitude prevailed toward sexuality. Then, in the seventeenth century the bourgeoisie repressed sexuality. The repressive hypothesis holds that the bourgeoisie was concerned with economic productivity and did not want energy wasted on sexual pursuits. Therefore, sex outside of procreative purposes was repressed. Consequently, if we want to liberate ourselves, the theory maintains we need to become free and open about our sexuality.

Foucault did not deny that with the rise of the bourgeoisie there was indeed an effort to control sexuality and how people talked about sexuality, but he also pointed out that since the seventeenth century discourse about sexuality has dramatically increased. In fact, discourse on sexuality began to change. Instead of discourse being vulgar or centering on pleasure it turned into a new discourse that centered on science. This insight led Foucault to spend some time examining knowledge and power. Foucault believed that there is an undeniable power dynamic related to knowledge and that people influencing the knowledge had a great deal of power. Power dynamics for Foucault are not "juridico-discursive", as the repressive hypothesis assumed. Or stated differently: power is not only present in the negative form in which someone in authority restricts behavior with laws. He also briefly discussed a psychoanalytical approach that states we only have desire once we are restricted from the object we crave. Once again, the psychoanalytical approach only regards power as "juridico-discursive" or as a force of repression. Foucault, however, proposed that power in the form of repression and subjugation is only part of the story. Instead of seeing power as only in the hands of people in authority, power exists in all relationships. Foucault emphasized that even the repressed exercise power, and this power shapes concepts. Importantly, Foucault believed power does not always present itself in a negative, repressive way as the juridico-discursive view holds. Power is, in fact, often creative. Foucault argued that knowledge and power dynamics in relationships have had great influence on sexuality. He concluded that power is not what repressed sexuality but instead that it is ultimately power that has created the construct of sexuality.

[Sexuality as a Construct \(Foucault\) – Queer Bible Hermeneutics \(smu.edu\)](https://www.smu.edu/queer/bible/hermeneutics/foucault)

4: Retrieval: summarise Foucault's views on power and sexuality?

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5: Reflect: what evidence can you think of to support or counter Foucault?

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### Amnon and Tamar

**13** In the course of time, Amnon son of David fell in love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David.

**2** Amnon became so obsessed with his sister Tamar that he made himself ill. She was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her.

**3** Now Amnon had an adviser named Jonadab son of Shimeah, David’s brother. Jonadab was a very shrewd man. **4** He asked Amnon, “Why do you, the king’s son, look so haggard morning after morning? Won’t you tell me?”

Amnon said to him, “I’m in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom’s sister.”

**5** “Go to bed and pretend to be ill,” Jonadab said. “When your father comes to see you, say to him, ‘I would like my sister Tamar to come and give me something to eat. Let her prepare the food in my sight so I may watch her and then eat it from her hand.’”

**6** So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill. When the king came to see him, Amnon said to him, “I would like my sister Tamar to come and make some special bread in my sight, so I may eat from her hand.”

**7** David sent word to Tamar at the palace: “Go to the house of your brother Amnon and prepare some food for him.”

**8** So Tamar went to the house of her brother Amnon, who was lying down. She took some dough, kneaded it, made the bread in his sight and baked it. **9** Then she took the pan and served him the bread, but he refused to eat.

“Send everyone out of here,” Amnon said. So everyone left him. **10** Then Amnon said to Tamar, “Bring the food here into my bedroom so I may eat from your hand.” And Tamar took the bread she had prepared and brought it to her brother Amnon in his bedroom. **11** But when she took it to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, “Come to bed with me, my sister.”

**12** “No, my brother!” she said to him. “Don’t force me! Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don’t do this wicked thing. **13** What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you.” **14** But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her.

**15** Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, “Get up and get out!”

**16** “No!” she said to him. “Sending me away would be a greater wrong than what you have already done to me.” But he refused to listen to her. **17** He called his personal servant and said, “Get this woman out of my sight and bolt the door after her.” **18** So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her. She was wearing an ornate robe, for this was the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore. **19** Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornate robe she was wearing. She put her hands on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went.

**20** Her brother Absalom said to her, “Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother. Don’t take this thing to heart.” And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom’s house, a desolate woman.

**21** When King David heard all this, he was furious. **22** And Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad; he hated Amnon because he had disgraced his sister Tamar.

**BIG Question:** What are the issues around God, the Bible and feminism?

**4: Retrieval:** what happens after the rape of Tamar?

**5: Reflect:** how might secular feminists respond to 2 Samuel 13:1-22?

1: Pre-reading: how do secular feminists view the Bible?

2: Retrieval: what wicked act does Amnon do to Tamar?











**Karl Marx (1818-1893): Alienation and exploitation**

Marx believed that societies rarely managed long periods of stability. **With historical materialism** he theorized that processes work towards harmony only to collapse in conflict. The process then begins again.

Since the first disputes over ownership and land (the first means of production) many factors have led to competition and alienation – the degrading of the person into a thing or an object, rather than a purposeful individual.

Karl Marx believed that **exploitation** was something embedded structurally in the entire capitalist system. It didn't matter if your boss was a kindly philanthropist or a rapacious miser – the way in which capitalism works means that exploitation is essential.

**So what did Marx mean by exploitation?**

In Marx's view, all societies in history had involved differing types of exploitation. The slave societies of ancient Rome saw human beings physically owned by their masters who would allow them to put a little aside for their own subsistence and to eventually buy their freedom (manumission).

Slavery gave way to feudalism where serfs in the medieval period used their "labour power" to both work for themselves and for the local lord. Feudalism was then succeeded by capitalism, which created the illusion of freedom for the working class. But in reality, every worker is obliged to sell their "labour power" to a capitalist.

**Capitalism and the illusion of freedom**

Because the working class doesn't own the means of production, distribution and exchange (the economy in other words), it has to hire itself out to the capitalists. They in turn cannot pay the full, real value of a worker's labour because they need to squeeze a profit out of the deal.

So, for part of the working day – a worker's labour pays for their wages. For the remaining part, they are creating surplus value – which goes straight to the capitalist.

**BIG Question: How does theology respond to Marxism?**

3: Retrieval: what were Marx's views on exploitation?  
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5: Research: find two quotes by Marx that help you to explore alienation and exploitation further.  
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1: Pre-reading: what do you understand by the following words:

**Alienation:**  
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**Exploitation:**  
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**Capitalism:**  
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2: Retrieval: what is **historical materialism**?  
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**Oscar Romero (1917-80)**

Oscar Romero was the Archbishop of San Salvador from 1977 until he was assassinated in 1980. He was initially regarded as a conservative choice as archbishop, but he became increasingly outspoken about human rights violations in El Salvador – particularly after the murder of his close friend Father Rutilio Grande in March 1977.

During his three years as archbishop, Romero repeatedly denounced violence and spoke out on behalf of the victims of the civil war. In a time of heavy press censorship, his weekly radio broadcasts were often the only way people could find out the truth about the atrocities that were happening in their country. He defended the right of the poor to demand political change, a stance which made him a troublesome adversary for the country's rulers.

A month before he was assassinated, Romero wrote to President Jimmy Carter urging the US to stop backing the Salvadoran government and supplying it with arms and military advisers. And on the day before his assassination, he urged soldiers and police not to follow orders to kill civilians, and stop the repression:

*"The peasants you kill are your own brothers and sisters," he preached. "When you hear a man telling you to kill, remember God's words, 'Thou shalt not kill'. In the name of God, and in the name of this suffering people, whose laments rise to heaven each day more tumultuous, I beg you, I beseech you, I order you in the name of God: stop the repression!"*

Archbishop Romero was shot dead on 24 March 1980, aged 62, while celebrating Mass. In the ensuing decade, some 70,000 Salvadorans were killed in the civil war.

Why is he an important figure to commemorate?

Archbishop Romero was one of the most remarkable figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who deserves to be commemorated alongside the likes of Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi as a peacemaker who sacrificed his life standing up to injustice. The world today desperately needs more figures like Romero – leaders with the courage, faith and love to stand up for the poor against injustice.

Romero is, in particular, an inspirational figure to hundreds of millions of Catholics around the world. He didn't simply talk about the need to love your neighbour, but courageously named the injustices that plagued his country. He reminded us that Christ is found in people living in poverty, and that we cannot ignore the suffering of our brothers and sisters in need.

We can all celebrate Romero's legacy by following his example: by challenging injustice wherever we see it and by refusing to stay silent about the issues that keep people in poverty. For example, the climate crisis is the single biggest threat to reducing poverty in the world today, which is why we campaign on the issue.

**BIG Question: How does theology respond to Marxism?**

3: Retrieval: What role did Romero have from 1977?

4: Retrieval: Who murdered him and why?

5: Retrieval and reflection: Why should Romero be remembered?

1: Pre-reading: What do you know about poverty and inequality in South America?

2: Pre-reading: What is a civil war and what challenges does it bring?