

### 3.1 Developments in Christian thought: Religious pluralism and theology

## The Big Question: What is religious theology and pluralism?

Religious theology is all about the relationship religions have with one another. In the context of developments in Christian thought religious theology is about the relationship Christianity has with non-Christian religions.



Many religions consider a similar question: **what are the necessary conditions for salvation (or liberation)?**

From a Christian perspective, is it necessary for a person to believe in God to receive salvation?

This raises the idea of *necessary* and *sufficient* conditions.

#### Different Christian ideas:

- Belief in the one God is *necessary* but not *sufficient* for salvation.
- Belief in God's Son alone is *necessary* and *sufficient* for salvation.
- Belief in Christ is *sufficient* for salvation but not *necessary* as there are other conditions (love for thy neighbor, openness to God, overcoming egoism, etc.) *sufficient* for salvation.
- There are many *necessary* conditions (love for thy neighbor, openness to God, overcoming egoism, etc.) but one alone is not *sufficient* for salvation.

#### From a Christian perspective, one can consider Gavin D'Costa's 'controlling beliefs.'

These beliefs vary depending on which Christian tradition a person belongs to:

**Sola Christus:** God's grace is only possible through Christ.

**Extra ecclesiam nulla salus:** salvation is not possible outside the Church as it is the mediator of Christ's presence on earth.

**Fides ex auditu:** true faith is only possible through hearing the Gospel as witnessed in the Bible and preached by the Church.

**God and creation:** God alone created the world; although God alone is one, he is also trinity or triune.

**Eschatology:** God comprises a future state of bliss or 'beatific vision' after death for the elect or damnation for the wicked.

**Sin and election:** humans are fallen and incapable of knowing God fully by themselves; God elects some to salvation and some to damnation.

#### The debate on religious theology

In liberal democracies of Western European society the freedoms of individuals are tolerated (providing they do not cause harm to others).

This freedom extends to the freedom to think and practice one's preferred religious beliefs.

Liberalism therefore naturally welcomes plural societies.

Religious pluralism refers to the varieties and practices within a particular religion. For example, Anglicanism, Methodism, Presbyterianism, Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Religious pluralism also refers to the varieties of different religions, e.g. Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Sikhism, Hinduism.

#### Relevance Today:

- Despite the rise of secularism in some parts of the world there are still areas where the growth of theists and religious structures (Churches, etc.) is significant.

**Theological exclusivism: only Christianity fully offers the means of salvation.**

**RAE: Salvation is only possible through directly hearing the Gospel and accepting baptism into the Church.**

**UAE: God wills the redemption of everyone.**



**Theological inclusivism: Christianity is the normative means of salvation, 'anonymous' Christians may also qualify.**

**Theological pluralism: There are many ways to salvation, Christianity is but one path.**

### 3.3 Developments in Christian thought: Religious pluralism and society

## The Big Question: How has the Christian Church responded to other faiths?

Inter-faith dialogue (ifd): The co-operative and creative process by which people of different faiths meet and exchange ideas to better understand each other's belief system.

### Causes of Multi-faithism

Globalisation

The Post-Enlightenment Mindset

Migration

**Inter-faith Dialogue and the theology of religions**

**Exclusivism**  
**Religious access exclusivists:** view dialogue as an opportunity to introduce the Gospel to others (fidus ex auditu).  
**Universal access exclusivists:** Acknowledge that God's revelation is not restricted to Christianity as there are rays of truth in other religions that reflect Christian teachings. Therefore, it is a pastoral responsibility to develop dialogue with non-Christians.

**Inclusivism**  
**Structural inclusivists:** Non-Christian religions may be a means to salvation. Aim at developing institutional changes and understanding.  
**Restrictive inclusivists:** reserve salvation to individuals based on the quality of their personal faith. Therefore, dialogue focuses on individuals.

**Pluralism**  
 Dialogue is used to promote a 'global faith' (Keith Ward - PTP) or a 'global theology' (John Hick - UTP).  
**Knitter (ETP):** Practice before theology. Overcome problems like radicalisation and then reflect theology on each other's teachings.

Is Barth and exclusivist or inclusivist?  
 Dialogue should be open, non-judgemental and conducted with humility. But non-Christian religions are 'lesser lights' which reflect the light of Christ.



**Scriptural Reasoning**  
 (David Ford and Peter Ochs)  
 Developing mutual understanding through the study of scripture. Aims to build collegiality, wisdom and openness (hospitality) between the Abrahamic faiths.

**Mission and ifd in the Church of England**  
*Sharing the Gospel of Salvation* (2010)  
 Mission is part of the Church's tradition but must be done with sensitivity. Christians should be authentic and confident: proclamation is not incompatible with ifd.  
 The fourfold classification of dialogue:  
 The dialogue of:  
 Daily life – from doorstep to checkout,  
 Common good – community tasks,  
 Mutual understanding – via conversations like scriptural reasoning,  
 Spiritual life – encountering each other at prayer and worship.

*Dabru Emet* ('Speak the Truth', 2000). 'A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity'.  
*A Common Word Between Us and You* (2007). A letter from 138 Muslim scholars and leaders to Christian church leaders.

**Mission and Conversion**  
*Redemptoris Missio* (1990): Pope John Paul II's encyclical to outline the Catholic Church's missionary mandate:  
 Inter-faith dialogue as part of the evangelizing mission, recognises the richness of all religions despite their 'gaps, insufficiencies and errors', through dialogue seeks the rays of truth.  
*Dialogue leads to inner purification and conversion.*  
*Those engaged in dialogue must be consistent with their own religious traditions and convictions...*

**Relevance Today:**

- The UK is a multi-faith nation with some areas exhibiting great ethnic and religious diversity. The Christian Church has responded to this challenge through a range of ways known as inter-faith dialogue.

**Criticisms of Scriptural Reasoning**

- Orthodoxy
- Reasonableness
- Authority of Scripture
- Non-Abrahamic Faiths
- Relativism

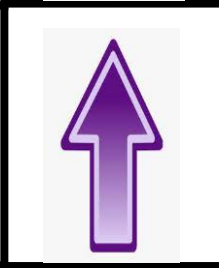


### 3.3 Developments in Christian thought: Gender and society

**The Big Question: What role does gender play in society?**  
 Gender roles and inequality have been challenged by feminism and secular viewpoints. The Church has had to responded to these challenges in a range of ways.

### Family trends

- Decline in:**
- religious marriages.
- Increase in:**
- Same-sex families,
  - Single-parent families.
  - Cohabitation.



**Feminism**  
 The many political, philosophical, economic, psychological and sociological movements sought to free women from male dominance and give them independence and dignity.  
 'First wave' feminism sought equal rights.  
 'Second wave' feminism sought to tackle patriarchal society: **Betty Friedan's**, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) revealed how bored and frustrated housewives and mothers were.  
**Simone de Beauvoir** describes the 'eternal feminine' – a pervasive and false view of feminine characteristics. This is perpetuated by the false-consciousness where even the most independent women reinforce the gender stereotypes.



### Biblical teaching on the roles of men and women

**Ordo creates naturalis: the natural order of creation.**  
*For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.*  
 1 Timothy 2:13-14

**Liberal Protestants**  
 More likely to accept secular insights. They interpret the Bible as a source of experiences rather than revelation. Accept parenthood as choice; non-traditional families and the new covenant ideal.

**Conservative Protestants**  
 The religious 'Right'. Men and women are equal but different; the home is a domestic haven; feminism and liberalism as a cause of divorce and sexual immorality.

**The Gender Debate**  
**Essentialism:** Distinctive gender characteristics are determined biologically (nature).  
**Existentialism:** Gender is determined by cultural and social factors (nurture).  
**Michel Foucault:** sexual practices have been historically controlled as a means of maintaining power, e.g. the Church.

**The Covenant Ideal**  
 Jesus establishes Jeremiah's new covenant where *God's law is written upon people's hearts, and God shall be their God and they shall be God's people.*  
 Jeremiah 31:31-34

**Catholic feminism**  
**Elisabeth Fiorenza:** there was gender equality among the first Christians.  
**Catharina Halkes:** Structural changes to gender roles need a more radical shift in gender-role consciousness. Critical of *Mulieris Dignitatum* – too focused on women as mothers.

**Roman Catholic**  
**Pope John Paul II's, Mulieris Dignitatum (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women).**  
 The married, heterosexual monogamous family. Suspicious of existential views of gender.

- Relevance Today:**
- Gender has always been an issue. It is important to know what traditional gender roles are, how and why these have been challenged and the subsequent impact on family.
  - Gender identity is an important expression of human rights in a liberal society.

**Genesis 1:** God created man and women in his own image but then...



### 3.4 Developments in Christian thought: Gender and Theology

**BIG Question:** What are the issues around God, the Bible and feminism?  
 Two significant, feminist theologians are Rosemary Radford Ruether and Mary Daly. They agree on some areas but there are also some big differences.



**Rosemary Radford Ruether**  
 Roman Catholic feminist liberation theologian

Monotheism tends to reinforce patriarchy. However, the roots of Judaism are far less male orientated. The femaleness of God is retained in wisdom and always presented in female terms. Christianity preserves this femininity via 'Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God' (1 Corinthians 1:23-24). The Holy Spirit is also shown in sophia terms, the immanent, relational aspect of God. She interprets Jesus as a male saviour who could save women and who could not. Ruether also concludes that traditional Christianity is sexist and cannot be a means of salvation for or liberation for women. Christian communities in the very beginning are the answer to reinvigorating Christian spirituality and praxis.



**Feminism and God**  
 Many secular feminists believe a belief in a transcendent, infinite God is a major cause of sexism. This is because it reinforces a patriarchal mindset. The transcendent creator (God) is master over humans. This creates a master-slave relationship. This is developed further through patriarchy with a dominant male (master) – female (slave) hierarchy.

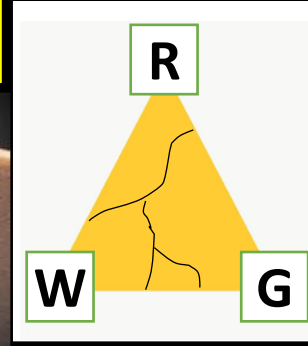
**Feminism and the Bible**  
 Secular feminists view the Bible as a cause of social problems. It reinforces patriarchy through stories of women as the weaker sex. However, there are feminist theologians who do not reject the Bible and God. How is this so? It is not Christianity at fault but secular feminism; women, and indeed men need the spiritual fulfilment of the Bible. This spiritual nourishment is a source of liberation.



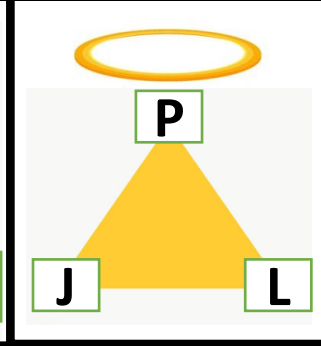
**Mary Daly**  
 Ex-Roman Catholic and radical feminist

Daly is an academic, radical feminist who took some of her inspiration from Nietzsche. She looked for transvaluation and argued that there were two conflicting sides to human nature, Apollonian and Dionysian, respectively the passive and the creative, energetic self. Only women had the ability to realise the Dionysian self and understand the process of 'be-ing', a spiritual process of living completely. She strongly disagrees with Ruether when arguing that God is the 'divine patriarch' or 'supreme phallus' that has 'castrated' women through the teachings of the Church. Only when all belief in God and his related language is removed can women be united with the elemental forces of nature.

The Most Unholy Trinity



The Most Holy Whole Trinity



**Amnon and Tamar**  
 2 Samuel 13:1-22

*"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. <sup>13</sup> What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you?"*

*It might be interesting to speculate upon the probable length of a 'depatriarchalized Bible'. Perhaps there would be enough salvageable material to comprise an interesting pamphlet. Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father, 1986*

**Daly's re-appropriation**

**Hag, crone, nag, spinsters.**



### 3.5 Developments in Christian thought: The challenge of secularism

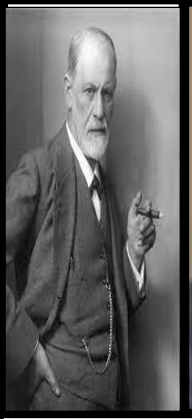
**BIG Question:** What are the challenges of secularism? Since the Enlightenment era, the Western democracies have become increasingly secular. What makes this preferable for some? What does this mean for the role of religion? What challenges are there to the secularisation of society?

#### Procedural secularism

The role of the state is to take into account the interests of all its citizens and institutions. Religion is not given priority but is treated equally alongside all other institutions.

#### Programmatic secularism

All religious views should be excluded from public institutions. These include government, public events (e.g. holidays), schools and universities.



**Sigmund Freud and Richard Dawkins**  
Programmatic secularists

Freud argues institutionalised religion is a key cause of **neuroses**. He agrees with David Hume (18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher) claiming religion is an infantile stage in one's development. This **infantile illusion** is a continuation of the control parental controls one experiences as a child. Freud also argues religion is a consequence of **wish fulfilment**: unconscious desires are projected into one's conscious experiences (dreams, daydreams, hallucinations) and manifest as a love of God. Dawkins fiercely criticizes religion and in particular monotheistic faiths as irrational and therefore **delusional**. His **positivism** means science should be applied to all things as a means of explanation. Dawkins also claims religious indoctrination is a form of **child abuse**.

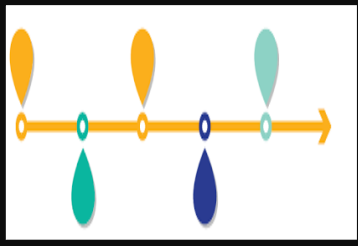


**Comte**  
Philosopher and influencer

Comte developed the view that civilized society developed from the religious world view to the metaphysical/abstract view to the positive view (scientific and rational). This **secular positivism** sees scientific reasoning as an end goal beyond a religious world.

#### The secularisation thesis

**A sociological term to describe the trend in Western society: the growing number of people who claim to have no religious affiliation and where religion is losing its influence on society.**



Taylor argues secularism is the result of **'subtraction stories'** where spiritualism has been replaced by humanism. This has resulted in more emphasis on individual, private experiences and erodes the communal aspect of society. He argues the current Western world narrative is out of synch with the wider global historical narrative, like an aberration. Only when this is redressed can people be experiencing the fullness of life.

#### Challenges to the secularization thesis

**Measuring secularism:** The increase in people claiming 'no religious preference' is contradicted by the numbers who claim to still pray in private or believe in a higher being.

**Influence and authority:** As some religious authorities wane (e.g. Catholicism in Italy) others take the place of mainstream, traditional belief systems.

**Historical religious commitment:** high church attendance was a traditional expectation but not a measure of spiritualism and genuine commitment. Therefore, less attendance now is not evidence of secularisation.



**Charles Taylor and Terry Eagleton**  
Challenges to secularisation

Eagleton accepts that religion has caused harm but also believes that it is a means of cultural enrichment, through the arts, architecture, poetry, and so on.

The free market and privatization has removed spiritualism from the public sphere, and this has caused anxiety and the upsurge in religious fundamentalism. Eagleton argues both secularism and religious fundamentalism are equally flawed.

**3.6 Developments in Christian thought: liberation theology and Marx**

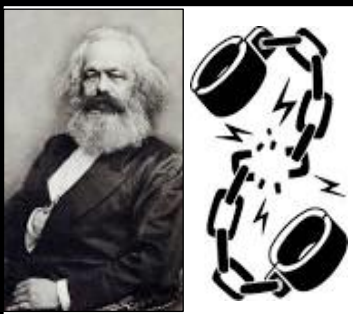
**BIG Question: How does theology respond to Marxism?**  
 Liberation theology is a contextual theology which considers that the heart of the Christian message is to bring spiritual and material justice and freedom to those who are oppressed.

**Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Bishop Benedict XVI, 2005-2013)**

*The Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation' (Libertatis Nuntius)* was created in 1984 by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith. It criticizes Marxism as reductionist and omitting the role of God's grace, and that liberation must occur from the 'radical slavery of sin' and not just economic conditions.



**The origins of liberation theology are Latin America and focus on the socio-economic conditions of the poor.**



*"Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people".*

**Karl Marx and Marxism**  
 Karl Marx was a German philosopher who was influenced by a radical group called the 'Young Hegelians'. Through them he developed his atheism and analysis of economics. His view of the world is **historical materialism**: over time, conflicting and harmonizing forces create cycles of conflict and harmony.

**Marx on religion:**

- He rejected God as a driving force of history,
- Religion could be used by the state as a tool of oppression.

**Marx on the economy:**

- Capitalism was a major source of alienation and exploitation.
- Land was the original means of production that seeded this exploitation.
- Industrialisation has exacerbated class differences with the emergence of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.
- Marx believed humans had the ability to understand and change their material conditions: **praxis**.

Liberation theologians and Marxists believe that although life is intrinsically good, human nature is also a cause of human misery. Liberation theologians use Marx to analyse the material conditions of the poor and put '*bread before theology*.' (Gutierrez). That is to first understand the plight of the poor and the causes of poverty and then use Christianity to interpret how to change things spiritually – a 'bottom up' theology. However, most liberation theologians are not Marxist; Marx is a '*useful companion on the way*' (Leonardo and Clodovis Boff) but there is only one teacher, Jesus Christ.

**Criticisms of Marx by Jose Porfirio Miranda**

has underestimated the insight of biblical writers that capitalism since the start of human civilization is a consequence of human sin. Therefore the Bible explains the causes of poverty and exploitation more fully.

**Idolatry:** Marx fails to give enough explanation for the causes of private ownership because of his rejection of God. The second of the Ten Commandments, "*You shall not make for yourself an idol...*", the command against idolatry explains why in the west capitalism (wealth and status) is worshipped instead.

**Leonardo and Clodovis Boff**

**The Boff brothers argue the preferential option for the poor comes from five motivations:**

- Theological,
- Christological,
- Eschatological,
- Apostolic,
- Ecclesiological.

**First act praxis**

Pre-theological, no doctrine but the realization of what is wrong through visits to poorer areas and living permanently with communities. First act praxis is strongly linked with the parable of the Sheep and Goats.

**Second act praxis: three mediations**

