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INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

THE WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY, AND HOW OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

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For students undertaking theology for the first time the word “theology” conjures many possible images. Often I have had students approach me, some with no religious background whatsoever, sincerely asking me if they were in the right course. They had the correct room, they just wanted my sincere opinion regarding whether or not they really belonged there. My answer to them, as it is to you if you are in the same boat, is “do not fear!” Whether you are well experienced in matters of faith and doctrine, or if you are a total beginner, this course (and these notes) are for you. We’ll take it one step at a time, starting with the most basic of elements: the word “theology” itself.

The first step: the word “theology”

The English word theology is derived from the Greek word theologia, which itself is a combination of two other Greek words: theos, meaning God, and logos, meaning word or discourse. Quite literally, then, theology means “words about God” or “discourse about God”. The word theology first appears in literature in the works of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, specifically his work entitled The Republic, in which he uses the word theology as a synonym for the “tales” of the Greek poets regarding the gods, tales which he considered offensive (particularly to the intelligence) because they sometimes attributed evil to God. Aristotle, Plato’s pupil, also used the term synonymously with “first philosophy”, or what we now call “metaphysics”, because it deals
with the first causes of things (sometimes called the “unmoved mover”).

The early Christians disliked the term theology because it was applied to the civic worship of the gods and goddesses of Greece and Rome, which the Christians of course rejected in the name of their own faith in Jesus Christ (and for which they would be bitterly persecuted even to the point of torture and death, a situation that would last for almost the first 300 years of Christianity). Their preferred term was gnosis, meaning “knowledge”, a term found several times in the Bible. However, the term gnosis gradually acquired new connotations over time, and came to describe the doctrines of certain heretical splinter groups from apostolic Christianity. Beginning with the 4th century Christian author Origen, the term theology was then used to express the Christian understanding of God as distinguished from the Christian faith. Over time the term became more and more accepted to describe the methodical elaboration of religious truth by reason enlightened by faith, or (if one prefers) the science of God and the Christian faith.

Of course, theology does not have to be specifically Christian. Any religion can (and does) have its own theology. The word itself does have a strongly Christian connotation, however. As for this course, it focusses on Christian theology and will remain faithful to that approach, but it will do so in a spirit of ecumenism and open to inter-faith dialogue.

The second step: the “five W’s” of theology

According to the Concordia University undergraduate calender this course “introduces the student to the structure, nature and method of theological studies”. To do this, we will take the

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2 “If there is something which is eternal and immovable and separable, clearly the knowledge of it belongs to a theoretical science—not, however, to physics (for physics deals with certain movable things) nor to mathematics, but to a science prior to both...There must, then, be three theoretical philosophies, mathematics, physics, and what we may call theology.” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1026a)

3 As a point of interest, an early accusation against the Christians was that they were “atheists”! The term was applied to Christians, not because they didn’t believe in God, but because they refused to acknowledge even the existence of the Greek and Roman gods (Cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Church History*, Book IV, chapter XIII, verse 3; chapter XV, verses 6 and 19; chapter XVI, verse 3).

4 Apostolic Christianity: those Christian churches that could trace their origins and beliefs back to the original apostles of Jesus. For a fascinating description of these early splinter groups and how they could be distinguished from apostolic Christianity, c.f. St. Irenaeu of Lyons, *Against the Heresies*, written in the 2nd century.

5 I do not wish to enter into a debate regarding whether or not it is appropriate to call theology a “science”. It is not a science in the sense of the physical sciences, which is what one usually thinks of when using the term “science”. However, the word “science” comes from the Latin verb scio, which means “to know”. To the extent that theology increases out knowledge of God and advances the development of the Christian faith as something rational, then, it should be allowable to properly call theology a “science”.

6 Concordia University, *Undergraduate Calender*, section 31.330.
approach of the “five W’s”, not necessarily in the usual order, and which in our version will also include the “how” of theology. This will give us a good overview of what theology is all about. All of this will be covered in the first half of the course, prior to the mid-term.

**The third step: the relationship between theology and society**

Theology is a powerful force. The simple fact is that religions wield considerable influence and power. Because this power originates from the strength of faith, it often is of a sort not shared by other groups such as business or government. The Worldwatch Institute, an environmental group, noted the following:

Religious institutions and leaders can bring at least five strong assets to the effort to build a sustainable world: the capacity to shape cosmologies (worldviews), moral authority, a large base of adherents, significant material resources, and community-building capacity. Religions are experienced at informing our perspectives on issues of ultimate concern. They know how to wield moral authority. Many have the political clout associated with a huge base of adherents. Some have considerable real estate holdings, buildings, and financial resources. And most produce strong community ties by generating social resources such as trust and cooperation, which can be a powerful boost to community development. Many political movements would welcome any of these five assets. To be endowed with most or all of them, as many religions are, is to hold considerable political power.  

Religion is not just about theology, of course. Many people are very devout and religious without being theologians. But because theology is about plunging deeper into the nature and meaning of religious beliefs, theologians are often turned to as a reference and a kind of authority on religious matters. Theology is like a rudder on a ship: it does not make the boat go, but it does determine its direction. This makes theology a potentially powerful factor in culture and society.

Not everyone in society has a religious outlook on life, of course. Some people have tried to reason out an alternative and have replaced religion with some kind of ideology (such as communism, which was an ideology with an explicitly atheistic outlook). Others are simply going with the flow, not thinking critically at all. Theology enters into dialogue with the first category of people, and tries to stimulate the thought processes of the second. And so the second half of the course will be used to examine features of post-modern society and show how theology can and does contribute to some of the issues facing our culture today.

**The fourth step: theology and the rest of your life**

Hopefully taking a theology course will have some positive lasting effect on your life.

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Hopefully (at the very least) you will have learned a few new things and will have come to understand the world around you a bit better. Perhaps it will also inspire in you a new openness to a theological approach to certain questions. And maybe, just maybe, you will find yourself at the start of a theological and religious journey and you will want to continue. Our last class will be all about looking at the question: what do I do with this theology stuff now that I’ve been introduced to it? Perhaps it can help you find your path in life, the one you are meant to be on.
2: The “why” of theology

While it might seem strange to start with the last of the “five W’s”, we might as well begin our study by examining our motives. Let’s take a step back from the question “why do theology” and simply start by asking: “why take a theology course?” There are lots of possible answers: "because it’s obligatory for my program," "because it fit in my schedule," "because I’m hoping it will be easy to get an A+,” "because I am genuinely interested in theology." It is possible to have a combination of motives: I don’t know of any student who doesn’t want to get an A+! But hopefully our own particular answer includes some of the last element: a genuine interest in theology as a source of knowledge, perhaps as part of a personal faith journey, or perhaps as part of coming to understand the world better. Each of these last two motives defines the two approaches to theology we will see described below.

The personal reason to do theology: St. Anselm’s approach of “faith seeking understanding”

Following on Origen’s distinction between the Christian faith and the theology as the understanding of the Christian faith, St. Anselm of Canterbury (b.1033 -- d.1109) defined theology as fides quaerens intellectum, i.e. faith seeking understanding. This definition is classic, and has been much debated and discussed. Each of its terms deserves attention.

Faith

In order for someone to be truly doing theology, it is commonly accepted that the person must possess religious faith, that is to say, some measure of personal adherence to or trust in a religious or spiritual system. In other words, theology is something that is done “from the inside” of a religion, by a believer who has personal knowledge and experience as a believer. Otherwise, what is being done is not theology, it is religious studies, and at the furthest limits becomes an anthropological, sociological, or psychological study of religion and spirituality as simply another

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8 This celebrated phrase formed part of the complete title of St. Anselm’s Proslogion.
phenomenon of human existence. But how “inside” do you have to be? Obviously theology cannot
be simply a repetition of what has already been taught and decided. There must be room for new
thought and new ideas, and new approaches to the perennial topics. This can risk going too far,
however, given that it is the commonality of religious belief that holds a religion together. A
religious community does have the right to determine what teaching is (or is not) in genuine
continuity with what it has taught and believed before. Otherwise that religion becomes very vague,
in both its beliefs and practices. It is not much of a religion at all, but rather it becomes simply a
group of people with (perhaps) vaguely similar religious opinions, held together by rituals and
practices that lack a truly common meaning. These kinds of religious opinions are often held
without any deep critical examination. In our day, many people define their religious convictions
according to their own opinions, saying “I have my own beliefs on that.” Is it possible to do real
theology in such a context?

Beyond the simple intellectual issues, however, is the question of the heart. In other words,
can theology be done from a speculative, tentative view of faith, or does it really require a deep,
personal emotional and/or spiritual commitment? From a Christian point of view, for example, can
a person do theology starting from the point of view, “While I don’t personally believe it, let us
suppose Jesus rose from the dead…”? Or does he or she actually have to believe in his or her heart
that Jesus rose from the dead, for the theology to be real theology and not just religious speculation?
And how strong does this belief need to be? Is it enough for us to believe, without becoming
disciples and undertaking in our lives the disciplines (such as prayer, worship, and moral conduct)
that the religion proposes? Does our conviction need to go all the way to giving things up, even
possibly our very lives? In fact, Christianity is a religion whose martyrs are considered heroes, and
all Christians are reminded of Jesus’ words, that “Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny
before my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 10:33) But what if the commitment of our heart is
not there yet? Does that mean our intellectual work isn’t real theology?

There is also the problem of selectivity when doing theology. In other words, is religious
faith necessarily a package deal? Many people today have a much more eclectic approach to
religion, which rejects the “all-or-nothing” approach to religious faith as too rigid. On the other
hand, this can become a “cafeteria” or “salad bar” approach to faith: I pick what I want, how much
of it I want, and I leave the rest, perhaps to come back to it later, perhaps not. What is the level of
religious conviction in such a context? And is it sufficient to undertake theology? It should be
pointed out that the original meaning of the word “heresy” comes from the Greek word hairesis
which means “a choosing, choice”, particularly with a sense of a self-willed option. Heretics, by
definition, do not belong to a religious community -- unless they form one of their own.9

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9 Key statements of religious truths are often grouped together in texts called “creeds” or “symbols”. Within
Christianity many such creeds have been developed, the most famous (and normative) being the Apostles’ Creed, the
Creed of Nicea-Constantinople, and the Athanasian Creed (which is used somewhat less). Each complements the other,
and each is generally considered an orthodox statement of the Christian faith. (Explaining the creeds, of course, is
another matter, and is part of the continuous work of theologians). The word “creed” comes from the Latin word credo
meaning “I believe”, and reflects how a creed is meant to be a statement of religious faith. The word “symbol” comes
from the Greek word symbolon, and originally meant half of a broken object, such as a seal presented as a token of
recognition. The broken parts were placed together to verify the bearer’s identity. A “symbol of faith”, then, is a sign
An important tool to help tackle some of these questions is a *hierarchy of truths*. The Christian religion (and indeed any religion) holds certain things to be true. A hierarchy of truths means the placing of these elements of faith in a certain order of importance to allow us to better see which elements of faith are central to a particular religious identity, and which others are more derivative from those central truths. (This does not mean that element of faith at the bottom of the hierarchy of truths are somehow “less true”!) Used this way, a hierarchy of truths helps us to identify just how “inside” a particular theologian or religious believer might be. It also helps us to identify the source of certain theological disputes. Often we presume religious disputes arise because a person or group of persons is denying an element of faith that other persons affirm. In fact, while this may be the case, a quick look at the hierarchy of truths of a religion shows that often the dispute is really about the relative placement of a truth within the hierarchy of truths, rather than just its outright denial. The use of a hierarchy of truths can also help clarify doctrinal disputes by allowing theologians, when they are caught in a dispute, to refer to the more central truths from which the disputed element is derived. This “going back to the centre” helps us clarify debate, take a fresh perspective and hopefully avoid useless controversies.

While a particular hierarchy of truths may theoretically be clearly defined by some religious authority, in practice the exact shape of a particular hierarchy of truths tends to be implicit to the life of the particular religious community. In other words, it is something more to be discovered than defined. The relative importance of certain religious texts, rituals, and even religious holidays points to the hierarchy of the elements of belief expressed by those texts, rituals and holidays. For example, the most important religious holiday in the Christian world is Easter, which celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. At the same time, the resurrection of Jesus is, without a doubt, the central article of Christian faith, something which the Bible itself acknowledges in the first letter to the Corinthians: “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.” (1 Cor 15:14). Because this is a central element of faith, it is therefore not possible to deny the resurrection of Jesus and still truly be a Christian...unless, of course, one completely alters the definition of Christianity (and, in effect, places something else at the centre of the hierarchy of truths).

This at last brings us to a very practical problem: what if I don’t want to found my own religion, I do want to continue to be a member of a religious community, but I am having difficulty accepting some of the things that religion teaches I should believe? First of all, we must acknowledge that almost everyone, at some point in their life, begins to take a second look at religious beliefs, whether somebody else’s or their own. We must begin by making a distinction between a *difficulty* and a *doubt*. John Henry Newman, an important churchman in the 19th century who went through a lengthy period of religious questioning, had this to say on the matter:

I am far of course from denying that every article of the Christian Creed, whether as held by Catholics or by Protestants, is beset with intellectual difficulties; and it is simple fact, that, for myself, I cannot answer those difficulties. Many persons are very sensitive of the difficulties of Religion; I am as sensitive as any one; but I have never been able to see a connexion between apprehending those difficulties, of recognition and communion between believers (c.f. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 188).
It is quite common and even somewhat normal, therefore, to live with certain difficulties regarding religious faith and practice. In fact, it is hard to see why we would need theology if these difficulties did not present themselves. Most people, when they state they are having doubts in fact are really simply having difficulties, and we should not get overexcited and blow things out of proportion. Nevertheless, when not tended to, difficulties can become true doubts, and this is much more serious. The real difference between difficulties and doubts lies in the area of choice. A religious crisis, a crisis of faith, is often really either a crisis of confidence, a crisis of lifestyle, or something which has arisen out of a severe emotional shock. In some senses it is ok to be in a crisis: the word in its original meaning means “turning point”. Apart from all the emotional turmoil, however, the real question becomes: which way will I turn? What will I choose?

When a crisis of faith results from a crisis of confidence, it is often because we are questioning the authority of the source of our religious faith, whether it is questioning the authenticity of the Bible, the place of the Church as an authoritative spokesperson for God, or even just our relationship with our parents and teachers (likely a typical source of the crisis of faith common to adolescence). Will I try and resolve the apparent difficulties I see in what has been passed on to me? Will I continue to trust that somehow God’s word has been passed on to me even by what may be imperfect sources? Or will I let go, possibly seeking other sources, or possibly just giving up and making myself my own authority? This is my choice: I can continue to choose to trust, even of emotionally I am uncertain. Real religious doubt is a failure of that trust.

When a crisis of faith results from a crisis of lifestyle, it is usually because there is some element of our lives to which we are attached, but of which the particular religion makes certain behavioural demands, such as moral demands. For example, traditional Christianity makes certain moral demands regarding marriage, family, and human sexuality which today are often contested by the wider society. The inability or unwillingness to adjust our lifestyle to match the lifestyle demands of the particular religion can quickly lead to a turning point, as we attempt to decide: do I adjust my lifestyle? Or do I adjust my religious beliefs, possibly even leaving my religious community? Once again, it comes down to a choice.

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10 John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, chapter V.
INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

Seeking

Theology is sometimes seen as a near-dead science, with dusty old men studying dusty old books in dusty old rooms. In fact, if properly done theology is a very dynamic science, one which does study the past with great respect but with a view to uniting it to present day experience, issues and questions, and with an openness to the future and what happens next. St. Anselm’s definition contains the Latin word *quaerens*, which is related to the English word “quest”. Quite literally, then, theology is faith on a quest, a quest for understanding and truth. Anyone who has personally been on a similar quest will find theology to be an exciting venture.

This dynamic feature of theology, however, means that a certain tension exists necessarily arises between the *truths of faith* and the *expressions of faith*. Can faith change? It is difficult to see how, given that the core elements of faith, especially Christian faith, are rooted in the concept of divine revelation, that God has personally intervened powerfully in history to reveal certain transcendent truths and therefore these truths are immutable. But even if the underlying truths of faith are immutable, certainly the ways in which faith is expressed -- in worship, in doctrine, in spiritual practice -- have changed over time. But can anything and everything change in the expressions of faith? Or are certain expressions of faith so precious to the truths of faith that we cannot change the first without losing the second? Theology, then, has the task of “translating” the faith of one generation into words and concepts understandable to the next, without losing the essential meaning of what is being translated. As with the translation of a text from one language into another, theology tries to preserve the core meaning without simply copying it, but really putting it in terms comprehensible to the new audience. This work of discerning what can change versus what must remain the same is constantly ongoing, driven by the encounter of different peoples with each other and by the

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11 Blessed Pope John XXIII offered a wonderfully succinct presentation of this principle in his opening speech to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965): “The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another.” (*October 11, 1962*)
constant (and accelerating) evolution of individual societies themselves.\textsuperscript{12}

The concept of Christian doctrine begins, then, with the notion that there exists a deposit of faith that dates back to Jesus and his apostles, which is complete in itself, and to which one must be faithful if one wants to truly be a follower of Christ and of apostolic Christianity.\textsuperscript{13} While God may be finished revealing his deposit of faith, however, this does not mean that humanity (and particularly the Church) is finished understanding it. It is here that we encounter the concept of “mystery”. Faith, and the truths of the faith, are often referred to as mysteries. “Stop asking the question, you’ll never find the answer, it’s a mystery of faith so you just have to believe it!” is a common misuse of the term. The theological “mystery”, in fact, does not mean something which is unknowable, but rather something which is “ever-knowable”. It means that the truths of the faith -- which are ultimately truths of God -- are so deep and profound that, while we can attain a certain level of true insight regarding them, we can always push on further and discover even more. It is a bit like being in love with someone: the more we get to know them, the more we realise how much there is to truly discover about the other person, and that we will never finish discovering who they really are. In a similar way, God is a mystery (in fact, the ultimate mystery) and theology is about “being in love with God”, always open to discovering something new and wonderful about him and what he has revealed to humanity. To say that the deposit of faith is composed of “mysteries of faith”, therefore, is not meant to discourage the theological “quest”, but rather to stimulate it, knowing that something new always remains to be discovered and understood.

The way a particular faith community of a particular time and culture expresses its current intellectual understanding of the mysteries of faith is through the vehicle of doctrine. Doctrine is encountered in many forms: in theological treatises, in homilies and sermons, in catechisms and educational texts, in creeds and canon laws, in books of spirituality and prayer (especially liturgical books), and in the decisions of councils and church leaders. When a particular doctrine is expressed in such a way as to make clear that it is to be considered as accurately expressing (or defending) an essential part of the unchanging deposit of faith, it is called a dogma, which is the strongest form of doctrinal expression. While the original deposit of faith may not change, however, the fact that this deposit of faith is composed of mysteries means that there can be a “development of doctrine”

\textsuperscript{12} St. Augustine of Hippo had a saying that summarizes well the attitudes one should take when undertaking this kind of work: \textit{In necessariis, unitas; in dubiis, diversas; in omnes, caritas}. This translates as: “In necessary things, unity; in debatable things, diversity; and in all things, charity”.

\textsuperscript{13} This notion of being faithful to what has been revealed is emphasized in the Bible itself. The second letter of John states: “Anyone who is so “progressive” that he does not remain rooted in the teaching of Christ does not possess God, while anyone who remains rooted in the teaching possesses both the Father and the Son.” (2 John 9, NAB) As another example, the author of the book of Revelation states “I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.” (RSV, Rev 22:18-19).
over time, as the mysteries are examined more and more penetratingly.\(^\text{14}\) Even a dogma is not to be considered the final word on a subject, not because the truth underlying it can change, but because a dogma is “a finger pointed at the truth,” not the truth in itself. Of course, this process of development of doctrine must be undertaken carefully, to ensure that the developing doctrine is faithful to the deposit of faith and that nothing of the original deposit of faith is lost or warped by fraudulent additions. St. Vincent of Lerins (5\(^{\text{th}}\) century) provided these criteria for discerning a healthy development of doctrine:

Is there to be no development of religion in the Church of Christ? Certainly, there is to be development and on the largest scale.

Who can be so grudging to men, so full of hate for God, as to try to prevent it? But it must truly be development of the faith, not alteration of the faith. Development means that each thing expands to be itself, while alteration means that a thing is changed from one thing into another.

The understanding, knowledge and wisdom of one and all, of individuals as well as of the whole Church, ought then to make great and vigorous progress with the passing of the ages and the centuries, but only along its own line of development, that is, with the same doctrine, the same meaning and the same import.

The religion of souls should follow the law of development of bodies. Though bodies develop and unfold their component parts with the passing of the years, they always remain what they were. There is a great difference between the flower of childhood and the maturity of age, but those who become old are the very same people who were once young. Though the condition and appearance of one and the same individual may change, it is one and the same nature, one and the same person.

The tiny members of unweaned children and the grown members of young men are still the same members. Men have the same number of limbs as children. Whatever develops at a later age was already present in seminal form; there is nothing new in old age that was not already latent in childhood.

There is no doubt, then, that the legitimate and correct rule of development, the established and wonderful order of growth, is this: in older people the fullness of years always brings to completion those members and forms that the wisdom of the Creator fashioned beforehand in their earlier years.

If, however, the human form were to turn into some shape that did not belong to its own nature, or even if something were added to the sum of its members or subtracted from it, the whole body would necessarily perish or become grotesque or at least be enfeebled. In the same way, the doctrine of the Christian religion should properly follow these laws of development, that is, by becoming firmer over the years, more ample in the course of time, more exalted as it advances in age.

In ancient times our ancestors sowed the good seed in the harvest field of the Church. It would be very wrong and unfitting if we, their descendants, were to reap, not the genuine wheat of truth but the intrusive growth of error.

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\(^\text{14}\) The Bible itself affirms that there can be a development in our understanding of the truths of faith, when Jesus says in the Gospel of John, “chapter 16, he will guide you into all truth”. There is nothing to suggest that this process is not continuing today! This passage affirms that what keeps the development of doctrine process legitimate is that it is ultimately led, not by human beings, but by the Holy Spirit.
On the contrary, what is right and fitting is this: there should be no inconsistency between first and last, but we should reap true doctrine from the growth of true teaching, so that when, in the course of time, those first sowings yield an increase it may flourish and be tended in our day also.  

This theme was taken up more recently by John Henry Newman in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, in which he argued against a stale (or stifling) idea of doctrine in favour of a fidelity to the past that was, at the same time, self-aware of its own processes of development and open to future creativity.

As a final consideration, we should note that if faith is to be “seeking”, it requires a method to be able to do so without wandering around aimlessly. Methodology is important in bringing order to the sometimes chaotic nature of intellectual investigation, but again (and especially in the case of theology) balance is important: if a method is weak in an area or too constrictive, it may prevent is from penetrating more deeply into the mysteries of faith. Theological methods are therefore important and useful, but always tentative, and they can never replace the wild abandon that results from a loving encounter with the living God. (The question of theological methods, along with some examples, will be dealt with in a later chapter.)

### Understanding

Socrates said “the unexamined life is not worth living.” This is a statement about the need to reflect on our existence, rather than simply live it uncritically. In some ways, the same claim can be made about faith. Certainly faith is something which is meant to be lived, first and foremost, but

15 St. Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium*. Saint Vincent of Lerins was a priest monk who lived on the island of Lerins during the fifth century. He wrote *Commonitorium*, from which this piece is extracted, under the pseudonym "Peregrinus." *Commonitorium* also contains what has become known as the Vincentian Canon, the three-fold test of Catholicity: *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est* - what has been believed everywhere, always and by all. He died before 450 a.d.

16 An example of the development of doctrine would be the teaching of the Catholic church on the morality of charging interest on a loan. During Medieval times this was always immoral, because by charging interest a person was paying “rent” not only for the thing, but the use of the thing -- a condition known as *usury*. With time, however, this teaching developed -- not because the teaching changed *per se*, but because our understanding of money changed. Money only has value as a medium of exchange. Because of this, $1000 has a lot more value to a very poor person than $1000 to a billionaire. It is the same $1000, but the value is different because it means different things to different people -- it has no intrinsic value in itself. Of course, in a medieval society where the vast majority of the population was extremely poor, any charging of interest at all would be excessive, and a way to oppress people. But as society became more affluent, it came to be recognized that not all loans were by their very nature immoral. Yes, usury still exists as a sin, nowadays typically in the form of “loan-sharking”. But the doctrine has developed: by examining more closely the *reasons* for the original teaching, as well as developing a better insight into the nature of one of the components of the issue (i.e. the nature of money), it was possible to arrive at a less legalistic, more nuanced doctrine that still preserves the same essential insights.

to be lived on all levels – emotionally, yes, spiritually, surely, but also intellectually. Our minds are part of who we are, and an important part of our human dignity. Faith, if it really is about engaging the whole person in the service and worship of God, cannot leave the mind behind.

The relationship between “faith” and “understanding” has not always been an easy one in the history of theology, however. On the part of believers, there have been currents of thought which have viewed the powers of the mind with suspicion. The commonly accepted Christian teaching is that, since the introduction of sin in the world, human nature has been weakened, a weakness which includes a certain darkening of the intelligence. Both the things of this world and the things of God become difficult to understand and the mind is open to error regarding them. Certainly this weakness does exist, in that we are not born knowing everything, but we need to learn, both by education and by experience, and for many this can be a slow and labourious process. The question is: how far does this weakness go? Some have argued that this weakness goes very deep, becoming a true corruption of human nature, including the mind. In this case all knowledge becomes suspect and possibly dangerously erroneous, and because (in this view) the mind is not merely weak but corrupt it is difficult or even impossible to discover any truth at all. In such situations faith can revert to a form called “blind faith”: just as the eye when “darkened” can be considered “blind”, the “darkening of the intelligence”, if extreme, causes faith to “become blind” as well. The theology that arises out of this kind of “blind faith” is called fideism, although since there is fairly little room for the understanding it is certainly a minimalist kind of theology. Some might even say that fideism not a form of theology, but is opposed to it.

Why would anyone want to hold “blind faith”, and how does one live in such a state? Blind faith does have a more positive side: when applied to God, it becomes total trust in Him. Systems of fideism are often combined with a vision of salvation in which God comes to rescue us from this prison of intellectual corruption and ignorance. In some views, God takes the act of total trust and enhances it by giving the believer a personal share of the Holy Spirit, and the believer therefore can now share in some fashion in the mind of God, which it goes without saying can never be corrupted. In other views, the means God uses to rescue us is by giving us a clear and precise revelation, typically understood to be the Bible, which must be followed absolutely as a supreme authority in all things, even (in the extreme) in things of physical science. Given the presence of such an authority, believed to contain “all the answers,” theology becomes almost unnecessary (and even dangerous, as the questioning it entails can lead people away from this “true light”).

All this being said, however, the simple fact is that it is not necessary to have “blind faith” in order to have total trust in God, to believe in salvation and in the presence of the Holy Spirit, or to believe in the authority of the Bible. Certainly these beliefs are only logical outcomes if fideism is true, but the reverse is not necessarily true: holding these beliefs does not mean that your faith is necessarily fideistic or blind. Nevertheless, faith has been looked upon with suspicion by some of the more intellectual members of society for exactly this reason: they see all faith as being

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18 This understanding can be particularly strong in the Protestant tradition. Cf. Martin Luther, Smalcald Articles, Part 3, Article 1: “This hereditary sin is so deep and [horrible] a corruption of nature that no reason can understand it”. A parallel passage can be found in the 39 Articles of Religion of the Church of England: “[Original sin] it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man. (Article IX)” The Methodist church also copies this last passage as Article 7 of their “25 Articles”. 
essentially blind faith, and so they reject it. Such persons need to be very cautious and should honestly ask themselves -- are they rejecting faith, or fideism? Did they even know the difference? In addition, faith is not simply rejected, but replaced by an opposite (but equally credulous) “anti-faith,” sometimes without our even realising it. An example of such a system is *Positivism*, put forward by Auguste Comte in the 19th century. Comte divided history into three phases: (1) theological, which relies on supernatural agencies to explain what man can't explain otherwise; (2) metaphysical, in which man attributes effects to abstract but poorly understood causes; and (3) "positive", because man now understands the scientific laws which control the world. In essence, he held that religion arises as a means to explain what is currently unexplainable. As an example, one would argue that, for more primitive people, lightning is not a form of electricity, it is the gods hurling their anger on the world; but now, thanks to science, we can put aside this religious belief in favour of a rational belief. In doing so, he simply replaced one “myth” with another, more scientific sounding one. 19 But can this analogy be extended to such an extent that religion can be eliminated entirely? If the truths of existence really are “mysteries,” what guarantee do we have that the methods of science can pursue those mysteries to the furthest limits? How, for example, can science measure God? The argument can be made, of course, that if something is not measurable scientifically it does not exist or is not relevant, but this is simply an assumption, and (curiously enough) itself resembles a statement of faith -- taking as a fundamental assumption the exclusion of faith in God weakens all subsequent arguments put forward against faith in God. If science does have its limits, then philosophy and theology will always have a place investigating those things beyond those limits.

By now it should be fairly obvious that, while many people do hold it to be that case, there is no necessary opposition between faith and science, or more accurately between faith and reason. The two are held in a certain balance and tension, to be sure, and the investigation of the exact relationship between faith and reason is a rich field of study, still hotly pursued and debated in the theological world. What is really at stake is not the question of faith versus reason, it is the question of a single Truth versus multiple “truths”. In other words, is Truth “one”? Is there only one ultimate Truth, within which there is no contradiction? Or are there multiple truths, which can exist side-by-side and even contradict each other? If there is only one ultimate Truth, then the truths of the Bible and the truths of the natural world cannot contradict each other, even if on the surface it seems that they do. Theology then becomes a quest for a deeper understanding of this ultimate Truth, and even these supposed contradictions are in fact blessings, as the difficulties they raise force us to look further. Related to this question is not only the supposed opposition of faith and science, however. We can also look to our personal experience and ask: is faith purely subjective? We often hear people say “You have your beliefs, and I have my own beliefs, and we will welcome each other’s beliefs”, as if to say “It is impossible to decide between belief systems, so let us simply accept that each others belief system exists and not investigate further.” Are we limited to “my personal faith” and “your personal faith”, without any way to decide or judge between them even if they are mutually exclusive or contradictory? Or can faith be objective, and if so, how do we

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19 Comte later systematized positivism into what he called the “Religion of Humanity”, complete with priests and a calendar of saints!
guarantee the truth of the objective faith which (if it really is objective) we are all called to share? Again, the question becomes a philosophical one. It is not simply a question of asking if there is in fact only one objective Truth, but also if that objective Truth can be known subjectively by multiple individuals in such a way that, while they have received that Truth according to their own individual manners, they nevertheless can truly be said to possess a common vision of that Truth.

One final critique of theology that is sometimes made is that it is not a practical science. To have theology defined as faith seeking “understanding” might seem to confirm the idea that theology is all in the head. This, however, ignores the ancient understanding that “understanding” included a practical side defined as “practical reason”. Nevertheless, while in the physical sciences there are so-called “pure sciences” but also applied branches of science (such as engineering), what about theology? Is there any equivalent sort of “theological engineering”? To be sure, theology is primarily concerned with “orthodoxy” (which means “correct worship” or, more practically, having the correct faith), but there is increasingly an interest in theological “praxis” (from which our English word “practical” is derived). Theology doesn’t just touch on what should be believed, but also on what we must do, and how we can do it best in a way faithful to God. In fact, “what must we do” was the very first question asked at the conclusion of the very first sermon in the history of the Church (cf. Acts 2: 37). Theology shapes our “praxis” by giving us a glimpse into God’s perspective and plan for the world and human society. This can be in things as simple as practical individual advice on how to be welcoming to people, how to live an excellent married life, and how to show kindness to the weak in our society, all the way to shaping our view of the world and our view of human nature (especially important to questions of justice and moral theology) in order to offer critiques how agents of power in our societies (such as governments, or even churches) should act. While Christian faith is not first and foremost about social structures, the fact that Christians live in societies means that those societies are affected in a very practical way by how those Christians live, and so it is begs the question once again: “what must we do?”

**The societal reason to do theology: Bernard Lonergan’s approach of theology and culture**

The definition of theology of St. Anselm ultimately starts from the perspective of the individual believer attempting to act as a theologian. The simple fact is that “faith” cannot “seek” anything unless it is present within an individual seeker. But what about the nature and function of theology itself, considered within a society as a whole (as opposed to within individual theologians)? Fr. Bernard Lonergan, a Canadian Jesuit, offers us this functional definition of theology:

> Theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix.\(^ {20}\)

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The term “cultural matrix” refers to all those elements (customs, language, institutions, economic and political structures, laws, values and so on) which constitute and perpetuate the culture. Certainly religion is part of culture, and is sometimes a central, determining factor. At the same time, while elements of culture may be influenced by religion, that does not mean that it (the culture) is necessarily determined by the religion. Technological advances, for example, may have significant impacts on culture, but usually arise from another part of culture than religion.

Religion, therefore, does occupy a central role within a culture, and indeed is truly part of that culture, without pretending to take over all elements of that culture completely. The religion and its tenets will have an impact on the culture, and will in turn be challenged by the culture and will change, either with the culture, or in reaction to it. This can be understood with reference to the following diagram:

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21 An example would be the Islamic civilization of 800-1600 A.D, which had many profound achievements in literature, science, medicine, architecture, etc. But it would be hard to conceive of an “Islamic civilization” without reference to the religion of Islam!

22 There have been some exceptions. Champagne, for example, was invented by a Benedictine monk named Pierre Perignon (the title “Dom” was used for monks, and so we use the name “Dom Perignon” in honour of the inventor). It was also a monk, Fr. Gregor Mendel, who first discovered the biological principles of heredity in 1865.

What is culture?

Culture is one of those concepts which common sense easily grasps, but which the intelligence has a hard time defining. In general, culture refers to all animal behaviour patterns that are not driven purely by biology or instinct -- in other words, all behaviour patterns which are learned.

While animals do have some capacity to learn, and even (in some cases) to transmit that learning from one generation to another, human culture is obviously much more developed. What makes the difference is the human capacity for insight. Higher level animals are certainly able to build complex mental patterns by associating things in their minds, but they have never really demonstrated the ability to understand.

The driving force of human culture, then, is not really the kind of clothes we wear or the kind of food we eat: it is the accumulation of wisdom through insights.

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Figure 1
INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

The larger circle represents the “cultural matrix” of Lonergan, which includes religion without being limited to religion. Religion, on the other hand (the inner circle) is a key focus of culture, and is part of it, without being perfectly identified with it. The arrows represent the constant interaction and exchange that occurs between religion and culture, as religion is challenged by culture and seeks to adapt to it (a process in some cases called *inculturation*), while culture is challenged by religion and especially by its values and principles.

What, then, is theology? As Lonergan states, it mediates between the matrix and the role of religion in that matrix. Theology, in this diagram, IS the inner circle itself, the boundary between culture and religion. A theologian sits immersed in his or her culture, and seeks to explain and interpret the religion to that culture, and well as explain and interpret the culture to the religion. Cultural changes pose challenges to religion, and the theologian attempts to meet those challenges, discerning what in those challenges can be properly incorporated in the religion (and how), and what cannot. The reverse is also true: religion is a voice within culture, but it is often a voice that is poorly understood (especially in our post-modern society). Culture changes very rapidly today, while religion does not. Some may therefore see religion as out-dated, but on the other hand if religion truly is rooted in something very real but transcendent (and God certainly is transcendent) then religion, to a certain degree, transcends the culture it is in. Theology has the function of reminding the culture of these transcendent principles, and finding new ways for those transcendent principles to be understood in the ever-changing culture. As the “cultural matrix” changes, then, theology interprets these transcendent principles in ever-new ways, while trying to stay faithful to the principles in the first place.

Being anchored in transcendent principles is largely what gives theology its particular character among the sciences today. There are many sciences which seek to study society:

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23 When the Catholic Jesuit missionaries reached the Huron people near the Great Lakes, they discovered it was not possible to teach them the sign of the cross as it was traditionally understood in Catholic piety. The words accompanying the sign of the cross are “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” However, in Huron all relational titles have to also be possessive in nature -- it is not possible to say “the Father”, or “the Son” in Huron, but only things like “my father”, “his son”, “their daughter”, etc. So the Jesuit missionaries taught the Hurons this formula instead: “In the name of our Father, and of his Son, and of their Holy Spirit.” This is an example of necessary inculturation due to differences in language.

When other missionaries eventually reached the great plains of the West, they encountered a different difficulty of inculturation, this time in translating the Bible. In the gospels Jesus tells the story of the wise man who built his home on solid rock, versus the foolish man who built his house on sand: when the winds came, the first house remained standing, while the second collapsed. The plains Indians, however, lived in teepees, which are anchored by pegs driven into softer ground. A teepee needs to be erected on softer ground -- it is the one erected on rock that would collapse! So the translators were presented with a problem: should they remain faithful to the original Biblical text, which wouldn't make too much sense in the Indian languages, or should they translate not just the words but the concept as well?

Inculturation therefore needs to be done carefully and with significant forethought. Because it is risky there are some people who believe that inculturation should be avoided entirely, and that a universal “Christian culture” should simply be imposed at the same time as the Gospel is communicated. Such persons tend to be ultra-conservative at the same time, because it is not only the differences of other cultures that they oppose -- it is also the evolution of their own culture. But culture changes whether we like it or not, and since religion is part of culture it tends to change as well. The goal, therefore, is not to resist all change, but to distinguish once again between the truth of faith and the expressions of faith -- and to adapt the latter, while preserving the former.
anthropology, sociology, economics, human geography, and so on. However, while each can be
done in a way respectful of transcendent principles of faith, this is not essential to undertaking the
science in question. Each such science is then limited to doing comparative studies between cultures
at best, and at worst making the mistake of taking changeable, culturally relative principles as
absolutes. By anchoring itself in transcendent principles of divine revelation, however, theology
is able to take a new kind of perspective by, in effect, “stepping outside” the culture and looking
back at it from this more transcendent position. Of course, this carries with it a risk: if there are, in
fact, no truly transcendent principles (at least none that can be discovered by us humans), then
theology is worse than false, it is a delusion. But if there truly are transcendent principles in which
we can be anchored, then theology is always able to bring important insights to the discussions
around culture as it (hopefully) evolves towards those principles.

The key position for a theologian, then, is to be “on the line” of the inner circle. Generally
theologians don’t declare themselves to be “off the line”, because it then means they are no longer
doing theology! But it isn’t always easy to be “on the line”, or to even know if you are “on the
line”. Take, for example, the case of Hans Küng. He is (or was, depending on your point of view)
a Roman Catholic theologian who had a major break with the Roman Catholic Church over the
issues of artificial birth control and papal infallibility. His book Infallible? An Inquiry begins with
what he called “a candid preface”. In this preface, he states his opinion that

The renewal of the Catholic Church sought by the second Vatican Council…has
come to a standstill…For the sake of the Church and of the human beings for whom
the theologian does his work, the reasons for this stagnation must be exposed.24

In other words, Küng is declaring himself to be “on the line”, at the service of the Church (the inner
circle in Lonergan’s diagram) and human beings (the outer circle of Lonergan’s diagram). In doing
so, he is essentially accusing the leadership of the Catholic church of being not “on the line”, i.e.
as being stuck in the inner “religion circle” only. But is he right? Did those leaders see themselves
that way? Quite likely, they believed themselves to be “on the line”, and Küng to be off it,
somewhere excessively in the outer “culture circle”. In fact, Küng’s license to teach theology in the
name of the Catholic church was revoked by church authorities, precisely because they believed he
had gone too far “off the line” so as to no longer really be a theologian (or at least, not a Catholic
theologian).

Whatever one may think of the Roman Catholic church or of Hans Küng (who remains a
controversial figure), there is still the following problem: how do we, as theology students and
theology teachers, know if we are “on the line”? That “inner circle” is very slippery indeed, and
it is easy to slide too far into the culture or into the religion only. As a closing reflection, let me
state my belief that the virtues of civility and humility, if present, are a good indicator that we are
on the right path. Anger, bitterness, arrogance, and a “shoot the messenger” attitude often simply
mean that the author is too much in one circle or the other, and is trying to hard to attack from their
circle with the “arrows” in the diagram, or is trying to hard to defend their circle against the
“arrows” coming in. But those arrows are not symbolic of conflict, but of direction: that theology

is a two-way street between religion and culture. Theological positions can and should be presented with conviction, but theology must be done in genuine dialogue, and with a reverence for the truth (and not agendas) above all else.
In order to better appreciate the developments in theology during the 20th century, it is profitable to be familiar with those who have contributed to the cause. Although the composition of a list of the most important contemporary theologians is partial, what follows is a collection of short biographic descriptions of some of those who have had a considerable impact in the field of theology in the last one hundred years. Whether it was for their application of new methods of biblical exegesis, or for attempts to integrate Christian thought with some of the more recent philosophical innovations, or for joining theology to some of the more pressing contemporary cultural issues, they each distinguished themselves for their influential contributions to the field.

Karl Barth: b.1886 -- d. 1968

A prominent Swiss theologian of the Reformed Church, he was an advocate of a Christo-centric understanding of revelation and faith, and was a spokesman for scripturally based dogmatism and the ethical tenets of Martin Luther and John Calvin. He was an early follower of liberal Protestantism, with its innovative approach to Biblical exegesis, and Christian Socialism, concerned with the improvement of station of the lower classes. He later distanced himself from these two movements after he rejected their strong anthropological foundations, which tended to eclipse the role of the divine and revelation with strictly human interpretations and concerns.

His theology was marked by his utter rejection of the existence of an analogy of being between humanity and God. He believed that the Being and Existence of God was so far above that of his creatures, that no analogy could be made; a significant departure from the thinking of Balthasar for example. Any attempt to create an analogy would distort and debase the true nature of God. The only point of similarity between the human and divine reality is Christ, whom he considered to be the historical manifestation of the Word. Therefore, all other religions apart from Judaism and Christianity are false. The Word of God can in turn only be known by means of three manifestations: Christ in the Incarnation, the written Word as found in the Bible, and the preached Word as is found in the Protestant concept of Church. These three manifestations of Christ are far greater means of knowing and reaching God than any ecclesial experience of believers, as is argued in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox understanding of Tradition. Despite his firm Protestant theology, Barth played an influential role in fostering ecumenical dialogue between the Protestants
and Catholics through a precise description of both the agreements and the differences between them.

His key works are the *Church Dogmatics*, and his work on the *Epistles to the Romans*.

*Leonard Boff*: b. 1938 --

A Brazilian Franciscan theologian who studied under Karl Rahner in Germany, who is a leading intellectual proponent of liberation theology in Central and South America.

Founded on the experience of oppression of the poor in South America, his theology draws a parallel between the situation of these poor and Christ by highlighting the material poverty of Jesus and the relative power and wealth of those who opposed Him. Boff presents Christ as not only a liberator from personal sin, but from material oppression caused by structural and corporate sin. Liberation theology has been perceived as aligning itself along political lines, often siding with Marxist guerilla movements, who employed violent means of challenging oppressive political authorities. This alliance between some parts of the church and Marxist insurgents has attracted suspicion and criticism from other voices in the Roman Catholic church, concerned by the liberation theologians seeming acquiescence to fundamentally atheistic political movements, and bloody methods of assertion.

His theology had elements in opposition to a hierarchical Church, stressing the Church as the community of the people of God (especially the dispossessed). The suspicion of liberation theology by many members of the Church hierarchy resulted in Boff being summoned to Rome for censure. Nevertheless, he was supported by many of the Latin American bishops.

His main books include his early work *Jesus Christ: Liberator* (1972), and *Church: Charism and Power* (1981), in which he revealed his vision of a new model for the Church, based on his experience of the base community, embodied by the early Church experience of community, cooperation and charism.

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*: b.1906 -- d.1945

A German Protestant theologian who is remembered primarily for his Christian witness against the Nazi regime.

He studied at Tübingen, Berlin, Barcelona and New York, and later held a teaching position at the University of Berlin. He proved to be a staunch opponent of Nazism and a leading member of the Confessing Church, a religious movement in Germany dedicated to challenging Nazi doctrines. He fought attempts to “de-Jewify” Jesus, that is to separate him from his Jewish identity and “Aryanize” him, thereby recasting Christ in a manner more palatable to nationalist ideology.

The main theological themes of his work were the servant Church, and Church as the living congregation of Christ. His ideas were a driving force in ecumenical movements as well. His important works were *Cost of Discipleship* (1937) and *Ethics* (1949, printed posthumously), a book in which he developed the theme of responsibility before God. He referred to Jesus as "a man for others," a term he borrowed from Barth. Jesus is presented as the living
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dynamic reality to which life in the historic moment was to be conformed to God in obedience and love.

*Raymond Brown*: b.1928 -- d. 1998

An American New Testament scholar who taught at the Union Theological Seminary of New York.


*Rudolf Bultmann*: b.1184 -- d.1976

A renowned professor of New Testament studies who taught at the University of Marburg in Germany, he is considered a major force behind form criticism, that is, the analysis of biblical texts using the tool of literary forms in order to interpret and extract their meaning. He was particularly noted for his hermeneutics, whereby he furnished numerous exegetical interpretations of the New Testament, and also for his attempts at the “de-mythralization” of scripture. This led to a marked disconnect between the Jesus of faith and the historical Jesus, which resulted in heavy criticism for his doctrinal inadequacies. For example, some of his interpretations inferred that Jesus was not conscious of his identity as the Messiah, and that the Resurrection is merely a myth.

He also was noted for his attempts to translate what he saw as the mythical language of the New Testament into a philosophical language, particularly within the system of existential philosophy of Heidegger, which he believed would be more intelligible to contemporary thinkers.


*Yves Congar*: b.1904 -- d. 1995

Born in France, and regarded as the greatest Catholic ecclesiologist of the 20th century, he studied Thomism and neo-Thomism under philosopher Jacques Maritain, and historian Etienne Gilson. After his studies he was admitted to the Dominican order in 1921, in Paris. He was also influenced by some Protestant notions, particularly Luther’s primacy of grace and the works of Karl Barth. Rather than simply rejecting modernism (a theological movement of the early part of the 20th century), he called for the proper use of whatever was of value in the approach of the Modernists, included but not limited to historical-critical method.

His work was concerned with ecumenism and the theological identity of the laity in the Church. He contributed to the ecumenical movement, but his work was initially condemned. This changed after Vatican II, when the new spirit that inspired the council rehabilitated his reputation, and he was invited to contribute on such important documents as *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic


*Avery Dulles*: b. 1918 --

Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., is currently the Laurence J. McGinley Professor of Religion and Society at Fordham University, a position he has held since 1988. An internationally known author and lecturer, he was born in Auburn, New York, on August 24, 1918, the son of John Foster Dulles and Janet Pomeroy Avery Dulles. He received his primary school education in New York City, and attended secondary schools in Switzerland and New England. After graduating from Harvard College in 1940, he spent a year and a half in Harvard Law School before serving in the United States Navy, emerging with the rank of lieutenant. Upon his discharge from the Navy in 1946, Avery Dulles entered the Jesuit Order, and was ordained to the priesthood in 1956. After a year in Germany, he studied at the Gregorian University in Rome, and was awarded the doctorate in Sacred Theology in 1960. He was created a Cardinal of the Catholic Church in Rome on February 21, 2001 by Pope John Paul II.

Cardinal Dulles served on the faculty of Woodstock College from 1960 to 1974 and that of The Catholic University of America from 1974 to 1988. He has been a visiting professor at: The Gregorian University (Rome), Weston School of Theology, Union Theological Seminary (New York, N.Y.), Princeton Theological Seminary, Episcopal Seminary (Alexandria, Va.), Lutheran Theological Seminary (Gettysburg, Pa.), Boston College, Campion Hall (Oxford University), the University of Notre Dame, the Catholic University at Leuven, Yale University, and St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie.


*Georgos Florovsky*: b. 1893 -- d.1979

Born in Odessa, Russia, Florovsky is considered to be one of the two greatest Orthodox theologians of his century. An Orthodox priest and an exile from his native land, he taught at the

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25 The information on Cardinal Avery Dulles is taken from the website of Fordham University.
St. Sergius Orthodox theological institute in Paris, and later at St. Vladimir’s seminary in New York. His work was mainly concerned with reuniting Orthodoxy’s theology with liturgical traditions. Two themes which permeated his work are pseudomorphosis and neo-patristic synthesis. Pseudomorphosis refers to what he felt was a deformation that occurred after the fall of the Byzantine empire in the 15th century, after which the Orthodox church was forced to borrow theology from Roman Catholic and Protestant sources, especially in the 17th and 18th centuries, when the Orthodox were cut off from their own. He believed that the result was a theology that was separated from living contact with the Orthodox liturgy, what he referred to as a theological amnesia. He attempted to restore the lost harmony between the Church’s liturgical and ascetico-spiritual traditions and its intellectual component by attempting to return to the thinking of the Church fathers found in Patristic literature, the so-called neo-patristic synthesis. He was also noted for being an energetic advocate of the ecumenical movement.

His important works include four volume collection, consisting mainly of essays, and The Ways of Russian Theology, an exhaustive study of Russian theology and intellectual tradition between the 14th and 20th centuries.

**Gustavo Gutierrez:** b. 1928 --

Born in Peru, and educated in Lima, Gutierrez is a leading advocate of liberation theology, expressed in his most important work *A Theology of Liberation* (1973). The book presents a theological reflection of the Gospels together with the experiences of men and women in the politically oppressed lands of Latin America of the 1970’s and 80’s. In it, he presents a philosophical and historical analysis of poverty. His experience of this poverty and oppression of the poor became his starting point for the development of a theology presenting Christ as both spiritual and politico-social liberator.

In his view, theology must be a response to the human condition. It is a theology aimed at abolishing the type of injustice affecting these nations, and building a new, freer and more human society.

**Hans Küng:** b.1928 --

A Swiss born Catholic, Küng studied philosophy at the Gregorian institute in Rome, and later in Paris, Berlin and London. He was strongly influenced by the thinking of German Idealism and Kantian philosophy. Not surprisingly, he has called for a greater openness to the insights of modern rationalism and critical methods.

He is known for his innovative ideas, and the polarizing effect that he had on opinions within the Church, and he has sometimes been referred to as “His Holiness’ loyal opposition”. His books

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26 Orthodox liturgy possesses a high degree of aesthetic and symbolic elements, expressed both by visual elements such as icons, and musical and vocal elements, which are considered crucial to the liturgical experience.
were so controversial that they provoked a declaration from Rome that he could no longer be considered a Catholic theologian or function as such. His emphasis on a more subjective interpretation of theology and revealed truths clashes with the Church’s official teachings about the objective nature of Church teachings and doctrine. A champion of theological reform in the Roman Catholic Church, he has argued for a return to the historical Jesus, as opposed to ecclesiastical tradition and papal infallibility, as the final authority in matters of faith and doctrine. In one of his most influential books, On Being a Christian, his presentation of Christianity as a relevant force to the concerns of modern, humanist contemporary culture has attracted a popular as well as a scholarly readership.


**Bernard Lonergan:** b.1904 -- d.1984

A Canadian Jesuit theologian noted for his methodology of theology. His primary contributions are the instruments he created for “doing” theology and philosophy, and only secondarily, his own theological and philosophical insights.

Lonergan studied at Loyola College in Montreal, and focused his studies on the work of Aquinas. His studies of St. Thomas led him to develop the idea that in order to understand the thinking of Aquinas, an intellectual “conversion” was required. This conversion involved a profound intellectual, moral and religious change that allowed one to “enter into” the mind of Aquinas, in order to retrieve his authentic ideas and avoid the deformations that had occurred at the hands of so-called Thomists.

This laid the foundations of his innovative approach to doing theology and philosophy. He reasoned that a better grasp of human understanding, a better grasp of its operations would lead to better philosophy and theology. Based on this thinking, Lonergan’s theology is concerned with the organization of categories, and the dynamism of questioning and thinking. He also felt that true theology, one that could successfully know the realities that religious texts and traditions express, could only be carried out by theologians that have experienced the intellectual, moral and religious conversion. He believed that this was the only way to critique subjectivism without falling into fideism or fundamentalism.

His principal works are Insight: A Study of Human Understanding (1957) and Method in Theology (1972).

**Johan Babtist Metz:** b.1928 --

German Roman Catholic theologian and professor at the University of Münster, Metz was a leading figure in political theology, seeing Christianity as a means of constructive critique of society and the Church.

His principal works include Theology of the World (1968), and Faith in History and Society (1980).
*John Meyendorff*: b. 1926 -- d. 1992

Born in France, Meyendorff received a strong education at the University of the Sorbonne, and later studied at St. Sergius in Paris. He was ordained an Orthodox priest in 1959, and served as professor, and later as dean at St. Vladimir’s theological seminary in New York. A very accomplished scholar, he produced works dealing with a range of topics, including spirituality, the sacraments, church history, and ecumenism. His doctoral dissertation was on the subject of St. Gregory Palamas, the 14th century apologist of Byzantine hesychastic prayer. By linking the spirituality of Palamas with the spirituality and thought of the Greek patristic Church, he succeeded in revolutionizing the way Palamas was viewed in the West. Palamas was previously dismissed by Western scholars as incongruent with western Church traditions, but Meyendorff effectively rehabilitated his reputation by demonstrating a link and continuity with Catholic tradition. His work is committed to historical orthodoxy and is marked by an openness to Western Christianity, especially Roman Catholicism.

Together with Florovsky, he is remembered as one of the greatest Orthodox theologians and ecumenists of the 20th century. His major works include *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (1959), and *Byzantine Theology* (1973).

*Jürgen Moltmann*: b. 1926 --

Born in Hamburg, this Reformed theologian developed a systematic theology with a particular concern with the significance of current ecological issues. He studied at Göttingen, and was professor at Wuppental, Bonn, and Tübingen. He was influenced by the works of Karl Barth.

The important themes of Moltmann’s theology are Biblical eschatology, human suffering and God’s goodness, and the role of the Holy Spirit. In his book *The Crucified God* (1975) he deals with the nature of Christianity after the Holocaust, in particular God’s loving solidarity with the world in its suffering, through a theological reflection on the cross. *Theology of Hope* (1965) is a work of eschatological theology, focusing on the end times and ultimate judgment of the world, as well as how the eschatological perspective can illuminate the question of God’s righteousness in the face of suffering and evil in the world. The dynamics and action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, and his vision of the Church as messianic community, are expressed in *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (1975).
Wolfhart Pannenberg: b. 1928 --

A German Lutheran theologian, renowned for his use of historical criticism to examine the Bible and Christian doctrine. He studied at Basel with notable figures like Karl Barth and Karl Jaspers. His theological view is passed through a historical lens. In his Revelation and History he claims that History is the most comprehensive horizon of Christian theology. All theological questions and answers have meaning only within the framework of the history which God has with humanity, and through humanity with the whole of creation, directed towards a future which is hidden to the world, but which has already been revealed in Jesus Christ.

His theology is based upon an analysis of universal and publicly accessible history, as in his view revelation is essentially a public and universal historical event which is recognized and interpreted as an act of God.

His major works include Revelation and History (1961), Theology and Philosophy of Science (1974), and Anthropology (1983).

Rosemary Radford Reuther: b. 1936 --

An American theologian and professor at Howard University at Washington, Reuther is a leading Roman Catholic representative of feminist and liberation theology. She has been influential in the formation of "liturgical communities" which seek by their reformulation of the language and ideas of traditional Christianity to effect a so-called "liberation of humanity from patriarchy" and a healing of the split between "masculine" and "feminine", and between mind and body.

She has an ambivalent approach towards the biblical origins of Christianity, which she considers patriarchal in character, but she nevertheless regards Jesus as the embodiment of the reversal of patriarchy.


Karl Rahner: b.1909 -- d.1984

This German born Jesuit is considered to be one of the foremost Roman Catholic theologian of the 20th century. He studied at the university of Freiberg, and was a student of the great German existential philosopher Martin Heidegger. He taught at the universities of Innsbruck, Munich, and Münster. He was forced to leave for the university of Vienna between 1939 to 1944, after the Nazi party closed his theological seminary.

His early work were Christological in nature and were influenced by the philosophies of Kant, Heidegger and Thomism. He attempted to present the thinking of St. Thomas in such a way as to defend it against the criticisms of Kantian thought by integrating Thomistic realism with Heidegger’s philosophy of existential personalism. The theoretical thrust of his theology was based on a theological anthropology examining the transcendental reflection of man’s conscious activity as a spiritual being in the world. He stressed the importance of human experience as the key
to all theological meaning, whereby our experience of the transcendental, that is the Good, the True, 
the Beautiful, the Just, only becomes conscious when we reflect upon the conditions for knowledge. 
He reasoned that the human spirit, our very being, is directed towards the Infinite Being of God. 
He suggests that freedom of choice, all the dynamism of human knowledge are inexplicable without 
their being directed to the ultimate freedom and existence found only in God. His later theology 
focused on the Trinity and God’s self-revelation through the Christian mysteries and their 
connection with man’s personal experience of himself and the world. 

He provided influential contributions at the Second Vatican Council, especially in the field of pastoral theology, where he made the distinction between the charismatic and hierarchical element in the Church. He also defended the value of free speech and public opinion in the Church, and was an advocate of a pastoral approach aimed at fostering personal decision rather than social 
conformity.

His principal works include The Spirit in the World (1939), Hearers of the Word (1941), and 
The Foundations of Christian Faith (1976). His Theological Investigations are a collection of his most important articles that enable interested readers to acquaint themselves with Rahner’s views on a host of topics.

Josef Cardinal Ratzinger: b. 1927 --

A German Catholic theologian. He began his studies for the priesthood just before the 
outbreak of World War II, and so was drafted into the war and even spent some time as a POW. 
When the war was finished he re-entered the seminary, was ordained in 1951, and received his 
doctorate in theology in 1953. He served at the Second Vatican Council as a theological advisor 
to Cardinal Frings of Munich. He took a chair in dogmatic theology at the University of Tuebingen 
in 1966, but left in 1969 when the theology faculty became heavily influenced by Marxism. In 
May 1977 he was appointed Archbishop of Munich and Freising, and less than a month later he was 
elevated to the rank of Cardinal. In 1981 he was named Prefect for the Congregation for the 
Doctrine of the Faith, the highest doctrinal authority in the Roman Catholic Church short of the 
Pope himself.

For over 40 years Ratzinger has had a major role in shaping the Roman Catholic encounter 
with modern culture. He has written several important theological books, helped found the 
international theological journal Communion, and is still the "Vatican watchdog" for doctrine in 
Rome.

Alexander Schmemen: b.1921 -- d.1983

Estonian born, he was ordained to the priesthood in the Orthodox Church in 1946. He 
studied at St. Sergius in Paris, and played a vital role in making St. Vladimir’s seminary in New 
York a center of liturgical and Eucharistic revival.

He was influenced by the “theologie nouvelle” of Jean Daniélou and Louis Boyer, as well as 
Church historian A.V. Kartashov, and the Eucharistic theology of Nikolai Afanassiet. In his

thinking, liturgy played a strong role in theology, and he believed that the mind of the Church is revealed in liturgical worship. The liturgy contains the experiences of Christ, and it also reveals and illustrates the way in which Christ transfigures the world. His theology shows a sharp appreciation for beauty, both in liturgy and poetry, and his work attempted to break down what he thought were false barriers between the sacred and profane, erected by secularism. He strongly condemned secularism for this reason.

He was invited as an orthodox observer to the Second Vatican Council.

**Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza: b.1938 --**

A prominent American feminist theologian and pioneer in feminist studies. Professor at Notre-Dame University and Harvard Divinity School.


**Paul Johannes Tillich: b. 1886 -- d.1965**

A German born, U.S. Lutheran theologian and philosopher, known for his work on Systematic Theology. He pursued his studies at the University of Halle, Germany between 1905 and 1912, after which he became a Lutheran minister, and served as a military chaplain in World War I. After the war he held numerous teaching positions in Germany, until he was barred from teaching and forced out of the country in 1933 for his criticism of Nazi policies. He then found positions in the United States, first at the Union Theological Seminary in New York, then Harvard and the University of Chicago.

His work was primarily concerned with the question of human freedom and the place of God and religious tradition in modern life. His Systematic theology provided a method of correlation where theology is presented as a dialogue relating questions asked by man’s probing reason to answers provided in the revelatory experience, and received in faith. It attempted to find the relation between humanity’s freedom and autonomy and God’s rule. Questions about the powers and limits of human reason prepare us for answers given by revelation; questions about the nature of being lead to answers revealing God as the foundation of being. His work attempted to surpass inadequate concepts of God, using the Protestant principle of justification through faith as a means of illuminating cultural and spiritual life.

His major works are *The Courage to Be* (1952), *Dynamics of Faith* (1957) and the three volumes that represent the culmination of his work, *Systematic Theology* (1931-63).

**Hans Urs Von Balthasaar: b.1905 - d.1988**

A Swiss Jesuit who studied in Zurich, Berlin and Vienna and was heavily influenced by the thinking of Martin Heidegger, the works of theologian Henri de Lubac (1896-1991), patristic
theology and Ignatian spirituality.

In his theology he was adamant about creating a dialogue between Church and culture, a goal which prompted him to leave the Jesuit order to found the Spiritual Institute of St. John. He drew upon various sources and tried to integrate the great traditions of Western philosophy and Eastern mysticism with the Christian faith and vision. The influence of existentialism is very apparent in the importance he places in the understanding of Being as the key to his theology. Balthasar used the "analogy of being" to examine the transcendence of God, and complements this with negative theology. He treated the transcendental properties of Being; unity, goodness, truth and beauty as tools to understand God.

Three principal features of this theology stand out. Firstly, he took a stance against subjectivism when dealing with revelation: he saw the tendency to make anthropology the basis for revealed truth as a temptation which risked ignoring the objectivity of divine revelation. Secondly, he stresses the Trinitarian character of the revelation encountered in Christ. The theme of analogy permeates his work, and he argues that this is the only possible means by which one may speak about God in a language that doesn’t deprive the mystery of God’s nature, and allows the believer the possibility of providing an explanation to that reality. Thirdly, his fundamental theology deals with the problem of existence. This element of his theology is apologetic in nature, making use of a theology of Beauty in order to understand revelation.

His principal works include The Glory of the Lord, which deals with the transcendental property of Beauty, Theo-Drama, which deals with the transcendental property of Goodness, and Theo-Logic, which deals with the transcendental property of Truth.

Metropolitan John Zizioulas: b. 1930 --

Formerly Professor of Theology at Glasgow University and Kings College, London, he is a key figure in major ecumenical dialogues between the Orthodox Church and the other main Christian traditions. He is a leading theologian in the area of “Orthodoxy and Ecology” and he has played a central role in making the Orthodox Church one of the most active religious communities involved with development and environmental issues.
4: The “what” of theology -- Major elements of Christian faith

In order to be able to undertake the study of Christian theology, we obviously need to have some minimal understanding of Christian belief. Given that our theology course is being offered in a secular university, and is open to students of any religious background, I don't want to presume anything. At the same time, it is difficult to present the “beliefs of Christians” given that there has been a great deal of diversity over the years, whether due to the debates between the different schools of theological thought, or because of the division of Christianity into different denominations. This being said, there are certain core beliefs common to all Christian denominations, and these are what we will examine.

Given that these core beliefs may have seen different forms of expression as doctrines over time, I am grouping them into what can be called “doctrinal categories”.

**Doctrinal category #1: God**

It is a non-negotiable Christian belief that God exists. This seemingly obvious element of Christian faith is the foundation stone of all that follows. Apart from the simple affirmation of the existence of God comes a list of characteristics attributed to God which form part of the Christian conception of God. These include:

--- There is only one God.
--- God has existed from all eternity and will continue to exist forever, and does not depend on any outside agency for this continued existence. God’s essence is his existence.
--- God is infinite in nature, and has no limits whatsoever.
--- God is omniscient, He knows all.
--- God is omnipotent, He is almighty and all-powerful.
--- God is perfect: all the attributes of Beauty, Truth, Unity, Goodness, Justice find their ultimate and full expression in God. There is no form of evil in God whatsoever.
--- God is infallible: it is impossible for God to err.
--- God is impeccable: it is impossible for God to sin.
--- God is simple, as opposed to a composite Being. In other words, God is not
composed of distinct elements similar to physical beings who are made up of cells and organs, matter and spirit.

-- God is unchanging in his essence: God's nature does not change with time.
-- God is mysterious: His nature is far beyond the capacity of the human mind to understand in its entirety, and so there will always be things about His nature not yet grasped or understood by human beings.

These characteristics are notable for the fact that they are knowable by philosophical means, that is, the human mind can ascertain these divine attributes without a special revelation from God himself. Many of these features of God were discovered by the earliest philosophers, particularly Plato and Aristotle. Many Eastern philosophies, such as ancient Indian philosophy, are so intertwined with the philosophy of God so as to sometimes be almost indistinguishable from religion.

The Bible affirms this possibility of discovering God by philosophical reflection on the nature and meaning of existence. St. Paul wrote the following in his letter to the Romans:

> Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. (Romans 1:20)

It is as though God is an artist, and the universe is his work of art. It is possible to know a lot about an artist by studying his or her works. At the very least, it is possible to know that the artist existed! This study of God using the created universe as its starting point is sometimes called “natural theology,” and what it studies is called “natural revelation” or “general revelation” (general because it is immediately accessible to all human beings).

This being said, however, there is only so much one can learn about an artist by studying their works. One can obviously learn a lot more by meeting the artist, becoming friends and entering into a dialogue with him or her, a dialogue in which you gradually reveal things about yourselves to each other. Put another way, it is a bit like being in love. As two people love one another over time, they continue to discover new things about each other -- even people married 50 years can still surprise each other! It is part of the Christian belief that God has done exactly this with human beings: our act of faith in God through Jesus is a response of love from human beings to God who has initiated this dialogue of love by revealing himself to humanity, first of all by inspiring prophets to speak on his behalf, and finally by sending Jesus as Son of God. The letter to the Hebrews begins with the following line:

> In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (Hebrews 1:1-2)

This extra revelation that comes from entering into this process of dialogue, which is beyond the general revelation already present in creation, is sometimes called special revelation. The study of the processes by which special revelation occurs is called fundamental theology, because it serves
as the basis upon which all other theology is built.\footnote{27} Thanks to this special Christian revelation, which consists in God revealing himself to human beings more directly than simply in creation, it is possible to know things about God (or to know them more clearly) than through what general revelation alone can bring. For our purposes, we will examine two additional teachings on the nature of God that are particular to special revelation.

*Special revelation point #1: God is a Trinity, He is One and Triune at the same time.*

This dogma of faith consists in the belief that while there is only one God, and that God is utterly one in his essence, he nevertheless consists of a trinity of “persons”: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.\footnote{28} This is an utterly unique conception of God in world religion, and is a significant difference from the belief in God held by the other two major monotheistic religions (Judaism and Islam). Belief in God as a Trinity is so central to Christian faith that it is one of the criteria for membership in the World Council of Churches.\footnote{29} Conversely, a church that holds a vision of the Trinity that is deficient in either recognizing the oneness of God or the divinity of the three persons (or both), is generally not recognized as a Christian church.\footnote{30}

\footnote{27} It should be pointed out that some scholars debate whether there really is a difference between general revelation and special revelation, and whether fundamental theology should include natural theology or not. While these debates are interesting, we will not enter into them for the purpose of this class. It is good for you to know, however, that the debate exists. These distinctions between general and special revelation also point to the possibility of developing a Christian theology of religious pluralism. We should not minimize the differences between the various world religions: there are significant differences. But how are Christians to evaluate the existence of these other religions? Are they simply totally false? Certainly, these religions do not have the fullness of the special revelation (otherwise, they would be Christians!) but the fact that they may be more or less (depending on the religion studied) based on general revelation does mean it is possible for those religions to contain elements which are good and even holy (c.f. Vatican II, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*). As to whether being a believer in such a religion is sufficient to attain salvation, see doctrinal category #3, below.

\footnote{28} In the gospel of Matthew, this “Trinitarian formula” is present explicitly in the passage called the “Great Commission”, Matthew 28:19. A modified form is also found in many of the introductions of the letters of St. Paul, and a general faith in the Trinity is interspersed throughout the New Testament.

\footnote{29} In other words, for a body of people who call themselves Christians to be actually recognized as such and be admitted into the World Council of Churches, they have to hold an orthodox belief in the Trinity as a basic starting point. Cf. WCC Constitution, Article 1, which reads: “The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit”.

\footnote{30} Examples of three such bodies generally not recognized as Christians except by themselves are the Mormons (also known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints), the Jehovah’s Witness, and the Iglesia Ni Christo.
Table: Ways of naming the persons of the Trinity, and their equivalencies.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;Relational&quot; titles</th>
<th>&quot;Numerical&quot; titles</th>
<th>&quot;Theological&quot; titles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>First Person</td>
<td>God (ο theos)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Second Person</td>
<td>Word of God (logos tou theou)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holy Spirit</td>
<td>Third Person</td>
<td>Spirit of God (pneuma tou theou)</td>
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The obvious question that people ask is, "How can God be one and three at the same time?" Countless pages have been written trying to answer this question, and usually resort to analogies to try and make the problem intelligible. St. Patrick, when he evangelized Ireland in the 5th century, used the image of the shamrock: 3 leaves, but together in one plant. St. Augustine of Hippo used a psychological analogy: the human mind has intelligence, will, and memory, and yet is still one in its operations. In more modern times, I like to use the analogy of a portable CD player: the basic unit, as the source of the music, represents the Father; the headphones are the means by which the music is communicated, and they represent the Son; and the music itself is the Holy Spirit. All three components are part of each other, in a sense, and yet they can be distinguished from each other. Apart from analogies, there are attempts to provide metaphysical explanations for the Trinity: the Father as the One who exists, the Holy Spirit as the act of this existence, and the Son as the communication of this Existent One to everything -- including itself.

In some ways it is easier to say what the Trinity is not rather than what it is. Trinitarian theology needs to be approached a bit like the way Michelangelo carved his statues. He used to say that the image of the statue was already present in the block of marble, and that he was only removing the useless bits around it, "freeing up" the statue more and more. Trinitarian theology works a bit like that: it does not describe the Trinity directly (i.e. "carve the statue") but it does remove obstacles to a correct and orthodox understanding of the Trinity, and in doing so makes the exact reality more apparent. It truly is a theological mystery, in the best sense of the term: studying it can always reveal something more. Attempts to understand the Trinitarian nature of God better has been a major driving force in the development of metaphysics, a related philosophical discipline, and the subtle nature of Trinitarian theology has led many to place it as the central form of Christian theology, around which all others gravitate.

Throughout history there have been many controversies regarding the Trinity, and some of these continue even today. Here is a brief review of some of these controversies.

Tritheism is the view that each person of the Trinity is, in fact, a god unto himself. Sometimes they are seen as together comprising a single "godhead", sometimes the door is left open for other gods as well. These views were rejected as far back as the 2nd century, but have resurfaced through the Mormon religion, which is tritheist. Tritheist belief is contrary to Christianity, although because the Trinity is a hard doctrine to grasp other religious groups (such as Judaism and Islam) sometimes consider Christians to be tritheists.

Monarchianism sees only the Father as God, with the Son and Spirit as being properties or creations of God, not as sharing in the fullness of the divinity of the Father. This is the perspective of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Iglesia Ni Cristo, which is why they are not considered as Christian groups by the vast majority of Christians. A version of monarchianism is
subordinationism, which held that the Son and/or the Spirit (depending on the version of subordinationism being considered) was also divine, but not in as complete a manner as the Father (and hence were “subordinate” to him).

Modalism proclaims that there is only one God, and that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not really divine Persons, but are simply modes of God’s action. A version of this is patripassionism, which teaches that the Son and Spirit do not really exist, but are simply names given to the Father. It is called patripassionism because it held that it was the Father, and not the Son, who suffered the Passion and who died on the cross.

There have been many other Trinitarian controversies throughout history, but most have either involved attempting to arrive at a correct understanding of the doctrine of the Incarnation (doctrinal category #2, below) or have been a rehashing of one of these ancient controversies. The major theological controversy on the topic of the Trinity still unresolved today is called the question of the filioque, which currently divides Roman Catholics from Orthodox. It is highly involved and technical discussion, however, so we will not examine in further for the purposes of our class.

Special revelation point #2: God is Love

The belief that “God is love” is taken from the first letter of John (1 John 4:8b). Certainly, there is a sense in Christianity, as in many other religions, that God is a loving being, that “God loves”. But the Christian belief goes even deeper: God’s very Being is love. God is “made out of love,” in a sense. The Catechism of the Catholic Church has a concise explanation of this as follows:

St. John goes even further when he affirms that “God is love”: God’s very being is love. By sending his only Son and the Spirit of Love in the fulness of time, God has revealed his innermost secret: God himself is an eternal exchange of love,
While this statement comes from the catechism of one particular church, this vision of God would probably be shared by most of the Christian churches.

St. Augustine of Hippo connected this idea of God-as-Trinity with God-as-Love by arguing that for God to be made of love required a multiplicity of Persons within God. The Father then, is the Lover, the Son is the Beloved, and the Holy Spirit is the very love that exists between them. God is therefore the most perfect expression of the love that humans can experience and know, and the fact that God is love is the sole motivation for all of his actions. Why did God create the universe? For the same reason why a painter paints or a sculptor sculpts: for the love of the craft and the creation. Why did God send Jesus into the world? The answer is found on placards at sports games around the world: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3: 16).

**Doctrinal category #2: The Incarnation**

The earliest Christian creed is contained in the Bible, and consisted in one statement: “Jesus is Lord.” (1 Corinthians 10:3; Romans 10:9). But the word “Lord” was a special title which in the Jewish religion (of which many of the early Christians were originally a part) was used to refer to God himself. To say “Jesus is Lord” implied a belief that somehow God himself had become incarnate in the person of Jesus. The word “incarnation” itself comes from two Latin words: the preposition “in,” which means the same thing in English as it does in Latin, and the word “caro/carnis”, which means “flesh” or “meat”. The Incarnation, then, refers to the Christian belief that the second person of the Trinity, the Word of God, has come to visit us “in the flesh” in the person of Jesus. This unique and singular manifestation of God in the flesh represents the epitome of revelation. The nature of Jesus’ humanity and divinity has been a point of deep reflection and contention over the centuries.

The Christian faith firmly professes that Jesus was truly God and truly man, not part God or part man, neither a confused mixture of the divine and human. The fact of Jesus’ perfect humanity is found in the Christian belief that he is “like us in all things but sin.” The letter to the Hebrews states:

> Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:14-15)

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31 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 221.

32 Apart from these passages, and the passage from the letter to the Hebrews previously shown, the Gospel of John explicitly testifies to incarnation in its opening chapters, “In the beginning as the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God…He came to his own and his own people did not recognize him…The Word became flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory…” John 1:1, 11-14.
As the same time, the Bible states that the Son of God pre-existed his Incarnation as Jesus:

> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (Phillippians 2:5-7)

He is a human being, like the rest of humanity in all ways except sin, while remaining truly God. This article of faith, although theologically sound (supported as it is by both Scripture and Tradition), remains a mystery in the sense that while Christians may profess it, it can always be further explored. This has led to a certain number of controversies, particularly in the early church.

The docetists rejected the humanity of Jesus, and tended to see the person of Jesus as having been some kind of projection from God, and not really human (or not even physically real). This earliest of heresies was rejected by none other than the apostle St. John himself, when he wrote:

> Many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. (2 John 7)

Gnosticism tended to reject the humanity of Jesus, either in whole or in part, and was refuted by the early leaders of the Church (especially St. Irenaeus of Lyons, in his work *Adversus Haeresis*, “Against the Heresies,” written in the second century). There is such a variety of views expressed in gnosticism that the word really refers to a category of belief rather than an organized religious movement, but it is interesting to note that gnostic ideas tend to resurface independently from time to time, and even now certain gnostic texts (and their interpretations) have become prominent once again on the shelves of major bookstores.\(^{33}\)

Adoptionism was the view first advanced by Theodotus the Tanner in the 2\(^{nd}\) century that Jesus began his existence as a man upon whom “Christ” descended at his baptism. This divine descent, attributed to the Holy Spirit, made Jesus the adopted son of God. This view was condemned by Pope St. Victor in 190 A.D.

Arianism is named after Arius, a priest of Alexandria, who taught that the Son of God was neither fully divine nor eternal, but that God had created him at some point. His position was rejected by the Council of Nicea I (325 A.D.). The Council confirmed the Christian position that Christ was fully man and fully God, and enshrined this belief in the Nicene Creed, a profession of the central tenets of Christian faith.\(^{34}\) Of course, simply stating that Jesus is both divine and human does not solve the problem immediately. Other controversies erupted, attempting to explain how the two work together.

Apollinarism (founded by Bishop Apollinaris of Laodicea) taught that Jesus had a human body but did not have a soul. These views began with the premise that salvation could be effected

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34 The Nicene Creed states “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ…eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, One in Being with the Father…”
by God only if Christ's divinity and humanity were united. But, it objected, this unity would be destroyed by the divine Word's assumption of a complete human nature. It then concluded that the Word of God supplied the place of the human soul, taking merely a human body to serve as His blind instrument, almost as if Jesus was under “remote control” from heaven. Apollinarism was rejected at a council in Rome in 377 A.D.

Nestorianism (founded by Patriarch Nestorius of Constantinople, who was later deposed for his views) began with a rejection of Apollinarism, and affirmed the importance of Jesus' human nature. But he went even further, and taught that just as there were two natures in Jesus, there must have been two persons, a human person and a divine person. He rejected the title of “Mother of God” (in Greek: theotokos) for Mary, preferring “Mother of Christ” (in Greek: Christotokos), meaning that Mary would have given birth only to the human nature of Jesus (and implying that the two natures are not perfectly united). The Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.) rejected his views and affirmed the title of “Mother of God” for Mary.\footnote{As a point in interest, the basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome was erected by Pope Sixtus III after the council as a dedication to “Mary, Mother of God”. The location was picked after the occurrence of the “Miracle of the Snows”.} Sadly, miscommunication between elements of the Roman empire and Christians in Persia (outside Roman jurisdiction) led to a division in the Church, a division which continues today with the Assyrian Church of the East (who are still sometimes accused of being Nestorians).

Monophysitism (likely founded by the monk Eutyches of Egypt) taught that the two natures were united, but because the divine nature must be so much more significant that the human nature the human nature was absorbed into it “as a drop of water falling into the sea is quickly absorbed to disappear in the great expanse.” His views were rejected at the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.), which affirmed the teaching of Pope St. Leo I, that

\begin{quote}
We ought to acknowledge . . . one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-Begotten, in two natures, without confusion, change, division, separation; the differences in natures being in nowise taken away by the union. On the contrary, the property of each is preserved, and concurs into one person and one hypostasis.\footnote{St. Leo the Great, \textit{Tome to Flavian}.}
\end{quote}

Unfortunately (again) the way in which the decrees were enforced by the Imperial government (or sometimes by a mob) and resisted (again, sometimes by a mob) led to bitter feelings, especially in Egypt, parts of Syria, and Armenia. This led to another schism which endures to this day, with members of these churches called the \textit{Oriental Orthodox} (to distinguish them from the Eastern Orthodox, who are more closely associated with the Great Schism of 1054 A.D.). For centuries the Oriental Orthodox were accused of being monophysites by Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox (they, in turn, accused these others of being Nestorians), but today there is general agreement that this has largely been a sad misunderstanding of terminology made worse by bitter feelings. There have even been official statements by the churches concerned proclaiming this new mutual understanding, so while monophysitism is still a heresy, the Oriental Orthodox are no longer considered monophysites (at least by Catholics and most Eastern Orthodox).
There have been many other controversies regarding the Incarnation, such as monothelitism, which held that while Jesus might have had a human soul he did not have a human free will, and iconoclasm, which held that while Jesus did have a human body that through its union with a divine nature was worthy of worship, it was not valid to have pictures or statues of Jesus. Despite these controversies, there is a general term than can be used to describe theologies of the Incarnation that match with Christian belief: the hypostatic union, which means the consubstantial nature of Jesus with God the Father. In other words, Jesus fully retained his human individuality while at the same time his essence was one and the same as that of God. Vatican II stated this well in this passage:

He who is the ‘image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), is himself the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam that likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin. Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in him, has been raised in us also to a dignity beyond compare. For, by his incarnation, he, the son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved.” (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no. 22)

Doctrinal category #3: Salvation

The symbol the early Christians used to represent themselves was the symbol of a fish. It came from the Greek word “icthys,” which literally means fish, but for the early Christians was also an acrostic for their statement of faith: Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour. Of all the elements they could have put into their basic statement of faith, they chose to find a symbol that emphasized their belief that Jesus came as Son of God for a reason: to act as the saviour of all humanity.

The word salvation comes from the Latin word salus, meaning “health”. If Jesus is our saviour, then literally it means he is our “health-bringer”. This analogy with health helps us to understand the mission of Jesus better. Jesus is like a doctor, who comes to heal us of our sicknesses, especially the spiritual sickness of sin (and who also teaches us how to avoid that sickness in the future). That being said, health is not just the absence of sickness! Jesus is also our “fitness trainer,” who comes to help show us a path to the greatest level of spiritual health possible, by giving our lives direction and meaning and giving us a path to personal excellence. The branch of theology that studies these processes of salvation is called soteriology, from the Greek word soteros, i.e. “saviour”.

This mission of salvation is accomplished in several ways. The most important kind of
salvation is *salvation from sin*. There is basic Christian understanding that, while God created the universe and created it good, a certain evil has infected the world from the origins of humanity that taints every human being. This is called *original sin*, and on its own it creates a separation between God and humanity. In addition, the weakness of original sin makes it much easier for us to fall into personal *actual sins*, by which we individually ratify (and even wallow in) this state of separation. But it is also a basic Christian understanding that God, out of love for sinful humanity, decided to take the initiative himself to close this distance. Jesus, by being perfectly human (but without sin) and perfectly divine, is the means of closing this gap, and the specific means Jesus used to close this gap was his death on the cross. Jesus “died for us,” as the expression goes, and in doing so allows our free will an opportunity for another kind of choice. The cross is meant to be an ultimate sign of God’s love for humanity, and Jesus himself said, as he spoke of his own impending death, that “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) Jesus’ death is meant to show us the extent to which God is willing to go in his love for us. In doing so, the cross becomes a salvific symbol, because rather than becoming stuck in a pattern of sin that ratifies the state of separation, a human being can now make the choice of faith, a choice that ratifies instead the love of God for us as expressed by the cross. In doing so, in accepting this love of God for us and in committing ourselves to God through faith in Jesus, the gap between God and the human person is closed.\(^{39}\) The doctrine that tries to describe exactly how all of this works is called the doctrine of the *atonement*, and is closely related to another doctrine called *justification*.\(^{40}\)

When we go to the doctor to be treated for illness, however, it is not always just medicine that we receive, but also a certain education in how our very bodies work. A good doctor will explain what is going on, and try to give us tips to avoid behaviours (smoking, bad diet, etc.) that lead to sickness. Jesus undertakes something similar, in that he also offers a *salvation from spiritual ignorance*. In many cases Jesus offers clear explanation outlining what is good behaviour and what is evil behaviour, and he expected his disciples to follow his teachings. He himself said “You are my friends if you do what I command you.” (John 15:14) Placing our faith and trust in Jesus by becoming his disciples implies in turn that we accept a certain “discipline” in life, a certain pattern and way of life outlined by Jesus. Much of Jesus’ teaching is exactly this, an outline of the path of discipleship, as well as related spiritual teachings that lay the foundation for the rationale of this new life of discipleship. In exchange for this offering of our lives, however, we gain something far greater: our lives take on new meaning. Life begins to have a purpose, even in moments of suffering. In exchange for spiritual ignorance, Jesus offers us meaning in life, a life worth living.

As mentioned before, however, Jesus is not only a doctor, he is a fitness trainer as well. A Christian is someone offered the chance to rise above being simply a “good person” to become an “excellent person”. There is no reason to be a mediocre Christian! Jesus prayed the following prayer to God the Father at the Last Supper:

\(^{39}\) The very word “religion” implies this process of closing the gap. In its origin, the word means “to bind together again”, similar to the French word “relier”.

\(^{40}\) Disagreement on the exact nature and process of justification has been (and in many cases continues to be) the major difference between Roman Catholics and Protestants.
INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world. (John 17: 20-24)

This is a tremendous spiritual promise, in that it implies that it is possible, through the power of God, to transcend our humanity even to the point of sharing in the glory of God.\(^{41}\) This process of “growing in godliness” is called *divinisation* (in Greek *theosis*), and points to the ultimate goal of salvation: spiritual union with God, in which, while we remain totally ourselves, the total love which we live and express means it is hard to tell where we end and where God begins. The fact that Christians are called to divinisation also points to an important reality, that faith is a journey and not a destination. It is like the concept of mystery: no matter how much we grow in goodness and holiness, there is always more growth possible.\(^{42}\)

To finish with the "health-bringer" analogy, there is one final category of person who brings us health: rescue worker. No matter how much we jog or watch out diet, if we are trapped in burning house we need someone to come rescue us. This is the point of the *Second Coming* of Jesus at the end of time. To summarize this doctrine, Christians believe that Jesus did rise from the dead and ascend to heaven, and that one day he will come in glory to inaugurate the final rule of God on Earth. While many people are actually quite nervous about the idea of the Second Coming, in fact it is going to be a time of final rescue and salvation. Jesus taught that, shortly before the end of time, there would be a time of great spiritual and moral darkness in humanity, and the Bible has many graphic descriptions of this time.\(^{43}\) Just as it would seem that evil is about to triumph,

\(^{41}\) In the theological language we say that human beings are *capax Dei*, i.e. are “capable of God”. St. Augustine of Hippo once famously remarked: “God became man so that man might become god” (*Sermon 13 de Tempore*). This does not mean that humans can become other gods -- from a Christian point that would be heresy -- but it does mean that we can become reflections of the glory of God.

\(^{42}\) This reality also implies that the idea of being a “good enough Christian” is a bit of a fraud. It is like a human romantic relationship: if it stops growing, it stagnates. Love needs to either grow, or it will die, because it is not being true to itself, and there is no limit to its possible growth. Christianity, in a sense, can be summed up as a “love relationship with God,” and so this divinisation process points to the same reality: that love needs to always grow, or it will die as well.

\(^{43}\) Take this passage as an example: “You will hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:6-14)
However, and drive the last sparks of God’s light from the world, God will call a stop to it and Jesus will return again to turn the tables and expel all evil from the universe. (This will include not only moral evil, but even physical evils like entropy, disease, and death, and every person who ever lived will rise from the dead in a new body.) This period of great difficulty is often referred to as the “tribulation,” and the branch of theology that tries to understand the end times and its results is called eschatology (from the Greek word eschaton, meaning “end-point”). There has been much speculation in recent years about the tribulation and the Second Coming, fueled both by the anxiety around the year 2000 and by the popularity of a series of fictional books called the “Left Behind” series (which offers one of several possible types of views of the tribulation and end times). Theology can help clarify the issues involved and point people to the future in hope, not in fear.

There is one last major issue in soteriology that needs to be tackled, and this is: who can be saved? If Jesus is the one who brings salvation, what about people who don’t believe in Jesus because (for example) they never heard of him? Or they never got an accurate picture of him? There have been various responses to this question. On one extreme, there is a “hard-line” theology which states that humanity is a “massa damnata” (Latin for “mass of people destined for damnation”), from which only a privileged few can be saved (and too bad for the rest). On the other extreme is the theology of apocatastasis, which states that everyone will be saved eventually, even the fallen angels, despite the teaching of Jesus to the contrary.44 It is a basic Christian belief that everyone in heaven has accepted Jesus and believes in him, in that when we die it isn’t St. Peter we meet at the gates of heaven, it is Jesus himself. Jesus himself said, in the parable of the Good Shepherd (in which all people are called his “flock”),

I am the door [of the sheep]; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. (John 10:9)

It is impossible, therefore, to get into heaven without encountering and accepting Jesus at some point. But while everyone in heaven might be a believer in Jesus, does it follow that only believers in Jesus get into heaven? Not necessarily. While there are some schools of theology that hold that an explicit personal acceptance of Jesus is necessary while we are alive, other schools of theology hold that, for people who do not have the chance to properly hear about Jesus for whatever reason, the general revelation God has offered in all creation can predispose a person to an implicit faith in Jesus sufficiently so that when they encounter him as the “gate” they will recognize him and be able to enter heaven. Salvation still comes through Jesus, but people are not asked to do the impossible. As the saying goes, in this view you have to “live by your lights”. If we have been fortunate to receive the light of a direct, clear and credible proclamation of the gospel of Jesus, then we are obliged to live by it, but if not, we have to live the best we can in the meantime.

Is it possible that there are other “doors” into heaven, apart from Jesus? Can a person be saved through faith in a different spiritual leader, say Buddha or Mohammed? The general answer in Christian belief is no. While there are theories of soteriology that allow for this “many paths” approach to salvation, many if not most of them stretch the Christian understanding of salvation to

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44 See, for example, the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, in Luke 16:19-31.
its extremes (or even beyond). The simple fact is that the Bible itself teaches that

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given
among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

Nevertheless, some of the “many paths” theories are interesting, and may represent a genuine
development of this distinction between explicit and implicit faith. Each individual theory needs
to be considered on its own merits, without leaving behind this key Biblical principle.

**Doctrinal category #4: The Holy Spirit**

While it is fine to say that Jesus came to Earth as the “health-bringer” (saviour), and that he
will come again one day, a key question remains: what do we do in the meantime? After all, the
current moment of history stands between these two events. Are we simply to wait around? Is God
simply waiting around? In fact, it is the Christian belief that God is continuing his saving action in
the world, through the presence of the Holy Spirit. The study of this action of the Holy Spirit, and
how it works, is called *pneumatology* (from the Greek *pneuma*, meaning “air” or “spirit”).

Just as the theology of the Incarnation focusses on the particular historical person of Jesus
(sometimes referred to as the “Christ-event”), pneumatology turns in a particular way to the event
of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, 50 days after Easter:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.
And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it
filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues
as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with
the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them
utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every
country under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were
bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. And they
were amazed and wondered, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?
And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and
Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus
and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to
Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians,
we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." And all were
amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others
mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed
them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and
give ear to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only
the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘And
in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all
flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall
see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and
my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.
This event is so central to pneumatology that there is a world-wide spiritual movement called the “Pentecostal movement,” to which the various Pentecostal churches belong, but also the Charismatic Renewal movement in the Catholic church.

Pentecost has had two important meanings in the history of theology. First of all, it was the first occasion on which the disciples received the gift of glossolalia, otherwise called “speaking in tongues,” along with other personal spiritual gifts. Pentecost has also been called the “birth of the Church,” i.e. the occasion upon which the disciples went from being simply a collection of believers to being a truly united “body,” animated by one and the same Spirit. For this reason, the study of the action of the Holy Spirit generally examines two dimensions of that action: a personal dimension, and a corporate (or community) dimension.

The personal dimension

You may be familiar with the phrase “your body is a temple,” but did you know that this expression comes from the Bible? We find it in several places, such as this reference in the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? (1 Corinthians 6:19)

To state that “the body is a temple” is an affirmation of a key theological (and spiritual) concept: the “indwelling” of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the just. In a sense each individual believer, by being justified through faith in Jesus (as we saw in doctrinal category #3), is able to live their own personal version of Pentecost and become in turn a “temple of the Spirit”. Pneumatology studies how exactly this indwelling works, how the various gifts of the Holy Spirit are applied in the life of the believer, and so on.

There are many theories of personal pneumatology out there (and the explosive growth of the Pentecostal movement has led to the development of many more) but generally these theories divide the effects of the action of the Holy Spirit in individual believers into separate categories:

-- “Theological virtues” (generally listed as faith, hope, and charity) are stable alterations of a believer’s personality and outlook on life (i.e. by having the Holy Spirit in your heart you look at life a bit differently and act differently). While these virtues originate in the action of the Holy Spirit, their impact and effect can be strengthened in the life of the believer by the choice of acts that build up (or tear down) the virtues. For example, actually choosing to do (and doing) charitable acts will build the theological virtue of charity.

-- The expression “gifts of the Spirit” generally applies to those listed in Isaiah 11:2, which reads:

The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11:2)
In this understanding, a spiritual gift means a stable “power,” a kind of spiritual instinct which becomes activated in the soul of the believer upon whom “the Spirit of the Lord shall rest.” In other words, thanks to having the indwelling of the Spirit, a believer acquires access to special spiritual wisdom, understanding, knowledge, strength, etc.

The “charisms” are also gifts of the Holy Spirit, but while each individual justified believer is supposed to receive all the gifts listed above, charisms are gifts which are not distributed universally. Some of these are listed in the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (1 Corinthians 12:4-11)

As you can see in this passage, not everyone gets each and every charism personally, but everyone enjoys the benefits of the charisms because they are meant to be used in service to the common good.

The “fruits of the Spirit” are the direct effects of having the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in one’s heart. This list in Paul’s letter to the Galatians is generally considered normative:

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

The word “fruit” is appropriate in that you cannot force a plant to bear fruit, but you can enjoy those fruits when they come, and you can tend to the plant to help it to bear even more fruit. It is the same with the fruits of the Spirit. Unlike the virtues, which can be directly increased by choosing acts which amplify them, the fruits can only be collected when they come, i.e. they cannot be provoked. But just as with a plant, as the Spirit grows in his indwelling in us, these fruits tend to grow as well.

As you can well imagine, the doctrinal category of “Holy Spirit” is critical in a special way to spiritual theology, as it is the action of this Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers that drives genuine spiritual growth. The doctrinal category of “Holy Spirit” is also important to moral theology, in that (in most theories of pneumatology) there is a recognition that it is possible to “chase out” the Holy Spirit from one’s soul by committing serious sins. Jesus himself refers to this when he states:

Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin. (Mark 3:29)
What exactly this “sin against the Spirit” is has been a matter of some speculation, but it does point to the seriousness of the question, and shows the link between pneumatology and moral theology.

**The corporate (or community) dimension**

The expression “temple of the Spirit” is also applied to the church as a whole, in that those believers together constitute one “body” in which God dwells:

> We are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (2 Corinthians 6:16)

An early image of the Spirit in this context sees the Holy Spirit as the “soul” of the Church, animating and guiding the Church and acting as its source of unity. As such, the study of the Holy Spirit is closely tied to the theological discipline of ecclesiology, or theology of the Church. Just as individual believers receive virtues, gifts, charisms, and fruits, the Church as a “body” also has its own set of Spirit-inspired characteristics. There is tremendous variation in the various ecclesiological positions of the different Christian religious traditions, so sometimes there is little agreement on what these Spirit-inspired characteristics are, but the following ones are considered classic.

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Thanks to the presence of the Spirit, the church is usually considered to be *indefectible*, that is to say, it cannot lose its essence. Jesus, when he promised to send the Holy Spirit to his disciples, mentioned the following:

> The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14:26)

In other words, thanks to the presence of the Holy Spirit, we can be assured that the faith which we have in our day and age, despite whatever forces may have acted on it and whatever development of doctrine may have taken place, is substantially the same faith that Jesus himself invited people to all those centuries ago.

A bit more controversial is the notion that the church is *infallible*. Infallibility is, in a sense, the flip side of indefectibility. Indefectibility refers to the continuance of the essence of the church, as expressed in its origins, while infallibility is the gift which allows that essence to grow and develop while remaining true to itself. As Jesus mentioned in the previous Biblical passage, the presence of the Spirit not only acts as a collective “memory” for the Church (indefectability), but also guides the Church in the application of those teachings (infallibility).

Did the members of the early church consider themselves to be receiving these gifts of indefectability and infallability? A hint can be found in the passages of the Acts of the Apostles related to the Council of Jerusalem. This meeting of the apostles and other early church leaders assembled to consider what elements of the Jewish Law (if any) should apply
to non-Jewish converts. In the letter to they sent to the community of converts, they stated:

\[
\text{It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things... (Acts 15:28)}
\]

This brief reference to the Holy Spirit implies they considered their meeting, and its resolution, to have been guided in a special way by that Spirit. Still, believing that the church \textit{can} be guided by the Holy Spirit does not solve the problem of \textit{how} it happens. The exact mechanisms for the application of these gifts (especially infallibility) have been hotly debated through the centuries. Protestants generally ascribe infallibility only to the whole body of believers (if they accept the notion of infallibility at all). The Orthodox will generally extend the charism of infallibility also to an \textit{ecumenical council}, that is to say, a gathering of bishops representative of all the bishops of the world. The Roman Catholic church has the most developed theology of infallibility, accepting the Orthodox position but also extending the gift of infallibility in certain well defined circumstances to the ministry exercised by the bishop of Rome i.e. the Pope.

It should be noted that these two gifts of indefectibility and infallibility are often confused with the concept of \textit{impeccability}, which means “sinlessness” or “inability to sin”. These should not be confused. There is no serious theological tradition in any church which ascribes \textit{de facto} moral perfection to either the membership or leadership of the Church. The Pope, the bishops, the pastors of whatever tradition remain sinners no matter what additional special gifts they may or may not receive on behalf of the Church. They even retain the capacity to become heretics in their private opinions, just not to such an extent that the Church would as a body lose its gifts of indefectibility.

For churches with a strong liturgical and sacramental tradition, especially Catholics, Orthodox, and some Anglicans, the Holy Spirit is seen as the source of power that makes those sacraments effective. For a ritual sacrament, such as baptism or the Eucharist, it is the Spirit that transforms them from simple rituals into sacred moments in which God is truly present and active. For example, in both the Catholic Mass and the Orthodox Divine Liturgy (both of which are ritual re-presentations of the Last Supper of Jesus) the central prayer contains what is called an \textit{epiclesis}, in which God is asked to send the Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine in order to change them into the Body and Blood of Christ. Without belief in the presence of the Holy Spirit, this liturgy would essentially be a kind of pantomime, without any real concrete connection to God.

The term “sacrament” does not only apply to rituals, however. It can also apply to the products of a sacrament. Each Christian who receives the ritual sacrament of baptism becomes a sacrament in his or her own right -- a sacrament of the presence of God in the world, thanks to the indwelling of the Spirit already mentioned. A deacon, priest, or bishop who receives the sacrament of holy orders becomes, through that ordination, a sacrament of the ministry and work of Christ, but any additional “powers” they may receive connected to their ministry are only operative thanks to the Holy Spirit. When the Eucharist is consecrated and becomes the Body and Blood of Christ, it is only thanks to the continued
presence of the Spirit that these elements don’t suddenly revert back to normal bread and wine (whose external properties it continues to have).

There are four “marks” of the Church that are generally considered to be signs of the continued action of the Holy Spirit. These are (1) unity, (2) holiness, (3) universality, and (4) apostolicity. The exact meaning and interpretation of these four marks will vary from denomination to denomination, but there is a general recognition that these four things reflect blessings that come from the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

Where there is unity, which starts in unity of faith but has its highest achievement in unity of love, there is the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, if Christians are divided amongst themselves, and are not loving one another, somehow the gift of unity offered by the Holy Spirit has been rejected.

Where there is holiness, especially holiness in the lives of believers and in the culture in which they live, there is the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, if believers are turning a blind eye to evil or sin, or if the culture is hostile to holiness, then somehow the gift of holiness offered by the Spirit is not being received.

Where the Church consists of people from all languages, races, cultures, and social classes, the gift of universality is being lived. When the church is living internal separations between people of different languages, races, cultures, and social classes, then the gift of universality is not being lived.

Where the Church is making an effort to live faithfully according to the teaching of the apostles, and doing its best to continue the mission of the apostles to invite others to faith in Jesus, the gift of apostolicity is being lived. The abandonment of apostolic teaching, or a lukewarm enthusiasm for the faith, are signs the gift of apostolicity is not being welcomed and lived.

What do these 4 “marks” mean in practical terms? It means that if you were to take all the persons living in the Holy Spirit and place them together to form a society, and you were to take all the persons who are not living in the Holy Spirit and place them together to form another society, you would observe that the “Holy Spirit society” was more united in purpose, had less crime and other morally-related social ills, and was more open to people of all backgrounds.

Conclusion

These four major doctrinal categories -- God, Incarnation, Salvation, and Holy Spirit -- and their related theological disciplines (Trinitarian theology, Christology, soteriology, and pneumatology) form together a kind of superstructure for the building of theology. For this reason it is important that any student of theology, at some point, become familiar with the contents of these four disciplines. It is a bit like the steel girders of a building: we do not always see the girders,

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45 The classic formula to describe these is that the Church is “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic”.

but nevertheless they form the structure of the building and keep it upright and strong. These four disciplines, taken together, constitute the “steel girders” for any theological construction. No matter what area of theology you are interested in, ultimately that branch ties into at least one (and by extension, all) of these four disciplines. They are not optional areas of interest.
Chart: The major subdivisions of theology

THEOLOGY

Systematic (a.k.a. speculative)
- Apologetics
- Dogmatics
  - Trinitarian Theology
  - Christology
  - Mariology
  - Josephology
  - Ecclesiology
  - Anthropology
  - Angelology / Demonology
  - Eschatology
  - Pneumatology
  - Soteriology
  - Sacramental Theology
- Moral Theology
- Spiritual Theology
  (Aesthetic & Mystical)

Practical Theology
- Canon Law
- Missiology
- Catechetics
- Ecumenics
- Pastoral Theology
- Liturgics
- Homiletics

Positive Theology
- Fundamental
- Biblical
- Exegesis

Negative Theology (Apophatic Theology)

Historical studies
- Church history
- Hagiography
- History of Dogma / Theology
- Patrology / patristics
- Heresiology


5: The major subdivisions of theology

In general, any field of science or human knowledge can be subdivided into component disciplines. Biology, for example, is the study of living things. This is a vast subject, however, so biology gets divided into botany (the study of plants), zoology (the study of animals), bacteriology (the study of bacteria), and so on. Each of these can in turn be subdivided, and all kinds of controversies can erupt about the best way to subdivide the sciences and the relationships between them. Theology is no different. Simple “theology” is a vast science, and like any other field of knowledge it has its sub-sciences (and its own controversies as well).

There is no general agreement on how to best show the sub-disciplines of theology, but it is good for students of theology to know that they exist. The diagram on the opposite page is my own attempt, as your theology teacher, to present these sub-disciplines in a comprehensible manner. Theology can therefore be divided into five distinct sections that exhaust the range of subjects covered by the discipline.

Positive Theology

Positive theology is the fundamental theology that seeks to determine what God has revealed to mankind. It examines the process of divine revelation and how it works. It also seeks to determine precisely what it is God has revealed, and what he has not.

Fundamental theology examines more closely the process of divine revelation, as well as its preservation in history.

Biblical theology tries to determine how we are to understand the Bible as such, i.e. as an inspired book. It look as the process of the creation and inspiration of the Bible, as well as how the different parts of the Bible interrelate.

Exegesis is the science of the detailed analysis of Biblical passages and Biblical manuscripts, and is closely related to the manuscript science of paleography. Exegesis requires a strong familiarity with Biblical languages, and is very demanding in this respect.
Systematics (aka speculative theology)

The systematic branch of theology tries to take the data of Revelation and form it into a single coherent picture. Inevitably, however, the theologian comes to know some part of this data better than others, so systematics can be sub-divided into the following specialties.

Apologetics: This is the branch of theology that tries to find answers to the various objections people raise to elements of the Christian faith, or to the Christian faith as such. It is one of the earliest types of speculative theology.

Dogmatics: This area of theology is concerned with making positive statements of the faith, and confirming truths that are deemed a necessary part of Christian faith. This area is further divided into areas dealing with more specific areas of Christian faith.

Trinitarian theology: concerned with the nature of God as three persons in one divinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Christology: concerned with the identity, person and mission of Jesus Christ

Mariology: concerned with the person of Mary, virgin mother of Jesus.

Josephology: concerned with the person of Joseph, husband of Mary and adoptive father of Jesus.

Ecclesiology: concerned with the nature of the Church, as well as fundamental elements of its structure.

Anthropology: concerned with developing a theological vision of human nature, and the manner in which grace and original sin affect that nature.

Angelology and Demonology: concerned with the study of angels and demons as created spiritual beings.

Eschatology: concerning the end of time and the final judgment of the world, as well as the afterlife.

Pneumatology: concerned with the Holy Spirit.

Soteriology: concerned with understanding the meaning and process of salvation.

Sacramental theology: concerned with the nature of the sacraments as vehicles of grace, and their proper use.
Moral Theology: Fundamental moral theology examines the question of what constitutes right and good action, based on revelation. It looks at how Christians should live their lives. This area deals with a host of moral fields, such as bioethics, social justice, and marriage and family (human sexuality).

Spiritual theology: This addresses the question of how we should pray and find communion with God. It has two types: ascetic, which studies the actions we undertake to find God, and mystical, which studies the activity of God in the life of the believer.

Practical Theology

Practical theology deals with the implementation of Christian doctrine to different categories of Christian life. The major categories are

Canon Law: the formulation and application of a legal code of conduct based in Christian belief whose goal is to achieve the common good of the Church as a Christian society (as opposed to moral law, which seeks the particular good of Christians).

Missiology: Concerned with the ‘how’, that is, the practical challenges of missionary work.

Catechetics: Deals with the practical problems surrounding the effective transmission of the faith, and the formation of members of the Church as disciples.

Ecumenics: All work that is concerned with the pursuit of Church unity.

Pastoral theology: Concerned with the practical requirements of the care and leadership of God’s people.

Liturgics: Concerned with studying the ways Christians worship as a community.

Homiletics: Concerned with the art and science of preaching.

Negative (apophatic) theology

The domain of negative theology is all those areas of theology that challenge our established notions of what we know about the reality of God. The name of "negative" theology implies that it is concerned with studying all those things that God "is not." By challenging our certainties, it reminds us of the limits of our capacity to know God. It is useful for the purpose of shattering ideas of God, invented in the process of trying to understand Him, but which prevent union with the genuine article.

An early example of negative theology can be found in the body of works attributed to
Dionysius the Aeropagite. In the work the *Divine Names*, two ways of approaching God are proposed: the *Via Positiva*, the affirmative way, and the *Via Negativa*, a negative way. In the first way, the most universal and general names are attributed to God, followed by progressively more intermediate and particular names. Beginning with affirmations such as "God is Being; God is Goodness; God is Power; God is Beauty, etc.," that ascribe to God transcendental attributes, he narrows the attributes to more banal descriptions of God, often metaphorical in nature; ‘God is the King, God is stone, God is air, etc.’. In the negative way, he begins by denying those very same attributes ascribed to God in the previous way. He therefore states that ‘God is not stone; God is not King; God in not Being.’ The exercise is meant to remind us that the limitations of our language when we attribute characteristics to God, and to warn against the tendency to anthropomorphize God by describing Him with human qualities. His point is that God transcends the attributes given to Him. That is not to say that God in not good, or powerful, or Being, but rather that He is all those things but in a way that far surpasses our human understanding of them. He is hyper-Good, hyper-Powerful and hyper-Being.

Another dramatic example of negative theology occurred towards the end of the life of St. Thomas Aquinas. Ill and waning, it is said that he experienced a mystical vision of God, after which he summoned his faithful secretary and demanded that he take all his theological works, which were of tremendous, and burn them. After witnessing the unveiled truth of God, he explained to his servant that everything he had reasoned and written concerning the divine was “as chaff,” fit only for the furnace, when compared to the real thing. This demonstrates that whatever conception the human mind can grasp about God, no matter how brilliant the mind, it is as nothing compared to the reality which lies beyond our ability to fully comprehend.

**Historical studies**

While not really theology *per se*, various historical studies are closely related to the study of theology and help support it.

*Church history:* The study of the history of Christianity and its development through the ages provides a necessary context for the study of Christian doctrine and theology.

*History of theology and history of dogma:* A historical study of the actual development of theology and doctrine over time, and of the events, councils and important theologians and thinkers who were responsible for the establishment and development of Christian doctrine.

*Heresiology:* Hand in hand with a study of theology, the examination of the heresies which galvanized the intellectual defenders of the faith is very useful. The propagation of non-Christian teachings and interpretations of Christian doctrine has always been a driving force behind the reinforcement of core Church beliefs. The indirect fruits of heretical movements has been the production of literature refuting them, which in turn explicitly expound sound Christian beliefs.

*Hagiography:* The study of the lives of the saints not only shows how Christian doctrine can
be put into action in the lives of exceptional members of the faithful, but also illuminates the intellectual endeavours of theologians with those spiritual insights into the questions surrounding the nature of God and Church that only the saints can contribute. The concrete application of Christian doctrines in the life of an individual can provide a profound look at the meaning of those doctrines, and a study of the mystical experiences of many saints also allows us to deepen the merely intellectual understanding of divine revelation.

Patrology / patristics: The study of the early “Fathers of the Church”, as well as their doctrine and writings. Because these authors lived and worked in a time much closer to the actual events of the New Testament, their thought is considered by many to have special value as a witness to authentic Christian tradition.
Theology does not happen in a vacuum. As we saw in the section on the Holy Spirit, one of the major consequences of having a Holy Spirit is the gathering together of believers into the Church. But while there is only “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5), the simple fact is that there are multiple Christian denominations in the world. Each carries its own doctrinal traditions, its own manner of worshipping God, and its own placement in and interpretation of culture. And no one is born into their own denomination of one. Even if a Christian wanted to found his or her own denomination -- a practice St. Paul strongly condemned in his first letter to the Corinthians -- he or she would be starting off from some base of received tradition. Theology is part of this base, and so while it strives to know the Truth (which transcends denominational considerations) theology is also necessarily coloured by those particular Christian traditions. And so we have to study them.

Major Christian subdivisions

East and West

The first major distinction that needs to be made in studying Christian denominations is the distinction between East and West. These have been called the “two lungs” of the Church. Each Christian denomination has traditionally been described as either Eastern or Western, although there are some that are harder to classify.

The terms “East” and “West” relate to the subdivisions of the Roman Empire put into place by Emperor Diocletian during his reign (285 - 305 A.D.). He divided the post of Emperor into two, creating in effect a double “co-Emperor” system: one emperor for the western part of the empire (comprising Italy, North Africa, Gaul, Britain and Spain), and one emperor for the eastern part (comprising Turkey, Syria and Palestine, Egypt, Thrace, Greece, and the Balkans). In general the major language of the western half of the Empire was Latin, while for the eastern half it was Greek, so the Westerners were sometimes called “Latins” and the Easterners “Greeks”, even though their original ethnicities may have been neither Latin nor Greek. There were even crossovers: the nation of Romania (which actually means “land of the Romans”) was a Latin territory but found itself in the eastern portion of the Empire -- a fact which explains why even today, most members of this
“Latin” people are part of the Eastern Orthodox church.

In general, the churches of the Eastern branch are either Orthodox or Catholic, while the churches of the Western branch are either Catholic or Protestant/Anglican. With a few exceptions, all of the Christian denominations in the world can therefore be placed in one of four major groupings: Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, and Anglican. The capital letters at the beginning of each word are important! The Orthodox, for example, consider themselves to be “catholic” in the proper sense of the term (the word “catholic” means “universal”) without being part of the other denomination called “Catholic”. Care must also be taken as well when dealing with small groups, who often appropriate the use of one of these terms to describe themselves without actually being part of the denominational group (for example, the “Old Catholics” associated with the Union of Utrecht are not in fact part of the Catholic Church, but arose from it, and so continue to use the name).

Because we will be examining the doctrines of the various Christian groupings in the history portion of our course, in this section we will focus more on the organizational structure of each major Christian subdivision. The following chart will help illustrate the relationship of the various subdivisions to each other:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WESTERN BRANCH</th>
<th>EASTERN BRANCH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>REFORMATION CHURCHES</strong></td>
<td><strong>(ROMAN) CATHOLIC CHURCH</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Latin Catholics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

For the sake of completeness, it should be pointed out that there are some Christian groups that are hard to place in this chart, such as Latin groups currently in schism with the Pope of Rome (the Old Catholics are one such group; the Society of St. Pius X is another). Also, there are Eastern groups, particularly in Russia and Armenia, which are eastern in ancestry but resemble Protestantism in doctrine. There is only so much room on this chart, however, and since these groups are numerically small I have elected to leave them off (without intending any insult).

*The Orthodox Churches*

The Orthodox Churches, without exception, belong to the Eastern branch of Christianity. For this reason, the Orthodox are often called “Greek Orthodox,” but in fact this is a misnomer. While Eastern Christianity has important roots in the Greek-speaking territories of the Roman Empire, the term “Greek Orthodox” today actually refers only to those members of the Orthodox churches who actually share the Greek culture. More Orthodox speak Russian than Greek, and other languages such as Arabic, Armenian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Romanian, and Ukrainian are heard in
Orthodox churches.

The Orthodox trace their roots to the original communities founded by the Apostles as they travelled around the Roman Empire spreading the gospel\(^{46}\) and teaching of Jesus. The principle of the “local Church” is particularly important to the Orthodox. A local Church is a gathering of Christians in a particular location -- typically the criteria is that they live in the same city -- whose faith and worship is lived in communion with a leader called a “bishop”.\(^{47}\) Bishops are not self-appointed. Just as the Apostles were appointed by Jesus, the Apostles themselves are said to have appointed the first bishops to serve as their successors in the leadership of the communities that they founded. These successors in turn appointed successors to carry on the apostolic tradition, and so on down through the ages. For an Orthodox bishop to be truly considered a bishop, they have to be appointed and ordained by other bishops within the context of this “apostolic succession”. A bishop who lacks apostolic succession is not considered to even be a true bishop.

The importance accorded to the local Church does give rise to a problem, however: how do you maintain unity so that the universal Church does not split into thousands of pieces? The Orthodox accomplish this by a principle of “sister Churches”: each local Church looks at those Churches that are its neighbours, and if it recognizes itself in the faith and life of that other local Church, it considers that Church to be a “sister Church” and therefore part of the same “family”. These Churches are said to be “in communion” with each other, such that a believer coming from one sister Church is allowed to fully participate in the worship of the another, even to the point of joint Eucharistic worship and reception of communion, which for the Orthodox is the highest sign of inter-Church communion and mutual recognition.

Of course, there are hundreds if not thousands of local Churches in the Orthodox world today, and so they do not all constantly monitor each other for this mutual recognition. Instead, they gather into groupings of local Churches called a “local synod” (the exact name of which varies from one Orthodox church to another), and one of the bishops of that gathering of local Churches (usually the bishop of the largest or most significant city) is recognized as the Archbishop or Metropolitan. For a local Church to be in communion with the local Church of the Archbishop/Metropolitan means it is automatically in communion with all the other local Churches also in communion with the local Church of the Archbishop/Metropolitan. These small groupings may in turn gather into larger groupings, typically on a national level\(^{48}\), on the same basis of mutual recognition, coming together to form a national synod.\(^{49}\) The leader of a national Church (such as the Russian Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Armenian Orthodox Church, etc.) may also have the title of Archbishop or Metropolitan, but there are other titles that apply in certain circumstances.

\(^{46}\) The word “gospel” means “good news”.

\(^{47}\) There are other criteria as well, but this is a critical one, so we’ll leave it at that for now.

\(^{48}\) The word “nation” can refer to an actual country, or it can refer to an ethnic grouping which does not possess its own self-government but nevertheless is bound together by a common culture.

\(^{49}\) In some cases, the national synod has absorbed the functions of the local synod, especially in smaller Orthodox churches or those that have undergone severe trials such that some centralisation was necessary.
leaders have the title *Patriarch*, such as the head of the Russian Orthodox Church (who carries the title “Patriarch of Moscow and All-Russia”). The head of the Armenian Orthodox Church is called the *Catholicos*, which means “the universal one”. And the head of the Coptic Church of Egypt carries the title of *Pope*, a title usually referring to the head of the Roman Catholic Church but which in its origin simply means “father”.

Unfortunately, this system of mutual recognition sometimes breaks down when it tries to extend to the universal level. Theoretically, all the national Churches, each with their head, should in turn group together universally in communion with one local Church recognized as the point of communion for the Church throughout the world, but in practice this is not really the case. As a substitute, this centre was provided for a time by the authority of the Byzantine Emperor, but Byzantium has not existed for hundreds of years.\(^5\) Today a certain “primacy of honour” is accorded by some Orthodox churches to the Patriarch of Constantinople (now the city of Istanbul in Turkey) for historical reasons, but there is presently no corresponding “universal synod” (and attempts to call one in the 20th century have thus far ended in failure). Fortunately there are few enough independent national Orthodox jurisdictions that the mutual recognition process can occur between them without a central point, but this has meant that Orthodoxy sometimes splits along ethnic lines, or that the Orthodox faith is identified with a particular ethnicity.\(^5\)

Another problem arises when the mutual recognition is refused. Suppose a Bishop of a local church takes offense at the teachings or practices of a neighbouring Bishop. Usually the local or national synod is gathered to deal with it, and the offending bishop (or sometimes the offended bishop) is admonished or even deposed. But what if the lack of mutual recognition starts to grow, with each bishop gathering supporters, so that the synod is divided internally? Or what if you enter into a situation where synods are united internally but are opposing each other? This can lead to a state of *schism*, in which whole grouping of Churches break off communion with each other over matters of doctrine or worship. Such schisms are very hard to heal, especially without a universally recognized mechanism to promote unity.

Orthodoxy today, in fact, is split into such groupings, two of them being particularly important, and a third being particularly ancient but today reduced to only one national Church. The two major groupings are the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox, and the third is the Assyrian Church of the East.

The *Assyrian Church of the East* originated with those local Churches that found themselves part of the Persian Empire, not the Roman Empire, along with other local Churches even further east. They participated in the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D., which decided against Nestorius, but they found themselves on the wrong side of the debate. Political and cultural factors intervened, and a schism with the rest of the universal church resulted which endures to this day. Because of

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5\(^\) This ensuring of Church unity through a dependence on the State is called “caesaro-papism”, in that the “caesar” is acting at the same time as “pope” i.e. as head of the church on Earth.

5\(^1\) A fascinating example of this can be seen in the movie “*My Big Fat Greek Wedding*”, in which Ian Miller, the non-Greek fiancé of Toula Portokalos, chooses to get baptised in the Greek Orthodox Church in order to be accepted by Toula’s family. As he puts on his shirt after the baptism, he turns to Toula and says “I’m Greek now.” But did he become Greek? Or Orthodox? Do the two have to necessarily be identified?
the origins of the split, the Assyrians are sometimes called “Nestorians” by members of other churches, although this is not entirely accurate and carried a polemical tone (and so is generally not used anymore to describe them). Despite the schism, the Assyrian Church carried on its work with gusto, becoming the first known Church to send missionaries to all the way to China in the seventh century. This church has fallen on difficult times, however, particularly with the Muslim conquest of Persia (now Iran). Recent persecutions have forced the relocation of their headquarters from Iran to Chicago, USA, and today there are only approximately 500,000 Assyrian Christians left.

The **Oriental Orthodox** is composed of the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Armenian Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and (most recently) the Eritrean Orthodox Church. These churches together either rejected the decision of the Council of Chalcedon of 451 A.D. regarding monophysitism or are descended from such churches. For this reason they are sometimes called “pre-Chalcedonians” or “monophysites”, although they do not describe themselves this way and would likely take offense at such titles. In particular, recent inter-Church dialogues have determined that the Oriental Orthodox do not hold truly monophysite beliefs, so that title is in fact incorrectly applied.

The **Eastern Orthodox** are the largest grouping, with fifteen or more independent national Churches all in a state of mutual recognition. These include: the Patriarchate of Constantinople; the Patriarchate of Alexandria; the Antiochian Orthodox Church; the Greek Orthodox Church; the Russian Orthodox Church; the Bulgarian Orthodox Church; the Serbian Orthodox Church; the Romanian Orthodox Church; and so on. These churches are called “autocephalous”, which means “self-headed” or “self-governed”. In addition there are a number of “autonomous” national churches, such as the Japanese Orthodox Church, which still depend on the sponsorship of an autocephalous church despite being effectively self-governed. Finally, there is a body in North America called the “Orthodox Church of America” which claims to be autocephalous and functions accordingly but which is not universally recognized as such. It nevertheless is in full communion with the other Eastern Orthodox.

There are other Orthodox jurisdictions which exist in a greater or lesser (usually lesser) degree of communion with the other major Orthodox groups. The **Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia** (ROCOR) was founded after the Communist Revolution of 1917 as an exile church, meant to carry the torch of Russian Orthodoxy during that time of persecution. Unfortunately, tensions between it and other Orthodox, particularly the Patriarchate of Moscow, have led to its not being recognized by the greater body of Eastern Orthodox. The **Ukrainian Orthodox Church** currently is divided into 3 bodies, one of which is an autonomous church under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox, but the other two of which are independent and not currently recognized by the Eastern Orthodox or Oriental Orthodox bodies. There are other such examples, and it can lead to some confusion for the outside observer.

**The Catholic Church**

Like the Orthodox Churches, the Catholic Church takes its origin from local churches founded by the apostles, but places a particular emphasis on one of these churches: the local church of Rome, where both St. Peter and St. Paul were martyred. For this reason, the Catholic Church is often called the “Roman Catholic Church”. Rome became the seat of the Western Roman Empire
when the empire was divided in two, and so the Catholics are often referred to as “Western Christians” (as opposed to the Easterners of the Orthodox churches). This is a bit of a misnomer, however, as there are Easterners who have chosen to also be Catholics at the same time without surrendering their particular Eastern heritage. The language of the Western Roman Empire was generally Latin, and so Roman Catholics are also often called “Latins”, again to contrast with the “Greeks” of the Orthodox churches, but for similar reasons this can be a bit of a misnomer at times (as we shall see).

As with the Orthodox, the central leader of a local Catholic church is a bishop, who similarly must be appointed in the apostolic succession. Local churches are grouped into gatherings headed by an Archbishop, and these groupings are in turn further grouped, and so on. At the highest level of grouping is what is called a “ritual church sui iuris”, which literally means “with its own law”. This corresponds roughly to an autocephalous church in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, and each sui iuris church is headed by its own Patriarch or Major Archbishop. There are 22 such sui iuris churches in the Catholic church, including the Latin Church (the only Western sui iuris church), as well as the Maronite Church, the Greek-Melkite church, the Ruthenian Catholic church, the Chaldean Church, the Ukrainian Catholic church, the Syro-Malabar church, and so on (all of which are Eastern sui iuris churches). Because the Catholic Church is a federation of all these sui iuris churches, most of which are Eastern in tradition, it is incorrect to label all Catholics as “Westerners” or “Latins”.

One key difference between the Catholic and Orthodox churches has to do with the question of the universal level of mutual recognition and communion. While the Orthodox do not have a mutually recognized centre to provide a “primacy of unity”, the Catholics believe that the local Church of Rome, headed by its bishop (usually known by his title of “Pope,” but who is also called the Patriarch of the West or Patriarch of the Latins) is exactly such a centre. Catholics believe that St. Peter was not simply an apostle, but that he was the head of the Apostles, and that this function of “headship” continues in his particular successor, the bishop of Rome, who “heads” the other bishops and whose church, the local church of Rome, heads all other local Churches. To be in communion with the local church of Rome is to be in communion with every other local church throughout the Catholic world, no matter what sui iuris church it belongs to. Again, this is the reason why the Catholic Church is often also called the Roman Catholic Church.

Having a recognized universal centre has tended to lead to a stronger sense of unity within the Catholic world than in other churches, and so unlike the Orthodox the Catholic church has not split internally into multiple large groupings. Also, the various Catholic churches tend to identify themselves less with a particular ethnicity, particularly the Latins, who in fact include people of all races, languages, and cultures. On the other hand, the manner of exercise of this universal authority has led to some problems. First of all, because the Pope is both head of the universal Catholic church and also Patriarch of the Western/Latin Church (and because over 80% of Catholics are, in fact, members of the Latin sui iuris church), there has been a tendency in some circles to identify

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52 To give an example of the effective differences this entails, people often think that “a married man can’t become a Catholic priest”. In fact, this is only true for members of the Western/Latin sui iuris church. The other 21 churches, being of the Eastern tradition, can and do have married priests, and are just as Catholic as their Western brothers.
“Latin Catholics” with “Roman Catholics,” and placing the Eastern Catholics as second-class citizens. In addition, a certain centralization and uniformity has sometimes been imposed which reduced legitimate local diversity and autonomy, something the Eastern Catholics again have complained about. An over-dependence on the centre can also result, with local problems being “kicked upstairs,” whether by local bishops who don’t want to deal with the issues at hand, or by individual Catholics who decide to go over the heads of their bishops and appeal directly to Rome for a solution to their particular issues. While this dependence on the centre is less of an issue if the Pope is a saint, an over-dependence on the centre can be terrible for the church should that centre become infected with corrupt men (or even a corrupt Pope). The Catholic Church has weathered such trials before, but they were indeed trials.

While the fact of having the local Church of Rome (and its bishop, the Pope) as the centre of the Catholic Church is part of the very identity of what it means to be Catholic, the exact manner in which the centre exercises its role has had varied mechanisms throughout history. The current Pope, John Paul II, has expressed an openness to exploring new ways of “being the centre” that will respect the legitimate diversity and mission of local Churches.

The Protestant Churches

The Protestant churches of the world originate in the 16th century during a period of Western history called the “Protestant Reformation”. While we will examine this time more closely in the section on the history of theology, suffice it to say that the Roman Catholic church had entered into a difficult period, with a decline in both its governance (a certain degree of corruption among its higher leadership) and its theology. A certain group of men, starting with Martin Luther in Germany (who was both a priest and an Augustinian monk), protested these decadent practices and sought a renewal of theology. The first of these public protests was the publication of Luther’s “95 theses” on the door of the church of the ducal castle of Wittenburg (October 31, 1517), which struck a responsive chord throughout Germany, and launched the Protestant Reformation.

Because the leaders of the Reformation were protesting certain doctrines and abusive practices, they eventually were called “Protestants”. In general they preferred to call themselves “Reformers,” because they were originally not trying to found their own church(es) but to “reform” the Catholic Church. With time, however, the leaders of the Reformation project gave up on the notion of reforming the Catholic Church from within, and in effect formed their own church, which today is called the Protestant Lutheran Church in most parts of the world (different countries may

53 Most Latin Catholics, in fact, just call themselves Roman Catholics and don’t even realise that the 21 other sui iuris churches even exist.

54 This offer was made in his encyclical letter Ut Unum Sint, no. 95, in which he wrote: “I am convinced that I have a particular responsibility in this regard, above all in acknowledging the ecumenical aspirations of the majority of the Christian Communities and in heeding the request made of me to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation.” This offer to discuss the ministry of the Pope was made in particular to the Orthodox churches, with whom disputes over the office and role of the bishop of Rome remains a serious stumbling block.
have slightly different names for it), although in Germany itself it is called the “Evangelical Church”. Again, we will examine the theology of the Lutheran church more closely in the history portion of this course, focussing here on the organizational elements.

Initially, Luther retained the office of bishop as a point of leadership in the church. Luther developed a different theology about the nature of apostolic succession, however. For Luther, the heart of this “reformation” would be to return to the essence of primitive Christianity as described in the Bible. This placed the Bible in an especially exalted place within the church, but also relativized the place of the development of doctrine and of Tradition. The essence of the office of bishop went from being a carrier of the developing apostolic tradition, to being a preacher and implementer of this primitive Christianity. Luther eventually developed a theology of ministry in which it was not necessary for a bishop to be appointed and ordained by his fellow bishops: any group of believers could, in theory, elect one of their own as a bishop, and could depose him at any time. Apostolic succession ceased to mean the handing down of the apostolic ministry, and instead meant the continuation of the apostolic teaching as contained in the Bible. Eventually, some Lutheran churches abandoned the idea of bishops altogether, although it continues in a few Lutheran churches (particularly the Lutheran churches of Scandinavia). Modification of the understanding of apostolic succession went hand in hand with a rejection of the office of Pope, who in fact was labelled by Luther as the “Anti-Christ”.

One of the consequences of the new theory of apostolic succession was a quick splintering of the Protestant world. The problem is not really with the transmission of the text of the Bible, which is a largely fixed canon, but with its interpretation. There are many, many possible different ways to interpret the Bible. Luther counted on the guidance of the Holy Spirit to ensure that the correct interpretation would always be obvious, without recourse to an authority other than the Bible itself. In practice, however, it simply hasn’t worked out that way. Luther opened up the possibility for groups of Christians to select their own leaders in the absence of the traditional notion of apostolic succession, and this they did, but often in doing so they founded their own new church! In fact, it sometimes worked the opposite way: a person would found a church (in effect, appointing themselves pastor), and go out and gather people around them. This has led to the good effect of Protestants being very missionary oriented, constantly seeking to bring people to God through Jesus, but it has also led to the splintering already mentioned. At first Luther tried to maintain unity through appeal to military force, but eventually this became untenable (and wound up turning over control of the church to the local rulers who controlled those militaries). In Protestant churches that have continued a (relatively) strong office of bishop (such as the Scandinavian Lutherans already mentioned), the divisions have been less pronounced, but at the very least separation has occurred along national lines similar to the Orthodox church. In Protestant churches in which the office of bishop if less important or even absent, however (such as the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches), the divisions are very broad, such that today there are thousands of Protestant churches in the world. Some are very small and localized, but they exist nonetheless, and dozens of new churches are born every year.

55 The Lutherans also rejected the office of priest, preferring the term “pastor” to describe their local leadership.
The Anglican Church (in the USA, called the Episcopal Church, or “Episcopalian”)

The Anglican Church was born in the same time of the Protestant Reformation, but under somewhat different circumstances. Christians have been in England for centuries, with their own local churches and bishops. When the Protestant Reformation began on the European continent, King Henry VIII of England initially sided with the Catholic Church against the Reformers, writing a book called “In Defence of the Seven Sacraments” for which the Pope thanked him and awarded him the title “Defender of the Faith” (a title which the monarchs of England continue to use). For reasons both political and personal, however, Henry desired to divorce his wife, Catherine of Aragon, and appealed to the Pope for an annulment of that marriage. When this was refused in 1533, Henry separated himself from the Catholic Church. In 1534 Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy, which declared:

Be it enacted by the authority of this present parliament that the king our sovereign lord, his heirs and successors, kings of this realm, shall be taken, accepted, and reputed the only supreme head in earth of the Church of England, called Anglicana Ecclesia.  

The Anglican Church therefore retained the office of bishop, but declared itself to be an independent church (similar to an autocephalous church in the Orthodox tradition) and replaced the Pope with the King. No changes to doctrine were initially envisaged, but these eventually crept in as part of the doctrinal ferment and debates already raging on the continent. There was eventually a reaction on the part of persons wishing to remain Catholics in England, and when Mary Tudor became queen of England in 1553 she implemented a return to Catholicism that was so bloody it engendered a strong counter reaction and earned her the nickname “Bloody Mary”. Her successor was Queen Elizabeth I, a staunch Protestant, and so Protestant tendencies and doctrines returned.

In its structures, then, the Anglican Church resembles the Orthodox church, in that it has local bishops, archbishops, and a nominal central leader in the Archbishop of Canterbury, England. It is also divided into national churches, such as the Church of England, the Anglican Church of Canada, and the Protestant Episcopal Church of America (also called “Episcopalian”). In its doctrine, however, the Anglican Church retains strong Protestant elements. For this reason, the Anglican Church is sometimes called a “bridge” church between Protestants and Catholics. As well, this duality has led to an inner distinction within Anglicanism between “High Anglicans” (who favour the Catholic elements of Anglican tradition and are sometimes called Anglo-Catholics) and “Low Anglicans” (who favour the Protestant side of Anglicanism).

It should be noted that there is a serious debate between the Anglicans on one side and the Catholics and Orthodox on the other, regarding the validity of the Anglican apostolic succession.

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56 Act of Supremacy, 1534.

57 Yes, the cocktail drink of the same name is named after her.

58 The name given to the gathering of all these national churches is the "Anglican Communion".
The Anglicans consider themselves to be in a genuine apostolic succession, but neither the Catholics nor the Orthodox recognize this in the Anglicans. This is because of changes made in the Anglican rituals for ordaining bishops, made in 1552 and re-adopted in 1559, which had strong Protestant influences. This ritual book was in use until the seventeenth century, and so its use raises doubts in the minds of Catholics and Orthodox as to whether the apostolic succession was really continued in its substance during those many years.

**Liberal vs. conservative?**

The diagram of the churches previously shown can give the impression that the churches of the world are static objects, and that while one can discover difference by choosing between them, in and of themselves they do not really change. This impression is wrong. The various churches of the world are also in the world, part of the social and cultural changes of the world around them, at some times pushing certain changes, and at times reacting to those changes (similar to the diagram describing Bernard Longeran’s definition of theology). A church is not a static reality, it is dynamic: it does change, if for no other reason than because its members eventually die and are replaced by a new generation. The real questions are “how do we determine what changes are good and which ones will cause us to lose the essence of what we are?” The analogy is like that of a body. To work out at a gym and become stronger is a change in the body, but a positive one: the powers of the body are increased, and it gives us new possibilities. On the other hand to get a disease is also a change, but it reduces our possibilities because it acts against the essence of the promise held by our human nature. So how do churches manage to discern the attitude to take when faced with the the prospect of change?

In the political world, we often use the terms “liberal” and “conservative,” and these terms are also often applied to the church (usually inaccurately). We usually think the words mean something like this: “liberals desire changes, while conservatives try and prevent change”. This is, in fact, only half the picture. Both liberalism and conservatism are theories of change, and how change should be handled -- it is just a difference of emphasis.

Conservatives believe that change is inevitable and sometimes necessary, but because of human free will human beings are always at risk for making mistakes (or worse, for being victims or perpetrators of injustice). For this reason every change should be applied cautiously and carefully at first, so that we don’t make things worse. They tend to have less use for grand theories of society and human nature, or for social experiments.

Liberalism is rooted in theories of the Enlightenment period of philosophy, which posited a very positive view of human nature, such as seen in the political theories of Rousseau. In such a view, a human being is fundamentally good, and that evil only arises from the bad examples and structures in our society which deviate us towards evil. In the view of the philosopher Hegel, this goodness is a motor driving the history of the universe forward to greater and greater good, such that History is not just a record of past events, it is a force in itself guiding us forward. Because of this trust in human goodness, liberals welcome change: it breaks open the static structures of society that are current sources of evil, and thanks to the (in the long run) benevolent power of “History” we can feel assured that (in the long run) the process of change will lead to greater goodness. Liberals tend
to try and provoke changes and, when in political power, to engage in social experiments, as it is believed that in the long run these can only lead to a better society.

We can see both kinds of tendencies in the Church. There are conservatives, who are often initially suspicious of change and want to “step on the brakes” to make sure changes are not, in fact, deviations or warpings of what the Church is meant to be (whether in its teachings or its practices). There are also liberals, who are typically suspicious of Church structures and who blame those structures for any sin which may be found in the Church, and who want the Church to be more “open” to modifications of doctrines and practices, in a similar way that political liberals seek to propose social experiments. Church liberals often also propose these changes on an experimental basis and have difficulty understanding why such offers are refused by conservatives. 59

These conflicts between liberals and conservatives can create divisions within Churches, and at the same time can cause Christians to find allies, not only in their own church, but in another church. The Catholic and Evangelical churches, in terms of overall doctrine are much more apart from each other than, say, the Catholics and the Anglicans. When it comes to the issue of abortion, however, conservative Catholics will gladly ally themselves with conservative Anglicans and conservative Evangelicals against abortion, while more liberal Catholics may easily ally themselves with more liberal Anglicans in a more pro-choice stance. This example also shows that often we do not possess a globally liberal or conservative attitude, but that our attitude depends on the issue at hand. 60

Any person who chooses to get involved in their church in a more public manner -- say, by becoming a theologian, or by undertaking some form of ministry -- is sooner or later going to encounter people who want to label them as liberal or a conservative. This is too bad, because the church is not meant to be conservative or liberal, it is meant to be conservative and liberal at the same time, thanks to its being guided by the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised the following about the Holy Spirit:

The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14:26)

The Holy Spirit, then, has a “conservative” function of helping the church to “remember” all that Jesus has said (and done). It is a link to the past that cannot be broken. The simple fact is that Christianity is a historical religion. The resurrection of Jesus, for example, is proposed not only as an element of faith but as a historical event -- either it happened or it didn’t. And the past is very

59 An example of this "experimental" approach was the ordination of women in the Anglican Communion, which was begun by one bishop only for his local diocese but which eventually extended to other locations almost as a fait accompli.

60 As a personal aside, it makes me laugh when I hear Pope John Paul II described by North American media as a “conservative”. This term is not applied in a vacuum, but is usually referring to his teachings on certain issues, such as the ordination of women, or the meaning of human sexuality. But what about when the Pope speaks about the need to promote human rights, or global economic justice, or when he opposes a war? In some parts of the world, he is accused of being excessively “liberal” on these issues!
conservative -- we may try to forget it, but it is what it is and it cannot be changed.

The above passage also states, however, that the Spirit will “teach us all things,” which is a “liberal” task oriented towards the future. This same Spirit is considered to be the “engine” which powers the task of the Church in history:

You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

As much as Christianity is a historical religion, this passage shows it is also a body of people with a mission, and as such is oriented towards the future. It must find the way to continually re-present itself, its message, and its Lord. As such, the mission of the Church is a very “liberal” task.

In traditional theology the distinction of these two functions is found in the distinction between “Tradition” and “traditions”. “Tradition” (with a capital-T) means the grand totality of Christian doctrine and practice that is meant to be truly timeless, just as $2 + 2 = 4$ is a timeless truth. On the other hand, “traditions” are potentially changeable things that help make the grand “Tradition” concrete; they are precious in themselves, but could be changed. As an example, for Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and many Protestants, the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday is part of the grand “Tradition”. On the other hand, the exact format of the Eucharistic celebration, such as what songs we are going to sing, is a very small-t “tradition”. The church is in a constant state of discernment to try and figure out what belongs to “Tradition” versus “tradition”, and one of the tasks of the theologian is to help discern this. It is summarized well in this paraphrase of the Serenity Prayer, which I think every theologian should regularly pray:

Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things of the grand Tradition, which cannot change,  
The courage to work for the change of things of the “traditions” that can and now should change,  
And the wisdom to know the difference.

Amen.

As a final point, I would caution people about falling entirely into one extreme or the other, whether liberal or conservative. While each of us, by temperament, may naturally tend to being liberal or being conservative, balance is important. Liberals who go too far may find themselves surrendering core elements of the Christian faith, and falling into heresy. On the other hand, conservatives who go too far tend to become very rigid, defensive and unkind. This is not good either. Good theology tries to set a course between these two dynamic extremes, and so be faithful to both its heritage and the people who are (and those who will be ) the heirs of that heritage.

The “Third church”?

The 19th and 20th centuries were eras of colonialism, as well as the throwing off of colonialism and the emergence of the “Third World”. The 19th and 20th centuries were also periods
of tremendous missionary effort, however. The classic distinction among Christian denominations has divided them into East and West, but there is talk of an emerging “Third Church” of the peoples of the global South. Having personally encountered theologians coming from nations of the global South, I believe this to be true.

In his work *The Next Christendom*, Philip Jenkins makes a number of important observations:

Many of the fastest-growing countries in the world are either predominantly Christian or else have very sizeable Christian minorities. Even if Christians just maintain their present share of the population in countries like Nigeria and Kenya, Mexico and Ethiopia, Brazil and the Philippines, there are soon going to be several hundred million more Christians from those nations alone...In 1950, a list of the world’s leading Christian countries would have included Britain, France, Spain, and Italy, but none of these names would be represented in a corresponding list for 2050. Christianity should enjoy a worldwide boom in the new century, but the vast majority of believers will be neither white nor European, no Euro-American.61

This development of Christianity in new areas of the world will lead to the development of new strains of Christian thought as religion and culture interact in new ways. Theologians need to be aware of this new territory, but for the moment the interest is not entirely there:

In the Western academic world...published studies of Third World religion represent only a tiny fraction of scholarship on Christianity...To quote John Mbiti, “It is utterly scandalous for so many Christian scholars in [the] old Christendom to know so much about heretical movements in the second and third centuries, when so few of them know anything about Christian movements in areas of the younger churches.”62

I agree with this assessment. The experience and work of Latin American theologians, writing and reflecting on their lived experience, produced a body of work called “Liberation Theology” which has had enormous impact in the world. This impact has been for better or for worse, depending on your point of view, but no one can deny the power of it. And Liberation Theology, as we shall see later in the course, truly is particularly “Southern” in origin, even if its methods have been applied to other situations found in the First World.63 What other new theological movements may emerge from the South? As the global village continues to shrink, we need to be more aware of this new source of vitality for Christian theology.

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62 Ibid., p. 4.

63 Feminist theology, for example, has been strongly influenced by Liberation theology.
As has been mentioned before, a lot of people ask genuine theological questions without even realising that those questions were theological or had a theological component. Asking questions does not make them theologians in the strictest sense, however. Being hungry does not turn you into a chef, although it may inspire you to do more than just eat and actually learn to cook at some point. It is the same with theology. To be a theologian is to do more than “express the hunger” in asking questions. It is more than “eating the food” in learning the answers given. Fundamentally, being a theologian is about being a chef: learning how to provide theological answers that are spiritually nourishing, palatable to the intelligence, and are not poison.

The “how” of theology can then be said to parallel a recipe in a recipe book. At the top of a recipe is found the list of ingredients, which for theology is the “sources of theology”. Next, below the list of ingredients we find the recipe itself, which outlines a procedure for mixing and cooking these ingredients so that the result turns out delicious (or at least edible). For theology, these are the “methods of theology,” which outline a structured series of steps or procedures to help guarantee that the resulting theology will be more than a collection of nice-sounding words, but instead will actually be in connection with the Truth.

Sources of theology (ingredients)

We can identify six distinct “ingredients” of theology that necessarily feed into theological investigation and study. These are: Reason, Nature, Experience, Revelation, Scripture, and Tradition.

Reason

The first ingredient for theological reflection is the person doing the reflecting! Theology is not something left to chance, or something that we could program computers to do: it requires an intellectual capacity, something only humans (as far as we know) possess. The use of reason is not always guaranteed, of course, but theology cannot be allowed to descend into a mere emotional exercise. A certain mental discipline is required, including (1) a clear and precise use of language,
(2) critical thinking and (3) the rigorous use of logical reasoning. Techniques of logic, such as the crafting of definitions, the proper use of analogy and syllogistic reasoning are key tools for theological reasoning. We will examine these more closely in the section on philosophy.

There has been much debate regarding the correct relationship between faith and reason. Unless we are willing to fall into fideism, however, a theologian has to admit that faith is amenable to reason, that it is reasonable, and has to prepare himself or herself accordingly.

Nature

The most immediate data made available to the intelligence is sense data, i.e. knowledge about the world around us. And from a very early age, we try and understand this world and how it works, and our place in it. This reflection can proceed from basic material questions to much deeper philosophical considerations. For example, to ask “Why does grape juice change into wine?” is quite different from asking “What is change? What does it mean for one thing to change into another?”

As already noted, within Christian theology there is a notion of a “natural revelation” present in the very fact of creation, and that this creation is like the work of art of an artist (the Creator). One can know something of an artist by reflecting upon his work. In the same vein, we can glean some knowledge of God by reflecting upon His greatest masterpiece, the created cosmos. From the beginning, Christians have believed that both scientific study and philosophical contemplation of nature and creation can grant mankind a clear but partial view of the One who fashioned them. This has led even to attempts to create proofs of the existence of God that proceed from considerations of the cosmos alone, and not from elements of faith from the Bible. And the simple fact that almost every human culture seems to contain some consideration of the Divine is itself strong evidence that creation really is mysteriously “signed by the artist”.

The fact that Nature constitutes a theological “ingredient” also implies that there can be a dialogue between theology and science. For example, theology is often called upon to make a moral analysis of particular human situations. In such cases, moral theologians will often consult the data of psychologists and sociologists in addition to the more typical data of the Bible and similar moral analyses.

Experience

This “ingredient” of theology relates to personal experiences of God and religion, and reflections made upon those experiences. Apart from the common experience we have of the world around us comes the experience we have of God stemming from living and practising a religious tradition within a community, or from a more personal experience of encountering God that can

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64 The earliest known example of this would be Aristotle himself, whose writings precede Jesus and who betrays no knowledge of Hebrew religious concepts.
manifest itself through an inner mystical experience, having external visions and apparitions, experiencing miracles, or simply sensing God’s providence in one’s life.

I should point out that it is also possible to have both kinds of experience! In addition, one kind of experience often leads a person to the other. For example, a person who has a powerful inner spiritual experience often turns to a Church or a minister for guidance in order to understand that experience. On the other hand, a person may participate in community worship, as in a Sunday service, and it can provoke a powerful spiritual experience. Theology enters the picture when a person seeks to understand these experiences, and what they mean, whether they be their own or the experiences of someone else.

Revelation

Revelation is a particular category of religious experience in which God is unambiguously infallibly revealing himself to the world. It is purely the special initiative of God. Because of the special nature of this “ingredient,” the data proceeding from Revelation is central to the study of theology. Divine revelation is generally understood to occur in one of three ways: in words, in deeds and (so Christians believe) in the person of Jesus.

Divine revelation “in words” means that God is choosing to communicate by means of language capable of being understood by the human intellect. This can be done personally, such as God speaking to Moses directly in the incident of the burning bush. God has also chosen to reveal himself through intermediaries, i.e. agents other than Himself. These agents include angelic messengers, who are understood to be carrying messages from God himself, as well as human prophets who have received some inner inspiration from God to speak on his behalf.

Divine revelation “in deeds” occurs in the form of signs and miracles. Signs are generally actions, usually performed by prophets, that reveal a spiritual truth or the will of God. An example would be when the prophet Isaiah undertook to walk around naked as a sign from God:

In the year that the commander in chief, who was sent by Sargon the king of Assyria, came to Ashdod and fought against it and took it, -- at that time the Lord had spoken by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, "Go, and loose the sackcloth from your loins and take off your shoes from your feet," and he had done so, walking naked and barefoot -- the Lord said, "As my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Ethiopia, so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians captives and the Ethiopians exiles, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, to the

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66 The root meaning of the word angel suggests ‘messenger’, and the understanding of angels in Jewish and Christian tradition has always been that of messengers of God.

67 The word prophet is derived from the Greek word *prophetes*, meaning ‘one who speaks before others’. The etymology of the word inspiration suggests the act of putting one’s spirit into another. The language of prophet and inspiration, suggests a human agent as a spokesperson of God, enabled by the infusion of God’s spirit within him.
shame of Egypt. (Isaiah 20: 1-4)

To be sure this would have been an attention-getting sign, something the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) already know! Apart from these kinds of prophetic gestures, however, there are also miracles, which are supernatural occurrences that reveal an aspect of God. They can take the form of nature miracles, such as the plagues of Egypt found in Exodus, (which revealed God’s power and His will to save the Israelites from Egypt’s grasp), or the many miraculous healings performed by Jesus, revealing His divine authority.

Christians also believe that divine revelation has occurred par excellence, not only with God speaking and acting personally, but with God becoming a person (Jesus) in the Incarnation. Jesus is the personal revelation of God par excellence, the “Word of God made flesh.” (John 1:14) He, in his person, and his life, is the ultimate and full revelation of God to the world. This was eloquently expressed by the great 16th century spiritual reformer, St. John of the Cross,

In giving us His Son, His only Word (for he possesses no other), He spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word -- and he has no more to say... because what he spoke before to the prophets in parts, he has now spoken all at once by giving us the All Who is His Son. 68

It is not just that what Jesus did or said was divinely revealed, but that Jesus is divine revelation itself made flesh. Consider this exchange between Jesus and one of his disciples:

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves. (John 14: 8-11)

In this passage, we see all the forms of revelation: the words that Jesus speaks, the works that he does, and his very person itself, in that a person who has merely seen him has already seen God himself.

Tradition69

The data of revelation, while universal in its meaning and scope, has nevertheless been given by God at a particular time in history. While this is wonderful for the people who were present


69 It is important to distinguish between the big-T "Tradition" and the small-t "traditions". See p. 76 for a discussion of the distinction.
when the words were spoken or deeds performed, some mechanism is necessary to carry this data of revelation forward through time. Derived from the Latin word *tradere*, meaning to carry, Tradition represents the means by which the revelation of God is carried forward in time. According to the Bible, this process of "carrying forward" began by means of the oral proclamation of the Christian faith, with St. Peter giving the first public sermon at Pentecost.\(^70\) It continued with the institution of certain religious practices and rituals, namely baptism, devotion to the apostolic teaching (and by extension, to the apostolic office), the practice of *koinonia*, the "breaking of bread", and prayer.\(^71\) Because the Christian faith is fundamentally meant to be something lived and not merely believed, each of these elements is a true and legitimate way of handing on the revelation of God and therefore constitutes part of Tradition.

One of the most important developments of sacred Tradition occurred when the early Christians began to write. At first these writings would have been letters written between Christians, meant to tackle certain questions arising in the practice of the Christian faith. Of course, letters from the Apostles would have been considered normative for the Christian community, and these were read publicly at gatherings of a local church, and even copied and sent around to neighbouring local churches. In addition to letters some individuals began to write down accounts of Jesus, particularly since the proclamation of Jesus as Lord is the very heart of the Christian message. St. Luke notes at the beginning of his gospel that several persons had already undertaken to set down an "orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us" (Acts 1:1), a task which he continued in the writing of the Acts of the Apostles. Again, these texts were copied and circulated among the various Christian communities as a precious part of Tradition.

The original apostolic era gradually came to a close as the Apostles themselves died, but the process of carrying forward the Christian message continued. Tradition, therefore, continued to develop as a living witness to the original apostolic Christian faith, now present in different lands and cultures throughout the world. As a source for theology, this Tradition is generally held to be constituted by: (1) interpretations and commentaries of the Bible through the centuries, as well as works of theology meant to further explain that Biblical faith, (2) ceremonies and devotional practices of the Christian community over time, that provide a witness to how Christians lived their faith,\(^72\) (3) the lives of the saints: a person is declared or upheld as a saint because they are considered either in their lives, or in their deaths (as in the case of martyrs), to have upheld the faith and life of faith in a heroic manner, and are therefore upheld as role models.

A final note should be made of a particularly important era in the development of Tradition.

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\(^70\) C.f. Acts 2: 14-36.

\(^71\) C.f. Acts 2: 42. The term *koinonia* means "mutual communion and solidarity in love", and is often translated as "fellowship". It was reflected, for example, in the practice of hospitality, or in material support Christians showed one another by placing their goods in common. It also was manifested in the practice of the leadership of meeting together in order to determine the best course of action for the community by common consent. The Council of Jerusalem, mentioned in Acts 15, is an early example of this.

\(^72\) *Lex orandi, lex credendi*, a phrase attributed to St. Leo I, meaning that ‘the law of prayer, is the law of belief’. In other words, examination of the prayer of the Church is important if you want to know what the Church believes.
While the apostolic period is considered truly normative, the Patristic period of the Church's history (from the 2nd to the 8th century A.D.) is also of special interest. This is because it is assumed that the earlier period one investigates in Christian history, the more likely one is to find a “purer” description of the faith, free from any dilutions that may have crept in over time. The study of the Fathers of the Church, therefore, is a critical source for Christian theology.

Scripture

The most important element of Tradition, as has already been described, is Sacred Scripture. The word “scripture” literally means “the writings”, which today are brought together in a collection known as the Bible. Christians believe that not only has God been speaking to human beings and inspiring them to speak on his behalf, but that these words have been written down, along with a record of his mighty deeds and even some theological reflection. As Vatican II put it:

Sacred scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.

Because the writings are inspired by God, they are the mechanism par excellence of carrying forward this record of revelation. Indeed, Christianity began by receiving a body of already extant works from the Jewish faith, works which Christians held to be inspired by God. An awareness gradually arose, however, that God was now adding to these works by a new process of inspiration, such that some of the apostolic writings began to also be considered "Scripture". A clear testimony of this development regarding the letters of St. Paul, for example, can be found in the second letter of Peter:

Count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. (2 Peter 3: 15-16)

Eventually, therefore, the body of sacred writings was seen to exist in two major portions: that which was received already from the Jewish tradition was called the "Old Testament", and that which was being added to in apostolic times was called the "New Testament". In either case, these scriptures were understood as something meant to be "handed on", such that Christian tradition does not believe that the New Testament has replaced the Old, but holds both in honour. As the early patristic maxim goes, “The New Testament clarifies the Old, and the Old Testament prepares the New”.

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73 While usually contained in a single volume, the Bible is not actually a single book but a collection of books. The word Bible itself comes from the Greek biblia, which means “the books”.

74 Dei Verbum, Vatican II document on the Dogmatic Constitution of Divine Revelation, chap. 9
One early issue that the Christian community faced, however, was deciding which books were actually inspired by God, versus which simply were of purely human origin. There were two types of lists of official Jewish books at the time, for example: Hebrew-speaking Jews of Palestine tended to recognize only books written in Hebrew, while the Greek-speaking Jews in the regions around the Mediterranean recognized some additional books written in Greek. As for the works of the New Testament, St. Paul himself alludes to the circulation of some fraudulent letters, for example, which were purported to be from him (c.f. 2 Thess 2:2). A list of official books was therefore gradually formed, called the canon of scripture, whose contents were slowly confirmed over time.

There is not perfect agreement among Christians, however, as to the exact contents of the canon of scripture. While all Christians generally agree today on the books that belong in the New Testament, the list of official books in the Old Testament is still subject to more discussion. While there were some exceptions, the early Christians generally accepted and used the Greek books, although there were some local variations in the exact list: an example of this is the list approved at the Synod of Rome in 382 A.D., which included Greek-original books. When the Protestant Reformation began in the 16th century, however, the Reformers decided to return to the Hebrew-only list (which is the one used by Jews today). We therefore have the situation today where a Protestant Bible will have one list of books for the Old Testament, a Catholic Bible will have another list, an Orthodox Bible may have a third list, and the Anglicans will publish their Bibles with the Greek books but in a special section called the “Apocrypha”, which they do not recognize as scripture. When shopping for a Bible, be careful you get the kind you want!

While the exact contents of parts of the canon of scripture might still be disputed, there is nevertheless a general agreement among Christians that the canon of scripture is now closed. In other words, there will be no more books added to the Bible: what we have is complete and normative, and acts as the rule by which any new book is to be judged. It is possible for the Holy Spirit to continue to guide people as they prepare to write -- students pray for this kind of guidance regularly before major exams -- but new books written under this guidance, no matter how edifying, will never be added to the Bible. This is because (as explained above in the section on Revelation) the ultimate Revelation is not in the words of the Bible, but in the person of Jesus himself. Jesus has since been glorified in Heaven, and so there is really nothing more to add: all the eye-witnesses of Jesus are long-since dead. What remains now is to understand the Bible as it is -- a process which has resulted in the writing of lots more books, to be sure! But as for adding new books of “data” to the Bible itself? No.75

As a final point, it should be noted that the fact that the canon of scripture is now closed sometimes gives rise to a debate regarding the relationship between Scripture and the wider body of Tradition. There are some, particularly within the Fundamentalist Protestant tradition, who hold that once the process of inspiration of scripture ceased any elements of Tradition outside of Scripture became superfluous. Indeed, some even consider such elements potentially dangerous. As others have noted, however, the difficulty with this position is that not only the words of

75 This is the major reason why Christians do not accept the Koran as a revealed work. It is also why the Book of Mormon is only used within the Mormon religion.
Scripture need to be handed on, but also their meaning. In this context, the wider Tradition (of which the Bible is the part *par excellence*) acts as an interpretive context for Scripture. Tradition is not a parallel or independent source of revelation from Scripture, as though there were "two sources", nor does it add anything to the essential content of scripture, as if scripture were deficient. Instead, Tradition helps to correctly interpret the scriptures, such that both Scripture and Tradition play an equally important role in preserving and transmitting the word of God. Although Tradition plays a role of varying importance within the different branches of Christianity, it remains crucially important for the Catholic, Orthodox, and more established Protestant denominations.

**Methods of theology (the recipe)**

The various methods of theology can be grouped into two categories: theology “from above,” and theology “from below,” and can otherwise be called “top-down” methods versus “bottom-up” methods. “Top-down” methods proceed from the data of divine revelation (usually from the sources of Scripture and/or Tradition), while “bottom-up” methods start from the data of lived experience.

“Top-down” methods tend to be more theoretical, proceeding from considerations of tentative theological questions or theological texts (such as the Bible), and trying to draw from those questions and texts whatever conclusions flow from reflection upon them. Because “top-down” methods often proceed from the raw data of God’s revelation, and are rigorous in their use of logic and philosophy, they are useful to draw conclusions that are otherwise closed to normal experience. For example, if a theologian is pondering the free will of angels, and wondering if angelic free will works the same way as human free will, that theologian is limited by the fact that normally we don’t get a chance to study angels first hand! But there is data about angels in the Bible, and writings of philosophers about so-called intelligent spiritual “separated substances”. A theologian might not be able to use a “bottom-up” approach drawing on direct knowledge of angels, but the same theologian could use a “top-down” approach and analyse the Biblical (and other) data to see what conclusions can be drawn.

The problem with using “top-down” methods exclusively, however, is that they can become disconnected from reality. It is possible to construct a theory that is, internally, perfectly logically consistent, but which has no connection to the lived experience of people. “Bottom-up” theories

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**Differences in preaching**

Catholic ministers are usually taught a more "top-down" theology, while Protestant ministers are usually taught theology in a more "bottom-up" approach. The difference can readily be seen in preaching styles.

Catholic preaching is often excellent in its theological content, but a typical complaint is that it is too "up there" and disconnected from everyday life. It is full of ideas, but not always practical.

Protestant preaching tends to start from real life -- Protestant sermons often begin with a little story, for example. But those sermons sometimes simply offer a "feel-good" message without getting to the spiritual realities behind them.

Both examples show the need for balance. As much as a sermon needs to be concrete and practical, it can’t be disconnected from spiritual and religious realities, or else it loses its essence.
avoid this by taking as their starting point some feature of lived experience, and then using theology to reflect on that lived experience. Consider two contrasts: a poor person using a “bottom-up” method of theology starting from the experience of poverty, versus a tenured academic theologian in the developed world who has never known real poverty in his or her life, and so therefore can only use “top-down” methods. I suspect they will likely understand the words of Jesus “Blessed are the poor” very differently from each other.

Neither type of method is inherently superior to the other: each is able to draw its own set of conclusions, and each needs each other to “test” the validity of its results. Because of the value of this interaction, there have been attempts to develop hybrid theological methods combining the power of both the “top-down” and “bottom-up” methods.

Scholasticism: using a “top-down” method

For centuries theology was largely undertaken by bishops and other direct pastoral leaders of the church, who were preoccupied with the very practical questions being asked of them. When the monastic movement became widespread an increasing amount of theology came from monasteries, primarily because the monks, in their lifestyle, had more time and resources for reading and study. Eventually the first theology faculties were founded, and theology entered a more “theoretical” and speculative phase. From this time came the scholastic method of doing theology.

The monks (and later, university faculty, many of whom were monks of some sort) practised a form of prayer called lectio divina, or “divine reading”, and in fact still do today. In lectio divina a person reads the Bible or other spiritual works as thoroughly as he or she can -- with the heart, to believe it and seek the greatest spiritual benefit from it, and with the mind, to come to the greatest possible understanding of what the words mean, of what God is trying to say. The scholastic method attempted to enhance this spiritual practice, particularly the intellectual part, by bringing it into a group discussion context (such as in a classroom).

The scholastic method works in three phases, called the lectio, the quaestio, and the disputatio:

- **Lectio**: The Latin word for reading. Reading was the initial step in the process, whereby a student would carefully read a text making an earnest attempt to fully understand what it was saying.

- **Quaestio**: The second step was the asking of questions of the text, trying to discover the fullness of its implications and its deeper meaning. This exercise was complemented by the formulation of theoretical answers to the questions raised.

- **Disputatio**: This phase of the method involved a form of debate or confrontation between the different theoretical solutions in order to uncover any flaws in their reasoning, and hopefully, to find a path to a more correct understanding of the text.
This would actually occur in theology classes. A professor would assign a reading, and the students would have to return with a thorough understanding of the elements of the text and a list of questions that they felt were raised by the text. These questions would then be brought together and classified into groups, and then the students would go back and as their next assignment they would theorize as to the best theological answer to those questions. They would then return to class and debate the various answers with each other, to try and determine the best elements of a solution to the questions that had been raised. The professor would act as a resource person and moderator of the debate.

One of the greatest works of the scholastic method was the *Summa theologica* (“summary of theology”) produced by St. Thomas Aquinas, who taught theology at the University of Paris. This book in its very structure shows a breakdown of theological questions into categories, the posing of these questions and the possible answers, and the reasons for selecting one answer over the others. It reads almost like his class notes from courses he had taught, grouped together in summary form. In fact, despite the incredible intellectual depth of the questions raised and answers given, at the beginning of the *Summa* St. Thomas called it “an introductory text for beginners”.

Two important characteristics of the spirit of scholasticism were (1) the assumption that there were no stupid questions, and hence any question could theoretically be put forward, and (2) one had to be willing to surrender one's own solutions to better answers. Curiosity and humility were rewarded! The scholastic method was a powerful tool and would be wielded by some of the greatest minds of the day to produce reflections of questions on philosophy and theology that retain their force and importance even to this day.

**Liberation theology: using a “bottom-up” method**

The scholastic method and other related “top-down” methods are excellent for the intellectual rigour of the results they can obtain, but they do risk at times producing a theology that is a bit disconnected from the everyday reality of people. Not every Christian becomes a student of theology, but that doesn’t make such persons any less of a Christian in the world. At times a new theology will emerge, arising from some element of the human condition and driven by very “real world” concerns. Liberation theology is one such example.

Liberation theology is the name given to a theological movement arising in Latin America, and the signature work outlining its tenets was *A Theology of Liberation* by the Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez. Liberation theology is characterized by 5 key features:

i Liberation theology originates in real life. It seeks to address the real and concrete experience of poverty and injustice experienced by the weakest members of Latin American society.

ii Liberation theology has a vision of salvation that includes the whole of life. For Liberation theology, salvation is not just the salvation of your soul in heaven, but salvation from oppression and poverty here on earth. This salvation is also not limited to the personal dimension, to individuals, but includes a political and social
Liberation theology is not simply a theoretical reflection on what must be believed, but also a reflection on what we must do as Christians (called a reflection on “praxis”).

Liberation theology seeks out philosophical models that already seek to address these questions, albeit in a non-theological manner, as a way to help in the theological reflection. In practice, this has meant in some ways a turning to Marxist theory and its suggestions for action.

Liberation theology seeks to address not only what must be done outside the Church in the culture, but also provides a reflection and prescription for the Church itself to be able to better live this form of justice. Its recommendations include:

-- The Church must make a prophetic denunciation in Latin America condemning the use of the Third World for the profit of the First.
-- The Church must be in solidarity with the poor.
-- The Church must be conscientiously evangelical not only to inspire but also to educate.
-- The Church needs to reform its own structure.
-- The clergy must change their lifestyle.

This very concrete and practical way of looking at theology aimed at producing a “theology-in-action,” but it also ruffled a lot of feathers. This was partly because of its particular affinities with Marxist theory, but also because of the bold challenges it launched to both the culture and the church. The method and message of liberation theology resonated with millions of people, and this 5-part pattern has been repeated in other theologies as well that seek to address some area of lived experience (such as feminist theology, Black theology, and gay and lesbian theology).

Bernard Lonergan’s “Method in theology”: a hybrid

Bernard Lonergan, a Canadian Jesuit, is a major writer in the area of theological method. He proposed that the process of doing theology had eight major steps, divided into two sides: the “upward movement,” and the “downward movement”. The upward movement starts with the basic data and seeks to come to the fullest possible understanding of the truth behind the data. The downward movement seeks to articulate and communicate this truth.
The “upward” movement

Research → Interpretation → History → Dialectics → CONVERSION

Research means simply gathering the data and being attentive to it, i.e. to the sources of theology already covered.

Interpretation is the process of trying to understand what the individual pieces of data mean, especially in the context in which they are found. For data from the Bible, for example, we would try and understand the historical and cultural context in which the passages being examined were written.

We may discover that there are many possible interpretations of a piece of data. History means discovering what the history of each of these interpretations has been -- why they were preferred or rejected, and what their current status is now. It is a way to draw on the wisdom of the past -- as well as to prevent repeating past mistakes.

It is unlikely, however, that our conclusions at this point will be universally accepted. Dialectics seeks to discover the sources of disagreements, not so much in the data, but in the people disagreeing. What are the different philosophies, ideologies, and ethical stances at work?

Ultimately, in the face of these differences, the theologian has to make a choice: it is the moment of conversion, in which we take a stand in the face of differing theological positions. It is more than simply repeating the position we may have held previously, however: we have now been challenged by a more explicit investigation of the truth, and our choice has to be made subordinate to the truth we have discovered.

The “downward” movement

CONVERSION → Foundations → Doctrines → Systematics → Communication

From conversion comes Foundations, which is the development of criteria (based on the options chosen in our conversion) by which we evaluate other theologies. For example, if part of our conversion is the conviction that the Protestant Bible has the correct canon of scripture, then we will tend to regard with suspicion theologies developed with an opposite view in mind -- our conversion has given us a foundation which we use to evaluate the other positions.

Doctrines is the development of actual judgements we make based on our foundations. It may be a positive exposition of our conclusions, or it may be a denouncing of positions we believe are erroneous.

Systematics is the name given to the attempt to give a systematic expression of what has been stated in doctrines. It places the various doctrines in a framework of thought, relating one to another and trying to sort out what appear to be inconsistencies.
Communication is the translation of theology into forms people can understand, that people can use to learn. The writing of a Sunday school textbook, for example, in order to pass on a particular theological understanding to the next generation, is a work of communication.

Conclusions regarding theological method

Students often find methodology to be one of the least interesting dimensions of intellectual study, but it is important. It is like listening to someone sing. Little children, for example, love to sing, and they do it with great gusto, often changing the melody, tempo, or words in the middle of the song. They sing just for the love of it. But let’s be honest, when we go out to buy a music CD, we are looking for someone with a bit more of a trained voice. Voice training adds method to the singing, perfecting the voice and helping a person to be able to express themselves better. It is the same with methodology: it is meant to help us “sing” our theology even better than we could before.

How can we find a balance? Let us learn our methods, but let us also not let methodology cause us to lose our curious heart. The German theologian Jurgen Moltmann said it well:

I am often asked about my theological method, and seldom provide an answer. At a time when so many colleagues are concerned solely with questions of method, what interests me are theological ideas, and their revision and innovation. There is a personal reason for this, among other things. As a child I underwent no very profound Christian socialization, but grew up with the poets and philosophers of German Idealism. When I was forced to become a most unhappy soldier, at the end of 1944, I took with me Goethe’s poems and his Faust, and Nietzsche’s Zarathustra. I only acquired a Bible when one was given me by an American chaplain, in a prisoner-of-war camp in Belgium, and it was there that I began to read it for the first time. Since the moment when I began to study theology (first in England, in the prisoner-of-war camp at Norton, near Nottingham, and then, from 1948, in Göttingen) everything theological has been for me marvellously new. I have first to discover everything for myself, and understand it, and make it my own. Right down to the present day, theology has continued to be for me a tremendous adventure, a journey of discovery into a, for me, unknown country, a voyage without the certainty of a return, a path into the unknown with many surprises and not without disappointments. If I have a theological virtue at all, then it is one that has never hitherto been recognized as such: curiosity.

So don’t forget, theology can’t be done by computers! Put your heart into it, and don’t let training in methods cause you to forget the joy of “singing”!

8: The role of philosophy in theology

“Theology is the queen of the sciences, and philosophy is her handmaiden.”

The previous chapter examined the "theological recipe," but in any recipe there is a third component that is rarely mentioned because it is simply understood: the kitchen! Theology has its own "theological utensils" as well, taken from the science of philosophy. Philosophy brings order to human reason, and the application of philosophical principles to the work of theology has an enormous influence on the outcome.

There have been many independent streams of philosophy in the world, such as the Chinese and Indian schools of philosophy. The stream of philosophy that has had the greatest impact on Christian thought and Western culture has, however, without a doubt been that which originated with the ancient Greeks, who were, as far as we can tell, the first to undertake philosophy for its own sake in a manner independent from religion. In this section we will follow this stream. In particular, we will trace the course of two principal and parallel philosophical currents of thought: the Platonic stream, originating with the theories of Plato, and the Aristotelian or Realist stream, rooted in the theories of Aristotle. We will examine their fundamental tenets, their different manifestations throughout history and their more illustrious disciples.

PART I: SETTING THE STAGE IN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

The initial problem of Western philosophy: looking for the fundamental substance

Philosophical thought as we know it originated in the West in ancient Greece and can be traced to Thales of Miletus (625-547 B.C.), the first philosopher mentioned by history. Thales marked a “quantum leap” in humanity's never-ending effort to understand the nature of the universe.

77 Attributed to St. Thomas Aquinas.
He was the herald of a separation between the mythological manner of explaining things and the new philosophical method based on human reason. The questions that preoccupied Thales and the first philosophers regarded nature focussing on the make-up and structure of the physical world. This was the initial philosophy which would, with time, expand to encompass everything attainable within the grasp of the human mind.

The particular question that taxed our hero Thales was “What is the source of being?” In other words, what is the fundamental substance that would offer a unified explanation for all things that exist? Thales’ answer to this question was a simple one: water is the fundamental or prime substance. Sounding overly simplistic to contemporary ears, this conclusion was not altogether unreasonable for the era in question. Water possesses the property of existing in different phases: solid ice, liquid water and gaseous vapor. Water is necessary for all living beings. It is abundant. And it appears to trigger reactions in matter: for example, the spring rains bring forth the growth of new vegetation, and so forth.

Thanks to Thales, the ball had begun to roll. It would pick up steam with the contributions of his followers. Two other early philosophers, both from Miletus as well, would offer different solutions to the question of prime substance. Anaximenes (570-526 B.C.) postulated that this substance was air. Again, not an unreasonable assertion for the time. He was familiar with the water theory of Thales, but he perhaps asked himself, “Where does water come from?” Rain water appeared to originate from the sky, therefore could water be simply another form of condensed air? It is interesting to note that the Greek word for breath, pneuma, also implied spirit. Air animates all living things, in that they are required to breathe. When a person dies, for example, their breath “leaves their body” in the same sense as they would “give up their spirit.” The element of air, therefore, carried a spiritual connotation with it, due to these ethereal qualities. Anaximander (610-547 B.C.) postulated that the prime substance was an undefined element he named apeiron. This translates loosely into the “boundless” or “infinite”. Anaximander believed that the fundamental nature of the world is ascribed to a substance that is beyond the ordinary elements proposed by his peers.

A significant development in philosophy occurred with the arrival of Pythagoras (570-490 B.C.). He established the first connection between mathematics and nature. By studying the musical instruments of the day, particularly the lyre, Pythagoras was able to determine a relationship between the length of the instruments strings and the musical tone they produced. This was but one example of how nature can be explained using mathematics. This led Pythagoras to believe that mathematics or “numbers” were at the root of everything. In other words, all things can be explained using numbers and the relationship between them (i.e. mathematics). The theory of numbers as "prime substance" emphasizes the shift away from the tangible and concrete towards the conceptual or abstract. For example, when speaking of a quantity, say the number three, we can speak of three apples. However, the important element is the number three, not the apples. We can separate the concept of “three” and use whatever physical object to convey it, such as three oranges, or three stones, etc., and if we continue further we can dispense with any physical reference and simply speak of the number three in its pure form. The mind can carry the concept of three, without

The literal meaning of the word "substance" is "to stand under".
attaching it to any physical anchor. The number three is an immaterial concept that is understood by the mind. As we saw with the philosophers from Miletus, the answer to the fundamental question of source of being continues to shift from physical and concrete elements towards the intangible and transcendental. In order to underline this shift, Pythagoras even founded a quasi-mystical sect or school devoted to contemplation and the study of mathematics. Philosophy, as emphasized by Pythagoras, is also moving in the direction of theoretical and non-empirical thinking.

We see, even at this early stage of philosophy, that the lines of thought are already progressing from material elements to the immaterial. From water to air to \textit{aperion}, there is a gradual recognition that the unifying principal somehow transcends physical substance.

\textit{Going a step further: from understanding our changing world to understanding change itself}

If the search for the fundamental substance was to progress, it would have to face the problem of change. In other words, what remains constant when everything else changes? Change appears to be a fundamental character of nature. Our experience attests that things are constantly in motion and changing. Amid all this change, what remains the same? Two key solutions to this problem are proposed by the philosophers Parmenides (515-440 B.C.) and Heraclites (540-480 B.C.).

\textit{“Being is, non-being is not.”}

Parmenides’ basic philosophy was that all change is illusion. He was perfectly aware that the world appeared to be in a constant state of flux, but he believed our senses deceive us. The fundamental substance is Being. In order to reconcile the perpetual change he perceived with his senses, and the permanence of Being (part of the definition of Being itself), he chose to trust his reason and dismiss his senses. He reasoned that nothing comes from nothing, that all that exists must come from something pre-existing. He took it for granted that the world had always existed and therefore Being must have always existed, and will always exist. Being is eternal. The chosen symbol for Being was the sphere, the shape considered most perfect.

\textit{“Everything changes, nothing stays the same.”}

Diametrically opposed to Parmenides stands Heraclites' philosophy that everything changes and nothing stays the same. He believed that “Becoming” was at the root of all things. One of his famous phrases is “You never step into the same stream twice.” He meant that when one steps into a stream of moving water, the particular portion of water that you come into contact with very quickly flows downstream, and when you return to the stream, you face a completely new section of water. The original water molecules encountered at your first visit have long since moved on and a new set of molecules have replaced them. In this sense, the stream is no longer the same stream.
The consequences of a perpetually changing foundation to existence are profound. If the fundamental elements are inconstant and unstable, how can there be any laws that govern them? If nothing stays the same, how can we truly know their nature? Science becomes seemingly impossible, even meaningless. His preference for constant change led him to propose fire as the basic element due to its constantly changing nature and its dynamism. He believed the rarefaction and condensation of fire accounted for the myriad substances found in nature.

*The Sophists*

Parmenides’ and Heraclites’ philosophies stand at opposite ends of a spectrum and are seemingly irreconcilable, thereby leaving the thought of the day in a somewhat difficult position. Which of the two positions is true? Amid this backdrop of uncertainty arose a class of philosophers known as the Sophists. The word sophist means “a wise or informed person.” These itinerant thinkers traveled the ancient Greek arena selling their knowledge to those who could afford it. They were notable for their position of skepticism, that is the belief that man cannot solve the riddles of nature. This skepticism in the natural realm was transposed to the moral sphere, and moral tenets previously held to be true were called into question. If the designation of what is right and wrong depends on a definite and universally accepted truth, what will happen if it is discovered that man is incapable of knowing these truths? The effect is moral relativism, where no universally binding moral laws can be confirmed. The inability of man to determine the nature of the world extended to an inability to determine set moral principles. If we do not know the nature of the world, we do not know the nature of man. If we do not know the nature of man, we do not know what is right and wrong for him.

The Sophists prospered within both philosophical spheres established by Parmenides and Heraclites. The extremes of the debate fed their skeptic positions. If our senses are illusion and cannot be trusted, as Parmenides maintained, then how can we be sure of anything? On the other hand, if Heraclites was right and everything constantly changes, then there are no stable standards or established laws, natural or moral. It appeared that they were in a win-win situation, but as they roamed the Hellenic world, and converged on the cultural center of Athens, they came face to face with a man who would prove to be a most formidable opponent.
Standing in opposition to the Sophists was Socrates of Athens (470-399 B.C.), dubbed the wisest of the Athenians by the Oracle of Delphi, despite the fact that he confessed to knowing nothing. Socrates did not accept moral relativism and set out to find something permanent, something that does not change. Socrates discovered that the permanence he sought could be found in the definition of things. That is, the link between a definition and the thing defined cannot change. For example, any given language assigns words to designate objects; a river means a “natural steam of water larger than a creek and emptying into an ocean, lake or another river”, a dog means “a domesticated canine”, and so on. Although the words designating an object may change from one language to the next -- for example, dog (English), chien (French), cane (Italian) -- and though words can even change within a particular language over the course of time, the definition of the words, that is the understanding of the object that the word conveys, does not change. Dog, chien, and cane all point to the same object, and they all mean the same thing despite the different spellings and pronunciations. On a deeper level, Socrates was not seeking the conventional meaning of the word but what the thing really is -- the essence of what is denoted by the word. That is, he was not just interested in the power of words to point to an object, or to label it, but in their capacity, through definitions, to capture and communicate the very essence of the object they describe. In this sense, Socrates believed there existed an unbreakable bond between our definitions of things, our understanding of them, and the nature of the things themselves. The word that a culture may assign to an object may be arbitrary or conventional, but the definition is not: it instead offered a link to the true nature of the object (see diagram on the previous page).

Socrates’ search for the ingredient which was the same in all instances can be called the "theory of the universals". A universal definition is one that is valid regardless of culture or place. Therefore, the definition of a dog as a “domesticated canine” is just as true for an Athenian of the fourth century B.C. as for a Montrealer of the 21st century A.D. This idea of a "universal" stood in contrast to the doctrine of the Sophists, who maintained that there were no universal standards. Socrates’ novel insight was to seek to understand the true nature of things by discerning their true definitions. An accurate definition of an object enables a person to know the object. This powerful insight also had the distinct advantage of being able to investigate non-physical things. Not being limited to physical descriptions or material explanations of the universe, he was now free to investigate things such as justice, beauty, truth, etc.

This new way of looking at things also required a new methodology for arriving at accurate
definitions. Socrates’ favourite method involved dialoguing with others. This method, known as “dialectics,” involved engaging in a question-and-answer investigation with another person in order to uncover the truth. Through an exercise of mutual questioning and interrogatory suggestions that were accepted or rejected by the parties, one could explore whether one’s understanding, or definition, of a particular subject was accurate or wanting. In practice, Socrates would often feign ignorance and question people on their assumptions and beliefs, all the while conducting himself with skillful humility and the most intentional politeness. His skill at asking questions, often-times exposing the ignorance of his adversaries by a destructive cross-examination, won him considerable renown, as well as an impressive list of enemies. In the end, his love of, and search for the truth, won him popularity, fame and ultimately, the death penalty. Not everyone appreciated the truth like Socrates did.

Nevertheless, he successfully managed to influence the orientation of philosophy to the point that he has been described as the “hinge,” where philosophy before him is called pre-Socratic, and would be irrevocably changed after him. He would heavily influence and inspire the thinkers that followed him, and he prepared the way for two of the greatest philosophical minds the world would ever see. The pursuit of truth and the liberation of philosophical thought from strictly physical objects, initiated by Socrates, was to be brought to new heights by his intellectual progeny. Plato (428-328 B.C.), who was heavily influenced by Socrates, and his student Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) were the greatest of the ancient Greek philosophers. These two giants would develop ideas that would found and chart the path of philosophy for the remainder of history.

**Plato and the theory of Ideas**

In order to explain change, Plato divided all of reality into four distinct segments. The principle division is between the world of Ideas or Forms, and the world of the Matter or physical things. The ideas we possess in our minds, the understanding we have of the essence of things, that are expressed in our definitions, exist in a pure form, that is, as pure Ideas, apart from their material appearance. The notion of Ideas and Forms is comparable to that of pure spiritual being. In other words, my eyes may see an individual horse before me, but the Idea of a horse exists in my mind simultaneously. The ideal Form of the horse in my head, is quite separate and independent from the physical horse in front of me: I can still think of a horse, or entertain the idea of one, with my eyes closed. What is more, Plato maintains that the truer reality, the higher mode of existence of the horse, is not the physical animal galloping through the field, but the Idea of the horse grasped by my mind. The true horse, the essence of “horse-ness” resides in the Idea and not in the material creature.

Plato establishes a hierarchy of being, where Forms are superior to Matter. The reason a horse is a horse is rooted in the “participation” of the physical animal with the ideal Form of “horse-ness”. There is a connection between the individual material horse and the universal immaterial Form of “horseness”. The idea of participation is unclear, and not well explained; nevertheless, he attempts to describe it metaphorically, by comparing the Idea of a thing to a solid
object, and the material thing to the object’s shadow. The shadow is only a shade or imperfect reflection of the object itself, and only by knowing the Idea can we see what it is truly like, its true nature (so to speak).

In his *Simile of the Line*, Plato illustrates schematically, his theory of Ideas and Matter. In it Ideas/Forms are seen as superior to material objects. The superiority of Forms over Matter lies in the qualities that Forms possess. Plato observed that matter can corrupt and be destroyed, while Ideas cannot. A horse can grow sick, it can age and die and its body decompose. The Idea of a horse is incorruptible, and therefore, eternal. An Idea can be shared among individuals without being diminished or reduced, while if a material object were to be shared, it would necessarily have to be divided up into smaller parts.

The unchanging and incorruptible nature of Forms suggests a superior, more permanent nature when compared with matter.

Plato’s theories took on a quasi-religious character when it came to the human person. He believed that the true or pure form of a human being was their soul, in other words, the person WAS the soul. The soul was immaterial, immortal and could only find full expression when it was free from the body. Plato believed that the body was a sort of prison for the soul. The soul, due to some transgression, had fallen from its proper place in the realm of Ideas, and had become trapped within the material world, specifically, within a carnal body. All the higher functions of the human being, i.e. reason and intellect, were proper to the soul. It was the soul that controlled the body, made the decisions, and which possessed the very essence of what it means to be human. The body was merely a shell, that could be discarded, just as if we would shed our garments.

In Plato’s view, the purpose of life was to escape the material bondage of the body, and return to the more perfect existence of being pure soul. This could be achieved by philosophy, by exercising the mind and the contemplation of pure forms. In order to truly understand reality, a person must deal with what is most real, and Ideas were the true standards of reality. The ideal man was a philosopher, and a philosopher could not claim to know reality unless he endeavoured to know Ideas, and the only access to Ideas was through the power of our reason. The road to knowledge travelled on the path of contemplation of Ideas. The contemplative life, for Plato, was the true source of knowledge, and the highest calling in life.

A hallmark of Plato’s philosophy is the duality that he sees between form and matter, between the spiritual and the physical. The two worlds are very distinct, hierarchical, with the spiritual being superior to the physical, and in some ways, even antagonistic, especially where the
human person is concerned. The emphasis on duality and the world of ideas is one of the most enduring notions in the history of thought, and has marked philosophical discourse ever since. For this reason, Plato’s philosophy has often been called Dualism, or Idealism.

**Aristotle: keeping your feet on the ground**

The greatest of Plato’s students was Aristotle, and legend has it that he was nicknamed the *nous* (the Greek word for the mind or knowledge), which in modern language could be translated into “the brain”. Despite being Plato’s student, however, Aristotle called into question many of his master’s theories, especially his theory of participation. His critique was essentially that “participation” does not adequately explain the interaction between matter and form. This led Aristotle to develop his own theory of *hylemorphism*, literally meaning “matter-form-ism”. This new perspective argued that matter and form were not separated as described in the dualist thinking of Plato, but rather that both were joined together within individual substances (substance being defined as the union of matter and form). Whereas Plato taught that an individual being, say a physical horse, participated in the separate ideal Form of horse-ness, Aristotle diverged from this belief and argued that an individual horse is a combination of “prime matter” and the form of horse-ness. There is no separation between matter and form, but rather they are intrinsically joined together in what we call substance. The Form is what makes a particular substance different from other substances. For example, a horse was different from a human because their forms were different. Even though both were composed of the same matter, that is, flesh and blood, they are fundamentally different due to the different nature of their forms.

The example of a sculpture further illustrates this theory. A sculptor may have an idea for a sculpture in his mind. This idea regards the form or shape of the piece he hopes to create. If the sculptor never executes his work, however, the sculpture will never pass from the ideal to the real. On the other hand, a block of unrefined marble cannot be said to be a sculpture either. It may have the potential to be worked into a sculpture by the skill and workmanship of an artist, but until someone takes hammer and chisel to it, it will remain a mere block of shapeless matter. Only when the sculptor carves the form he sees in his mind into the matter of marble, are the two elements of form and matter “fused” together and joined to form the sculpture. The original idea can be said to be the form, the shapeless block of marble can be compared to the matter, and the finished sculpture (i.e. the union of the two), can be equated with the substance. The substance cannot be said to exist without either of the two fundamental elements. The potential sculpture in the artist’s imagination only becomes real or actual once it is carved in some material.

Furthermore, the statue of a horse would obviously be different from the statue of a man. The reason that the statues are different is because the idea that spawned them, that gave them shape was different, even though the material from which they are carved is identical.

The road to true knowledge for Aristotle did not lie exclusively in the mental contemplation of forms, because he believed that forms were “imbedded” in material substances. This
understanding of reality meant that a person had access to the forms found in physical bodies through his/her senses. Hence, observation and experience became a primary source of knowledge. He believed that one should “study horses before studying horse-ness”. The importance of this method of acquiring knowledge cannot be underestimated and has had a profound effect on Western civilization, as it founded the method of observation that underpins the modern sciences. The scientific method itself begins with the observation of physical phenomenon as a first step in order to attempt to understand reality. This is why Aristotle is accredited with the invention of the physical sciences. Further contributions include the system of biological classification of genus and species. The structured and orderly operation of reason known as logic, a system unsurpassed in the history of human thinking, is also a product of Aristotle’s genius. As already stated, the current of thought which flows from Aristotle’s source is known as Realism for its emphasis on the real world conveyed by the senses.

The great philosophers of ancient Greece

This image is taken from the painting The School of Athens, by Raphael, a famous work which depicts many of the philosophers of ancient Greece. At the centre of the painting, however, stand Plato (left) and Aristotle (right). The position of their right hands is symbolic of the difference in emphasis between the two philosophers.

Plato is an Idealist: he believes that true knowledge is found in the intellectual contemplation of pure Ideas, also known as Forms, so his finger is pointing upward to symbolize the superiority of these forms to ordinary matter.

Aristotle, on the other hand, is a Realist: he believes that all knowledge starts in experience, particularly the data of our senses regarding ordinary material things. So his hand is flat, facing the earth, symbolizing the importance he places on the common-sense experience of reality. It is as if he is contesting the ideas of Plato, his old teacher.
**Plato and Aristotle: comparison by example**

Both Plato and Aristotle accepted the existence of Forms and Matter. What differentiated them was how they understood the relationship between Form and Matter. For Plato the real essence of things was the Form, and the contemplation of these Forms was the starting point of real philosophy. For Aristotle, however, Forms could not really be understood without a necessary connection to Matter -- both were necessary to begin to understand the essence of things. For that reason Aristotle believed that all knowledge of things had to begin in experience. This is why Aristotle was considered to have been one of the first real scientists, and even wrote books on scientific subjects (such as zoology).

Despite all this, however, we can be forgiven for wondering whether there is a practical side to all of this, whether for theology or just for ordinary life. The different philosophical positions, however, can have very different implications for how we view the world, and especially how we view human nature. For example, each philosophy tends to arrive at very different conclusions regarding the soul:

**PLATONIST SCHOOL**

**The Soul is the principle of reason**

Because the goal of intellectual beings is to “contemplate the forms,” which are non-material, there must be a non-material soul in human beings that permits us to go beyond the animals and have a true capacity for reason. Animals and plants, however, because they lack reason, therefore also lack a soul.

**The Soul is the essential element of a person**

Reason is that which distinguishes human beings from animals, such that the essence of a person is found in their soul. The body is merely a tool for the soul, and at its worst is considered a prison for the soul, something which can distract the soul from its higher purpose.

**ARISTOTELEAN SCHOOL**

**The Soul of the principle of life**

After death we have a soulless body, i.e. a corpse, so the soul must be the principle of life. But if it is so, then every living being must have a soul -- animals and plants included. There are simply 3 kinds of soul: vegetative, animal (which includes the vegetative functions), and rational (which includes the animal and vegetative functions).

**Both Body & Soul together compose a person**

Without the animal and vegetative functions the rational functions would not be able to operate either. Body and soul need each other, and really can’t be understood apart from each other. Both enter into the true definition of what a person is.
The Soul is immortal

Because the soul’s function is to contemplate the eternal Forms, the soul must also be eternal. Plato taught that the soul reincarnates, putting on a new body each time (almost like a set of clothes) and taking it off at the time of physical death. Each reincarnation, however, was considered a punishment for some unknown sin the soul might have committed in the spiritual realm of the Forms.

The Soul is without gender (i.e. unisex)

Gender is a property of the body, like height or weight. Just as a soul cannot be said to be tall or short, or fat or thin, the soul cannot be said to be male or female. For all intents and purposes gender is not part of the soul, and therefore does not enter into the definition of the essence of a human being.

The Soul could possess gender (male/female)

Gender is a property of the body, but because “body” and “soul” help define each other, it is possible to conceive of the soul has sharing some of the attributes of the body. Therefore it is possible to conceive of the soul as also possessing gender.

The historical split into two branches of philosophy

The debate that began between Plato and Aristotle forms the basis and the model for all philosophical debate that followed. All the myriad models of thought conceived of throughout the centuries all deal with, or attempt to refine and expand, elements of the original fundamental debate between the master and his student. Indeed, it has been said that all subsequent philosophical debate since Plato and Aristotle has been an attempt to resolve the issues they themselves raised.
Can the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle ever be reconciled? We need to recognize that the two systems of philosophy are not polar opposites: that distinction belongs to Parmenides and Heraclitus, in the opposition between Being and Becoming, and both Idealism and Realism are attempts to find the middle ground between the two. Plato leans more heavily in the direction of Idealism than Aristotle, but there is still a bias within Aristotle for Being over Becoming. (It should be noted that there have since been other philosophers whose work has leaned closer to the Becoming end, such as the work of Alfred North Whitehead.) The ideal philosophy, yet to be developed, would sit right between these two poles, overcoming the original issue at hand: what is existence, in the face of change.
St. Augustine of Hippo (the city, not the animal)

Plato’s theories enjoyed a popular following in the ancient Roman world and were propagated by several prominent thinkers, such as Plotinus (c. 205-270 A.D.), who advocated a hierarchical view of reality where matter was not merely inferior to spirit, but was considered corrupt.

Plotinus influenced the greatest of the early Christian philosophers, St. Augustine, bishop of Hippo (b.345 -- d.430 A.D.). St. Augustine attempted to “Christianize” the theories of Plato, that is, he adapted these ideas to the Christian faith. He believed in the existence of immutable and eternal truths, which were not justified by the senses, but by a participation of the intellect with the first and ultimate truth which is God. His major work was City of God, in which he described the dual realities of the worldly realm, named the City of Man, and the kingdom established by God through Christ, the City of God, which exists simultaneously and in parallel with the world. The dichotomy between the cities echoes the mentality established by Plato’s matter-form dualism. St. Augustine exerted a major influence on early Christian thought, and would later be a strong influence on Martin Luther (b.1483 -- d.1546 A.D.), who was himself an Augustinian monk.

The Nominalists

The nominalist school of thought is rooted primarily in the philosophy of William of Occam (b.1285 -- d.1349), an English Franciscan scholar, who challenged the philosophy of Plato in one of its weakest points: the theory of "participation". At stake was the question of the link between the universal Forms and the individual particular things of this world which were said to participate in those Forms. The problem is not easily solved. After all, anyone can posit that a universal "human nature" exists, but no one has ever seen "human nature" walking down the street. All we ever do see is the actual individual human being said to possess that human nature. This, in fact, was Occam's starting point. He advanced a form of radical empiricism, and argued that the basis of all knowledge is direct experience of individual things and particular events. Reality cannot be established by reason alone, but only by experience.
As a result, Occam denied the existence of universal Forms. The universals were considered not as real existing things, but merely as general labels that we invented and attached to individual beings who we recognized shared common traits. Universals were nothing more than names, that helped us classify the world we experience through our senses. The essences attributed to individual beings, such as the idea of humanity or human nature, are not actual or real, but conventional, symbolic or nominal, hence the term of nominalism.

The impact of these theories are profound. Whereas within the scholastic school maintained, there was a direct link between a name or word, through a definition, to the thing it designated or defined, the nominalists denied this. In effect the link between the word and the object was severed. Therefore, the permanent and unchanging element in reality is reduced to something invented by the human mind and applied, or “stuck onto” objects we experience in the world.

**Descartes: It’s all Mind over Matter**

René Descartes (b.1596 – d.1650) was preoccupied with the question of certitude: how can we be certain of what is true? His philosophical answer to this question would usher in a new era of modern thought. In his *Discourse on Method*, he attempts to establish a method of discerning, by power of reason, what can be considered true and free from all doubt. In many ways, Descartes’ method is diametrically opposed to the nominalist notion that truth is essentially dependent on our senses. Rather, in the Cartesian doctrine, it is the mind that plays the principle role is determining what is true and what is false, a current of thought known as Rationalism. Descartes did not trust the senses as accurate indicators of what is real. After all, we may be caught in a dream and experience all manner of sensations and believe them to be real, when in actual fact they are nothing more than imaginings in our mind. How then, can such a dubious thing as sensory input be the basis for a honest discernment of reality?
For Descartes the mind was the true measuring stick of reality. His most famous dictum was the *cogito,* “I think, therefore I am.” If one were to progressively and systematically doubt everything, then such a person would arrive at a single, irrefutable certainty: that he or she is thinking. No one can deny or doubt the fact that they are thinking. Even the act of doubting or questioning, is an act of thought. Therefore, if the first certainty I can affirm is that I think, then it follows that I exist as well, for only something that exists can act or be. If I did not exist there would be no possibility for me to think or act in any shape, way or form. Once I realize that I think, the second positive affirmation I can make is that I necessarily exist.

One of the obvious consequences of Rationalism, is to place the mental order firmly above and superior to the material order. Reason, the mind, is the arbiter of truth and reality, while the testimony of the senses, rooted in the material world are suspect. Here we see echoes of Plato’s duality and hierarchy of Form and Ideas over Matter, and his mistrust of the senses.

Criticism of this strict form of Rationalism points out the deprecation of experience as a source of knowledge. If our senses are false, and cannot be trusted to provide us with valid facts, then our knowledge must issue from a non-material source (i.e. therefore a spiritual or mental source). This fails to account for any important contribution of the senses and experience in our acquired knowledge. Furthermore, an important consequence of Descartes’ theory is that for the first time in philosophy, the determination of the truth, of my ability to know, does not depend on an interaction between a subject and an object, that is, between myself and a distinct “other”; instead, truth depends on an interior criteria, namely the mind. Not only the mind, but MY mind. We have shifted from an interplay between subject and object to a system of thinking which concedes complete authority in matters of truth and knowledge to a subject’s personal psyche. It is literally a question of mind over matter.

The emphasis on the “I,” also known as the “self,” is extreme. What Descartes is effectively saying is that it is the self that exists, it is the self that experiences, it is the self that is source of, and possesses the capacity for, action. No longer does the subject play a passive role in the reception of outside data from the senses, no longer is there an interplay of abstraction between the subject and the outside object, as in the Realist theories of Aristotle. All initiative and power belongs to the self. This results in a bias within Descartes’ philosophy: the bias of freedom over nature. Descartes' method involves a denial of each individual experience, but has to stop at the realization that it

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**Descartes and the Nominalists**

Have you noticed that there is a strong resemblance between the approaches of the Nominalists and the subsequent thought of Descartes?

The Nominalists focussed on the Formal Relation, to such an extent that they wondered how the Material relation can even exist. This was because the Material Relation depends on the relationship between definitions and things, and definitions seemed hopelessly dependent on the words that themselves make up the definitions.

Descartes took it one step further. The Nominalists did not doubt the data of the senses per se, but just how the mind can create the link between the data of the senses and the universals. Descartes effectively destroyed the validity of the data of the senses completely. So once again the Formal Relation was privileged over the Material Relation -- through an argument that was seemingly unanswerable.
cannot deny the experience of denying experience. There is nothing in this method, however, which requires that the self be the source of this ultimate experience. In other words, "I think therefore I am" is wrong, because it assumes that the "I" is the source of the "thinking". It would have been better to conclude "I experience, therefore I am." To experience is a passive verb, to think is an active verb. Descartes, by assuming it is the "I" that is the source of the experience of the denial of experience, builds into his system an assumption that the self is capable of free will and free action, without any necessary reference to human nature. Indeed, the only thing that can be asserted about human nature is that the human person is capable of free thinking. Man is radically free. In fact, Descartes would say that it is our nature to be free. This opens the door to a philosophy where Man can override any outside influences to his person, and steers himself according to his own will alone. Here is a being, who unlike all other things is creation, is free from the universal laws that guide and determine all physical beings, animate and inanimate. Man’s will alone, among all things visible in the universe, possesses the unique quality of not being subject to anything but itself.

**Kant: it’s all in your head**

Another tremendous shift in philosophical thought occurred with the theories of the Enlightenment thinker Immanuel Kant (b.1724 – d.1804). Kant was responsible for a “Copernican revolution” in the way we see the interaction of our minds and the world, or to put it in a more contemporary way, he caused a “quantum leap” in the manner mankind’s thought of itself. Copernicus was a renaissance astronomer that first hypothesized that the earth was not the centre of the universe, but rather, that it was mathematically conceivable that earth, and the other astral bodies, actually revolved around the sun. This proposition shattered previous norms and ways of perceiving the cosmos. Similarly, Kant introduced a shattering change in the way we saw ourselves and the world. The centre of the universe was about to change, again.

In his work *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant sets out to attempt to establish what we can really know. In other words, he examines human reason in order to determine the operation of the human mind and how it comes to know things. Kant’s theory is that every thing we know, all the ideas, thoughts and imaginings that we experience occur within the confines of our mind. The whole of our experience happens inside our heads. These interior experiences he names phenomenon. Basically, everything we ever saw, heard, felt and thought, are phenomenon. Although he doesn’t completely discount the senses, all they succeed in doing is conveying external sensory input to our brain. All sensual input is basically translated to neural electrical signals and transferred to the brain where it is interpreted as colour, shape, sound, etc..

The unique contribution of Kant’s theory is that the forms of all these phenomenon, whether it is the shape and colour of an apple, or the motion of a person walking by, or the passing of the days and months, are not proper to the things that we experience in the world outside the mind, but instead they depend on the human mind itself. In other words, the attributes of reality (space, time, colours, texture, and so on) are a property of the mind. The apple is red and round and tastes sweet because that is the way that I experience it in my mind, not necessarily because it is inherently red, round and sweet in itself. The sensory input from the outside world is given a form and a meaning by our minds. In the same way in which water takes on the shape of whatever container it is poured
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into, whether it be round or cubical, the sensory input we receive is given form by the structure of our mind.

To put it another way, all the phenomena that communicate to us the state of the world outside of our minds is a function of the structure which contains them, the mind itself. The centre of gravity of reality has moved from the world outside, to the world inside our consciousness. In some ways, it can be said that humans shape or determine reality in the sense that it is the subjective mind that gives form to the object perceived by the senses. There is a fundamental “disconnect” between our perception and the external world. In the past, thinkers would try to discover the fundamental nature or essence or form of things by observing the world around them. According to Kant’s theory that is no longer possible, because all forms, essences and nature of things are contained in the vessel of the human mind. We can no longer truly and objectively know what the outside world is really like. There is no way in which we can determine what is the fundamental nature or essence of the object perceived by our senses. The senses are not completely ignored, but they are reduced to merely providing an input. All they can communicate is the existence of an object before us, but all the rest is given to us by our own minds.

Needless to say, any theory that displaces the center of the philosophical universe is mildly disorienting, to say the least. Reason can no longer explicitly prove or demonstrate anything in an absolute or purely objective fashion, as everything we know (including the laws of nature) are subjective laws of the human mind. Reason is trapped within the confines of its own consciousness, within the world of its own ideas, a phenomenological world. The truth, then, becomes the truth as we see it, not as it is independently of our own perceptions. In the end, it is not possible to state anything about exterior, objective reality with any certainty.

Here again, the shadow of Plato’s dualism shades Kant’s distinction and deep separation between real world and the realm of reason, the mind. This theory, which argues that all we know is ideas in our mind, is squarely within the Idealistic stream of philosophy. Despite the similarity

Kant’s placement of Matter and Form

Plato saw Forms and Matter as existing in their own “realms,” Aristotle saw them as existing together in concrete things, but at least for both Plato and Aristotle, both Matter and Form exist independently outside the mind.

Kant proposed something else: Matter might exist outside the mind, but Form does not -- the Forms, grouped into categories, exist within the mind and are applied to the sensory data that comes from Matter.

Like with Descartes, the only conclusion is that each of us exists in a “world” within our minds that is fundamentally disconnected one from the other. Kant tried to address this by stating that everyone has the same categories of Forms in their mind, so the same sense data would be interpreted the same way. Perhaps, but the necessary universal resemblance between minds is impossible to verify. Besides, we are still out of touch with the true essence of the things -- all we get is a package of sense-data, and the ability to apply a (hopefully) universally-acceptable label to that sense-data.

Kant also does not entirely address how the mind knows which categories of Forms the mind needs to apply to the sense-data that is coming in -- unless there is something already in the sense-data that is “looking for” certain categories of Forms. This, however, implies the existence of a knowable “essence” which exists outside the body and which can be known -- something which Kant rejects because he follows Descartes’ “method of doubt”. So Kant’s ideas are incomplete in themselves.
to Plato’s emphasis on Ideas as the true source of knowledge, there is an important difference between the philosophers’ views. Whereas Plato thought of Ideas as spiritual realities, separate from and exterior to the human mind, Kant sees Ideas as being entirely a function of, and interior to, the mind.

**Hegel: “Things can only get better...”**

Another extremely influential modern German philosopher was Friedrich Hegel (b.1770 – d.1831). He believed in a form of pantheism, that is, he did not believe that God was a separate entity from a created universe, but rather that God IS the universe. He argued that the universe is in the progress of “evolving” from a primordial mass of matter, to a higher, spiritual form of existence. As time passes, all change and all history is slow, gradual conversion of the material universe into a fully self-conscious spiritual being. This universal spirit, who is “awakening” from its primordial state, is Hegel’s “God”. Hegel saw a natural progression, and improvement, between inanimate matter, living beings and finally Man, a self-conscious being. Mankind is considered the first expression of self-consciousness of this World-Spirit-God. What the World Spirit is striving for is an escape from a base, material form of existence, into a fully spiritual form of self understanding or consciousness. This metamorphosis is achieved through a method of continual experimentation, through which the World-Spirit is supposedly coming to an increased understanding of itself.

This method can be summarized as a **process of thesis/antithesis/synthesis**. The thesis represents a certain principle of knowledge, existence, or action. The thesis is contrasted with an opposing antithesis which attempts to challenge the thesis. The end result is the synthesis, which reconciles the conflicting elements of the thesis and antithesis into a coherent and superior principle. This synthesis then becomes the new thesis, and the process starts all over. This method or process is the “motor” which drives the cosmic evolution, and with each new step, the World Spirit slowly, surely progresses towards its ultimate goal.

One key objection to Hegel’s theory was that is seemed to justify violence, or at least it took a benign attitude towards it. Disease, mass extinction, even genocide -- all these are simply experiments undertaken as the World-Spirit tries to understand itself. As well, what becomes of our place in the system? The theory can tend to justify selfish, self-serving behaviour, because of its understanding that such behaviour simply feeds into a system that ultimately can only improve. But does History really
have this force of World-Spirit behind it? Or could the world, in theory, not improve but rather annihilate itself?

The Platonic elements of Hegel’s theory are clear, such as the contrasting of the basic material world with a superior spiritual one, or the proposal of an ultimate, spiritual existence as the goal of all things, personified by a World Spirit attempting to escape a form of material bondage. While Hegel’s theories remained safely in the theoretical sphere, his influence would inspire others to attempt to apply them to the world of Man.

Marx: World Revolution and Utopia

Karl Marx (b.1818 – d.1883) was a German social philosopher who applied Hegel’s theories to the socio-political realm and launched a world-wide revolution. Horrified by the poverty and misery due to the exploitation of workers during the industrial revolution in Europe, Marx founded a theory of socialism, later to be named Marxism after its founder, framed in an economic vision of humanity.

Marx argued that all elements of human existence, social and cultural, are functions of economics, and it is by revolutionizing the economic world that mankind can emancipate itself from servitude and oppression. He saw the capitalist system as eventually evolving to form two competing social classes: the bourgeoisie (the “haves”) and the proletariat (the “have-nots”). Marx then applied Hegel’s theory of history to these classes, seeing one as the thesis and the other as the anti-thesis. These two classes would eventually conflict in a massive “Communist Revolution” which would result in the creation of the ultimate synthesis: a classless society, which would eventually itself become a perfect human utopia.

Marx’s ideas captured the imaginations of millions of people who saw in it a hope for the betterment of mankind. The theory, however, contained many of the weaknesses of Hegel’s theory, including a justification of violence which, in practical terms, led to the deaths of millions of people through planned starvation, imprisonment, and war. Nevertheless it remains a compelling vision, one which has been copied (in modified forms) and used in contemporary feminism, the sexual revolution, and Latin American liberation theology.

The Existentialists: Human nature does not exist, human freedom is everything

The existentialist movement was widely popular in the post World War II years, and was exemplified by the French thinker, novelist and playwright Jean Paul Sartre (b.1905 – d.1980). The existentialists were primarily concerned with the issue of human freedom. As the name implies, the starting point existentialist thought is existence itself. Existence is primary, and it is distinguished from and precedes all form or essence. In other words, before we can say what something is like, before we can define the characteristics of a thing, we must acknowledge that it exists. Therefore, if the essence of a person is attached only after existence, then essence is not inherent or implicitly part of a person. That is, there is no such thing as a human essence, or nature, it is merely an arbitrary addition to the fundamental act of existing.
If there is no such thing as an objective human nature common to all persons, i.e. that is part and parcel with our existence, then the alternative is that it must be built through a series of choices that determine it. Therefore, the notion of a natural law which dictates a human nature, yields to the idea that we determine our own human nature through the choices we make. In the end, what a person chooses, is less important than the act of choosing. Choice is not merely a fundamental, inalienable right of a person, but it is also their duty if they are too establish themselves as a person. This absolute form of freedom and choice found in the existentialist movement duplicates the bias for freedom found in the philosophy of Descartes, only now it is more explicit. The result is a rejection of any restraining moral laws or beliefs in favour of an unlimited expression.

Existentialism has become more and more enshrined in our post-modern culture, to the point of it even being enshrined in judicial decisions. In 1992 the Supreme Court of the United States made the following remarkable statement:

At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of the meaning of the universe, and of the mystery of human life. (Casey decision)

There is no reference to a common human nature here at all, but rather an exaltation of freedom without reference of such a nature. Similar language has also become part of Canadian law, particularly in the Canadian Human Rights Act.80

**Deconstructionism**

Hermeneutics of the branch of philosophy that tries to understand how we come to an accurate understanding of the meaning of a text. An author may write a text meaning to say one thing, but is that what others will understand? And if there is a difference, why? Is there a way to read a text that helps guarantee we truly are getting at the original intent of the author?

Deconstructionism is a form of literary criticism that believes that it is impossible to truly arrive at the objective meaning of a text, because the reader cannot get past the fact that he brings his own subjective experience into the process of interpretation. In fact, neither can the author, who may have had certain conscious intentions in writing the text, but who inevitably also winds up communicating unconscious meaning as well.

Deconstructionism originated in France, through a series of books by Jacques Derrida in the late 1960’s. It has had an important impact on postmodern thought, particularly in the questioning of assumptions inherent in philosophy and written texts. The effect has been a undermining of those texts by exposing a rift between the conscious intentions of a writer in producing a literary text, and the unconscious meaning of their work. In other words, a writer could write a specific text with an apparent meaning, but an examination of such things as the cultural context or the personality of the writer may reveal underlying biases or assumptions that can cast the obvious meaning of their text into doubt, and open up the possibility of new and novel interpretations. As the name implies, this

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80 C.f. Canadian Human Rights Act, article 2.
philosophical method “takes to pieces what has been built” and the effect on postmodernism has been similar to that of Nominalism in the sense that the words or text expressing ideas have been disassociated from the meaning of those very words.

Not surprisingly, established understandings of philosophical and literary texts have been subjected to a sometimes radical new interpretations. Deconstructionism has itself been criticised as being popular because it is “just an easy means to obtain a Ph.D.” There are more serious critiques, however. For example, if the premises of deconstructionism are true, how can judges apply the law? After all, a law is a text. If there is no objective meaning to laws, how can they form the basis of a solid social contract between people? How can they for the basis of a society? The only alternative is the “will to power,” where interpretation depends on the will of the stronger versus the weaker.

Of course, the impact of deconstructionism is devastating for religions founded on an objective revelation contained in written texts, such as Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. Without the possibility of attaining any objective meaning through these texts, these religions come under tremendous pressure to continue to justify their teachings to an increasingly sceptical populace.

**Whitehead: Process philosophy**

Alfred North Whitehead was a 20th century scientist and mathematician initially known for his work with Bertrand Russell on the *Principia Mathematica*, an attempt to do for mathematics what Isaac Newton had done for physics many centuries earlier: to describe mathematics starting from its most basic principles. Whitehead was also a philosopher, however, his major work being *Process and Reality*, first published in 1929. He is considered the founder of process philosophy, which might have not been as important as it was were it not for the development of a corresponding process theology based on his initial philosophy. Since then a school of *process hermeneutics* has also been developed, which tries to interpret texts (like the Bible) in the light of process philosophy and theology.

In essence, Whitehead is attempting to engage anew the age-old debate between Parmenides and Heraclitus: What changes? What stays the same? How do they interact? Whitehead was a scientist among scientists, so he had absorbed the predisposition of modern science to want to stick to the objects of experience and disregard the idea of “higher philosophical Forms” (modern science tends to very Nominalist in its approach to the question of universals). But Whitehead was also a mathematician, and his whole work on the *Principia* had been to try and demonstrate that mathematics was ultimately self-evident (and therefore, despite its being abstract, would also be a solid foundation for understanding objective reality). Whitehead therefore tried to develop a new kind of metaphysics that combined the best insights of both disciplines. In essence, he tried to describe the process of “participation” that Plato mentioned but never explained.

The jury is still out as to whether or not Whitehead succeeded. Nevertheless his work is significant in that he even tried in the first place. At the time Whitehead did his philosophical writing most philosophers of the “Plato-line” had concluded that it was impossible to undertake real metaphysics. Similar to Aristotle, Whitehead began from a consideration of the world as he knew it from his perspective as a scientist, and wound up developing a challenging metaphysical
This is why process philosophy so quickly developed a theological branch, especially in the Protestant world: it seemed to hold out the prospect of basing faith in a sure form of philosophy that was itself based in scientific principles.

PART III: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE “ARISTOTLE” BRANCH

The second great philosophical tradition flows from the Realist theories of Aristotle. Surprisingly, these theories enjoyed a less popular following in the ancient Greco-Roman world, and were largely forgotten for centuries after the fall of the Roman empire. The reason for this are unclear, however, it could be linked to the fact that his doctrines not championed by prominent thinkers, similar to the way the Plotinus or St. Augustine supported the teachings of Plato. Aristotle’s most notable student was Alexander, a prince of the northern Greek kingdom of Macedonia, whom he was hired to instruct by the boy’s father. The youth’s ambitions lay in areas other than the study and development of philosophy. Alexander was less interested in deciphering the workings of the world, than in conquering it. In fact, he proved so gifted in the latter, that he succeeded in subduing the greater part of the known world at the time, from Egypt, through the Middle East, Persia and into present day Afghanistan, all before the age of twenty-one. He was dubbed Alexander the Great, and is still considered by many to be the greatest conqueror in history. But as for the philosophies of Aristotle, they lay dormant until they were rediscovered in the Western world after they were re-introduced from an unexpected source: the Islam civilization.

Islamic philosophy

A mere two centuries after the death of Mohammed (b.569 – d.632 A.D.), in the seventh century, the fledgling Islamic kingdoms of the Middle East began a campaign of conquest that would successively conquer Egypt, Persia, all of Northern Africa, and even stretch into the Iberian peninsula of present day Spain and Portugal. This great expansion brought with it great wealth and power, placing the Muslim civilization in a pre-eminent position with regard to the fractured kingdoms of Europe. Within this civilization, scholarship and learning flourished in all spheres; mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and philosophy. Within this world, the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle were known, and since there was no weight of tradition favoring Plato, the theories of Aristotle enjoyed a sort of Renaissance, and were examined by such prominent Arab scholars as Avicenna (b.980 – d.1037) and Averroes (b.1128 – d.1196), who was convinced that Aristotle was the final culmination of genius in the human intellect.

It was through exposure to the Muslim civilization that the Christian European scholars were re-introduced to the teachings of Aristotle. The strength and freshness of the Aristotelian doctrines

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81 This is why process philosophy so quickly developed a theological branch, especially in the Protestant world: it seemed to hold out the prospect of basing faith in a sure form of philosophy that was itself based in scientific principles.
seized Western thinkers with such force that it provided the impetus and main inspiration for the school of Scholasticism, which would dominate European learning for the greater part of the medieval period.

**The Rise of Scholasticism**

Western Scholasticism was the dominant school of scholars that flourished in the learning centres of Europe throughout the Medieval era until the Renaissance. The list of scholars who employed the scholastic method to further our understanding of theology and other questions important to the human mind, reads like a litany of genius. Some of the early users include St. Anselm (1033-1109), the eloquent author of the Proslogion, famous for its rational proof of the existence of God; Peter Abélard (1079-1142), an aggressive and brilliant personality whose incessant questioning of the accepted ideas of his day set a standard for technical strictness and intellectual rigour; Peter of Lombard, whose Sentences were considered mandatory reading for students of philosophy of the day; Albert the Great (1206-1280), a brilliant intellectual polyglot with an exhaustive knowledge of all the branches of knowledge known in his day, who was reputedly the last man to “know all there is to know”; Duns Scotus (1266-1308), a major force in perpetuating the Neo-Platonist philosophy; St. Bonaventure$^82$ (1217-1274), the Franciscan thinker whose works are considered among the best expressions of “Plato-line” thought; William of Ockham (1285-1349), who came at the end of the Scholastic period and who founded Nominalism; and perhaps the most important figure of all in the Scholastic world: St. Thomas Aquinas.

**St. Thomas Aquinas: the Angelic Doctor**

While the early scholastics were still in the “Plato-line” of thinking, the infusion of Aristotelian ideas (championed initially by St. Albert the Great) led to a burst of original philosophical thought that reached it highest expression in the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, who earned the title “The Angelic Doctor” to describe the quality of his work, thought, and life. In a single lifetime, he succeeded in Christianizing Aristotle’s philosophy. That is, he was able to integrate the great ancient thinkers theories with the Christian doctrine, in such a complete and solid manner, even to the point of improving upon them, that they have scarcely been surpassed or expanded upon to our present day. So perfectly did he achieve this work, that he has become the major source of Catholic theology ever since.

Thomas Aquinas was born into a noble family in the Italian city of Roccasecca, not far from Naples, in 1221, and he was placed in the care of the Benedictine Abbey of Monte Cassino by his family at the age of five years old, in the hopes that he would rise through the ecclesiastical ranks of the very rich and influential monastery. Instead he was attracted by the Dominican order and resolved to pursue studies at the University of Paris. He succeeded in his quest despite the

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$^82$ Yes, the subway station in Montreal of the same name is named after him.
objections of his family, who firmly expressed their disapproval by having him kidnapped and held prisoner for a year. Despite their attempts to dissuade him from this vocation, he was finally arrived in Paris in 1245. There he became the student of St. Albert the Great, under whom he studied the works of Aristotle.

St. Thomas was an extremely prolific writer, and he produced important works treating metaphysics such as *De Ente et Essentia* (on Being and Essence), written in 1256, but his most important works appeared later. The *Summa contra Gentiles*, written sometime after 1259, and the monumental *Summa Theologica*, written in three parts between 1265 and 1273, are his most valued legacies. The unique contributions he provided to the realm of philosophy and theology are varied, often using the a strong command of the former in order to push the latter to new heights of insight. Some of his most notable improvements of Aristotle’s realism concern the question of the immortality of the soul, and the proof of the existence and the nature of God.

Within his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas made use of Aristotelian logic and produced five classic paths of reasoning, demonstrating or the existence of God, based on philosophical metaphysical principles. These proofs were considered concrete, rational proofs of God’s existence for centuries, until the philosophical climate drastically changed during the Enlightenment and Modern era. Within the Realist stream of thought however, they continue to serve as arguments in favour of the Divine.

If we compare the manner in which Plato’s theories were Christianized, we would have to trace a developmental path beginning with the ancient works of the Church doctors, to St. Augustine, through the middle ages to luminaries such as Duns Scotus, and culminating in the work of St. Bonaventure. What required almost twelve centuries for the ideas of Plato, St. Thomas accomplished in one lifetime. His influence on Catholic thinking has been inestimable, but this influence goes well beyond the Catholic Church. Any serious student of Aristotle, for example, sooner or later has to study the commentaries of St. Thomas Aquinas on the works of Aristotle, and his contributions to and improvements upon Aristotle’s work has led scholars to re-christen this current of philosophy Aristotelico-Thomist thought, or simply Thomism.

Yes, he really was that important. He still is.

*The decline and eclipse of Scholasticism*

Although the contributions of St. Thomas and other luminous predecessors infused Scholasticism with a rich intellectual heritage, the standard school of European learning began to stagnate and whither towards the end the Medieval period. The main reasons for the decline included the infighting between Franciscan and Dominican orders, who represented the intellectual elite, and the rise of Nominalism as a serious challenge to the scholasticism which had ruled the centres of learning for so long.

The rivalry between the Franciscan and Dominican orders was essentially a pride-fueled battle for status in the field of theology. In a race to outdo their rivals, the scholars from each order strove to “score points” by either securing coveted positions within the universities or demolishing the positions of their opponents through clever use of dialectics. This intellectual warring among the two most powerful groups of Western scholars severely compromised the original search for
truth that scholasticism was designed for. The noble sentiments of humility and the common desire for truth, drowned out by the clamour of pointed argumentation, designed to undo one's opponents in a quest for supremacy.

The second factor that eroded scholasticism was the rise of nominalism as an influential current of thought, that swept away the fundamental assumptions that endowed scholasticism as a legitimate method of exploring the truths of the world. Prior to nominalism, it was accepted that definitions and words did in fact contain truth, by the virtue of the fact that they were directly linked or related to the objects that they described. For example, when we spoke of the definition of a lion, then the definition contained some irrefutable and objective truth about lions. The topic of discussion during much of period of Medieval theology revolved around the existence and nature of universals. Although humans exist as individuals, they share a common human nature, a similarity that makes all humans part of a particular species and differentiates them from other species. The question is, does this universal thing called "humanity" actually exist? How does it exist, as something separate or outside individual humans, or inherent and somehow contained within each individual? If all humans were suddenly destroyed, would this thing called humanity still exist, or would it vanish also? Such theoretical questions proliferated under scholasticism and drew criticism from some thinkers as being a sterile product of purely dialectical discussions. The inability to attain a definitive and generally accepted answer to many of these questions sowed a deep sense of frustration with some. One thinker in particular, William of Ockam, expressed his opinion that the source of this sterility is the idea that universals are real things, if not in themselves, then at least in individuals. He initiated a movement that rejected this assumption and claimed that universality cannot be attributed to things, but to words alone. This thing we call “humanity” is not a real, distinct being in itself, but only a word that we use to classify a group of real things, namely human beings, who we perceive as sharing common attributes. The universal of humanity is merely a label, or a name, from whence we get the name nominalism.

If Ockam’s assertion is true, then all the dialectics practised in the scholastic schools, striving to determine the nature of reality, are nothing more than complex mental gymnastics. The raging debates between the rival orders are just a duel of words using logical foils. If the basic assumptions concerning universals are false, then all of this tremendous intellectual effort is completely cut off from reality because, in actual fact, they are not even talking about anything real. What profit can be extracted by endlessly debating the nature of humanity, if “humanity” as such does not even exist? This disconnect from reality implies that almost any conclusions can be justified, as long as they follow the rules of logic. It would ultimately culminate into an exaggerated form of “mind over matter,” where someone armed with logic could commit almost any intellectual atrocity, where one could claim almost any conclusion valid, because suddenly, man found himself completely bereft of any real standard by which to measure his thinking. If my words, and therefore my concepts are my own mental inventions, rather than something I discover that is inherent in the world, then how can anyone prove me wrong?

This can all appear to be a recipe for monumental foolishness, but unfortunately, when a flawed view of reality, however convincingly argued, attempts to assert itself upon reality, the results can be truly tragic. The worst example of the decline of scholasticism was nothing less than the Spanish Inquisition (1478-1542). Spearheaded by Tomas de Torquemada (not to be confused with his uncle, Juan de Torquemada, a renowned theological scholar), the Inquisition would prove
how vicious human reason could be.  

**Neo-scholasticism: a fresh start for the “perennial philosophy”**

The rejection of Scholasticism by the broader intellectual community led to its replacement by the Modern philosophies of Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and so on. These philosophies, however, eventually began to themselves run aground in scepticism. The political ideas born from the Moderns also led to the Age of Revolutions in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, which calmed down only for a time before beginning again with the Marxist agitation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The French Revolution itself began with great promise but degenerated into a brutal dictatorial regime called “Le Terreur” and characterized by its symbol: the guillotine. This pattern would repeat itself over and over, leading some to wonder if there was some flaw in the very philosophical foundations of Western civilization.

This quest for a more solid intellectual footing was for many a very personal affair. Jacques and Raisa Maritain, as young students of philosophy, were so despairing of the intellectual scepticism of their day that they undertook a suicide pact: unless they could find a philosophy that would promise some possibility of attaining Truth, they would kill themselves. They found their answer, in the writings of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, and they went on to lead the resurgence of Neo-Scholasticism in the 20th century.

Another important figure in the Neo-Scholastic movement was Etienne Gilson, whose seminal work was *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*. In it, he demonstrated that, throughout history, philosophers who have started with the same initial assumptions eventually wound up with the same conclusions. The constant “quest for newness” of Modern thinking was actually quite circular and sterile. The only real alternative was therefore to follow the Aristotelico-Thomist schools of thought. Now everybody knows that Protestants and Catholics have not seen eye-to-eye theologically for centuries. Knowing what we know now, however, we have to ask the question: how much of this disagreement is really about theology? How much of it, instead, can be attributed to differing philosophical perspectives, perhaps so subtle that we don’t realise their real impact?

It is more than possible that theologians are not disagreeing about theology at all. Understanding a theologian’s underlying philosophy can greatly facilitate dialogue with a dissenting view from a colleague with a different intellectual background, by avoiding fruitless argument and focussing on the real source of divergence.

What role does philosophy play in understanding the differences between different Christian churches?

We’ve already seen that Protestant thought is heavily indebted to the “Plato-line” of thinking. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, has tended to prefer the Aristotelico-Thomist schools of thought. Now everybody knows that Protestants and Catholics have not seen eye-to-eye theologically for centuries. Knowing what we know now, however, we have to ask the question: how much of this disagreement is really about theology? How much of it, instead, can be attributed to differing philosophical perspectives, perhaps so subtle that we don’t realise their real impact?

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83 Tomas de Torquemada was a Dominican, of the same spiritual family as St. Thomas Aquinas. The Angelic Doctor must have been turning in his grave.
as in departments and faculties of philosophy. Nevertheless, thanks to the work of the Neo-Scholastics, the thought of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas now constitutes a real alternative to the dominant patterns of thought of our day.

**PART V: BRANCHES OF PHILOSOPHY**

Similar to other academic disciplines, the field of philosophy is organized into divided into distinct categories. More particularly, the philosophical tree is composed of five major branches; philosophy of nature, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics and logic.

*Philosophy of Nature (a.k.a. Cosmology, or Physics)*

The philosophy of nature is the original and broadest field philosophy, and looks at and wonders about the world around us. It is concerned with examining the workings, structure and meaning of the universe. While "physics" busies itself with the natural laws that govern the things which exist, "metaphysics" (also known as "ontology") delves into the more fundamental nature of reality, essentially asking the question "What does it mean to exist in the first place? What is Being itself?"

The more spectacular achievements of the physical sciences have led some to believe that there is no real value to the philosophy of nature, but despite this the philosophy of nature is making a bit of a comeback, particularly by physicists investigating the most basic laws that govern the universe. They are finding themselves confronted by basic questions similar to the ancient Greeks, questions like "What is the universe ultimately made of?" As for metaphysics, it remains important since it surpasses the scope of science by its ability to investigate the constitution of nature and reality itself: it does not limit itself to the study of individual "things which are," but rather examines existence and Being itself. Its jurisdiction includes the existence of non-physical entities such as God and the immaterial soul, which science does not address.

**Epistemology: how can we come to a knowledge of the Truth?**

Epistemology is the philosophy of the mind, originally called "psychology" by the Greeks. It derives its name from the Greek word *episteme*, meaning knowledge. It asks the question "How do we know things?" and explores the nature of how knowledge is acquired and processed, the sources of knowledge, as well as the limits of knowledge and the viability of skepticism. The answer to the original question has been split between the Idealist and Realist camps; the former epitomized by Plato, who believed in a spiritual source to ideas, and the latter by Aristotle, who explained knowledge by his theory of abstraction.
Ethics: what is Good?

Ethics is moral philosophy, and is concerned with “right action.” It essentially asks "What is good? What are the proper choices to be made?" Plato deals with the question of ethics in his reflection on the ideal society and state, and the morals that animate such a state, in his famous Republic.

As in epistemology, the different streams of philosophy, Idealism and Realism, lead to differing perspectives on what constitutes moral action.

Realist/Hylemorphism: Modelled after Aristotle’s notion of hylemorphism, this ethical system prizes both internal and external criterion in order to determine the morality of an action. Both a good internal motive and an act that is inherently good in itself are necessary to classify an act as good or moral. This ethical system studies both the internal intentions of the subject, as well as the nature of the act itself in order to determine the goodness of each. Right and wrong are more absolute and objective, and far less subjective.

Idealism/Dualism: This school of thought favours the consideration of internal criteria over external criteria in moral decision making. In other words, the internal or subjective attitude of an individual, such as intentions or motive, are more important than external/objective considerations i.e. whether or not the action is inherently good or evil.84

In recent years there has been somewhat of a move back to the Realist school of thought in through the study of "virtue ethics".

Abortion: a modern ethical debate

Have you ever noticed that the people on the two sides of the abortion debate never seem to be able to sit down and have a rational discussion? It is partly because of the nature of the issue, but also because each side is coming from a very different philosophical perspective. Think of the names of the two sides in the modern debate on abortion: “pro-life” versus “pro-choice”. These very terms parallel the views of Plato vs. Aristotle on the nature of the soul.

For Plato, the soul is the principle of reason, which is the source of human free will and the ability to choose. The pro-choice camp is therefore very Platonistic in its thinking, something that is reflected in its ethical view as well, in which the internal, subjective attitude of the person seeking an abortion is a vital consideration, and is the real justification for abortion in cases of rape (as one example).

For Aristotle, on the other hand, the soul is the principle of life -- and the pro-life camp is very Aristotelean in its ethical view that some things (such as abortion) are just wrong, no matter what a person’s motive might be. And because much of Christianity has been influenced by the Realist view, it is often practising Christians who are most active on the pro-life movement.

Each side considers itself to be right -- and the other side to be stupid (or worse, as acting in bad faith). But does each side recognize the existence of the philosophical differences?

There is a lesson for us here: whenever we see two groups of people who seem to be utterly unable to even talk with one another, look for the philosophical differences -- very often their inability to communicate is because they are coming from very different philosophical perspectives.

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84 Modern existentialism, exemplified by the French thinker Jean Paul Sartre, is the offspring of this Idealistic mentality. It contends that the most important thing is the freedom of choice of the person, rather than the consequences of the action. As long as the person makes a choice with perfect freedom, then that justifies the morality of the act, regardless of the eventual consequence of that act. The only real evil act is to diminish the freedom to act of another, although there is the basic problem that almost all our actions, and even our most basic passive needs, place limits on the freedom of action of another. To be sure, the passive needs of children (such as food, diaper changing, security, etc.) place limits of the freedom of action of the parents! This led Sartre to make a famous conclusion: “Hell is other people.”
Virtue ethics recognize that when a particular choice is made repeatedly, it leaves a lasting effect on the one making the choices in the first place. While animal creatures (including human beings) have a certain set of instincts which help govern their activity, and which constitute part of their given nature, by means of repeated choices a human being can also acquire a new set of spontaneous behaviours that act like a "second nature" on top of the first. A good example of this principle is that of a musician who, through years of practice with his or her instrument, become so proficient at it that he or she plays with great spontaneity. Such persons are called "virtuosos", because they have acquired the "virtue" of being able to play the instrument well. Of course, it is possible also to make negative choices, which diminish our capacity for future action. Such choices are called "vicious", because they lead to the formation of vices, not virtues.

**Aesthetics: what is Beauty?**

This branch of philosophy is concerned with "What is beauty?" It examines the nature of beauty, particularly through the arts, the experience of the arts and our natural environment.

This branch is also heavily influenced by what stream of philosophy one finds oneself peering out from. Within the Idealist line, beauty is subjugated to the perspective of the viewer, in essence “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” The definition of beauty is determined by what appeals to the subject and may vary from one person to the next without there being any objective or universal standards of beauty accepted by everyone. In the Realist camp, on the other hand, beauty is far more objective, is governed by specific rules of aesthetics, and is considered related to the concept of order, symmetry and proportion.
Logic

The final branch of philosophy is logic, which can be simply defined as “the science of keeping your story straight.” The aim of logic is to structure thinking in order to allow one to arrive at sound conclusions, beginning from specific precepts or assumptions. Logic makes three major contributions to philosophy: (1) the art of making accurate definitions, (2) the art of critical thinking, and (3) the laws of the syllogism (for the purpose of both making and critiquing an argument, in order to attain truth).

The classic system of logic was invented by Aristotle, and has proven to be of such refinement, that this very same system has been in use up until the present day, without any major modifications. Aristotle himself considered logic to be the foundation of knowledge. Without logic, a thinker could not assure the accuracy of the knowledge he professed. It was also extremely important to the scholastic method of learning that prevailed throughout the middle ages.

Even logic is subject to the distinctions of the Idealist vs. Realist schools, particularly in the question of the making of definitions. It all goes back to the question of the connection between definitions and the reality being defined. As we have seen, the Idealist branch tend to have a weaker connection than the Realist branch. For this reason, definitions produced by Plato-line thinkers tend to be more abstract, while definitions produced by Aristotle-line thinkers tend to relate more to actual things which exist.

Crafting definitions

The difference between the Realist and Idealist groups can be seen in how they craft definitions. Take these three examples of the use of the word "healthy": (1) The boy is healthy. (2) The food is healthy. (3) The blood sample is healthy. Now, given that the same word is being used in three different but related contexts, what is the proper definition of the word "healthy"?

Idealists would argue that the true definition of healthiness as such is found by taking the three concepts of "healthy" and seeing where they overlap. This "overlap of meaning" provides the core of the essence of "healthy" as such -- even if that core can’t be directly attributed to anything in itself.

Realists would argue that the Idealist methodology is flawed, precisely because this "core essence" cannot, in fact, be found on its own in anything (recall the emphasis of Realism on finding the essence of things in the things themselves). Instead, Realists would argue that each definition is equally valid, but that they need to be placed in a hierarchical order according to relationship called "analogy". The concept of "the boy is healthy" is at the core of this hierarchy, because health is directly attributable to the boy. The concept of "the blood is healthy" is next in line, because the blood comes from the boy and, while not healthy in itself, is called healthy because it indicates the health of the boy. The concept of "the food is healthy" is furthest from the centre because it is only called healthy insofar as it can potentially promote the health of the boy, and is extrinsic to him. All three usages are valid, but the analogical relationships need to be mapped out so that we don’t accidentally understand one concept when we mean another.

In these diagrams, each circle represents a definition. On the left is the Idealist approach of relating the definitions, and on the right is the Realist approach.
CONCLUSION: WHAT ABOUT OTHER PHILOSOPHERS?

It is true that we’ve only scratched the surface of the domain of philosophy. The field of philosophy in both the “Plato” and “Aristotle” branches is truly vast, and there are a great many more philosophers we could (and probably should) look at in order to have a more complete picture -- but we have to stop somewhere. These philosophers have been selected because of the impact of their thought, either in the history of philosophy, on our post-modern culture, or because of their importance for theology. Students of theology are encouraged, nevertheless, to undertake a more thorough study of philosophy, so as to truly be able to “bring order to reason,” and not fall into old theological and philosophical pitfalls and errors.
PART I: THE JEWISH BACKGROUND OF CHRISTIANITY

Christianity began as a sect within Judaism. The first Christians were all Jewish, and they understood themselves to still be Jewish even after placing their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. After all, Jesus himself was Jewish, and had never renounced his Jewishness. In order to understand Christianity, then, we need to understand its Jewish roots.

The Patriarchal Age (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob/Israel)

The Hebrew people, who later became known as Jews, were originally a tribal people of wandering animal herders. They trace their original ancestry to Abraham, who was from the land of Ur (likely in southern Iraq). According to the Bible, Abraham’s father was a polytheist, but Abraham himself rejected polytheism and chose to believe in only one God. Following a divine inspiration, Abraham left Ur with his family and began to pasture his flocks in Palestine (along with a brief sojourn in Egypt as well). This territory became known as the “Promised Land” because of promises God made to Abraham that he would have many descendants and that they would occupy this land as their heritage. As a sign of his acceptance of this covenant with God Abraham had himself and the males of his house circumcised, and even today this Jewish rite is practised as a sign of the continued acceptance of the covenant of Abraham by the Jewish people. Abraham had two sons, Ishmael (the son of the union of Abraham and his slave Hagar) and Isaac, the son of Sarah. The Bible indicates that Isaac was to be considered the “child of the promise,” and so Jews trace their ancestry to him, but it is interesting to note that the Koran considers Ishmael to have been the child of the promise instead of Isaac. Some modern-day tensions have very ancient origins.

Isaac had two twin sons, Jacob and Esau. While Esau was the older brother and should have been the one to inherit Jacob’s blessing, Jacob obtained the continuation of the promise instead through trickery. A blood feud ensued, but was eventually pacified. Jacob received a second name, Israel, and he prospered in Palestine, having a dozen sons. Jealousies arose amongst them, and was
directed against the son Joseph, for whom Jacob had a special love. Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt, where he later prospered and was made a governor. In the meantime a severe famine arose and the other brothers were eventually sent to Egypt to seek help. Joseph reconciled with his brothers, and they and their father Jacob/Israel were invited to settle in Egypt itself.

The Hebrews in Egypt, and the Exodus

The Israelites (as they were now often called) prospered, until a new pharaoh arose in Egypt who was less appreciative of the services Joseph had rendered to the kingdom many years before. He forced slavery upon the Israelites, until the arrival of Moses and the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. This moment of salvation of the people by God is considered the central religious component of Jewish identity. It is celebrated every year in the festival of the Passover, such that by eating the Passover meal the Jews of today believe that they are, in a mystical way, escaping from Egypt with their ancestors. Moses acted as an intermediary between the people and God, transmitting to them a complex set of moral and religious laws (collectively called “the Law”, or the “covenant of Moses”). The people eventually arrived once again in Palestine and under the leadership of Joshua (Moses’ successor) they conquered large portions of the land. This they divided into twelve portions, each named after one of the tribes or tribal families descended from the sons of Jacob. Ten of these were in the north (the more fertile part), and two in the south. The tribe of Levi (one of the sons of Jacob) was not assigned any portion of land, but instead had responsibility for performing religious services, living off the tithe provided by the other tribes.

Settlement in Canaan and the United Monarchy

At first leadership of the twelve tribes was given by charismatic prophets called “judges,” but eventually the people clamoured for a king. Under an inspiration from God the prophet Samuel anointed Saul as the first king for all the tribes. (An important thing to note for later: the Hebrew word for “one who is anointed with oil” is messiah.) Later Samuel received a second inspiration to anoint David son of Jesse as king in Saul’s place, while Saul was still alive. A civil war erupted between Saul and David, with Saul having the loyalty of the 10 northern tribes, and David having the loyalty of the 2 southern tribes. Eventually peace was achieved between the two royal houses by means of a diplomatic marriage, but there was still tension and political machinations. David eventually passed away, but not before leaving the now-united kingdom to his son Solomon.

The reign of Solomon is considered the golden age for the Jewish kingdom. Solomon was reputed to be a very wise ruler, and undertook many diplomatic and commercial initiatives that raised the profile of the nation. He also built the great Temple of Jerusalem, which was considered by many to be a wonder of the world, and religious worship began to centralise there. The differences between the tribes had not entirely dissipated, however, and at Solomon’s death the two groups split. The 10 tribes of the north became known as the “Kingdom of Israel” and the 2 tribes of the south, the “Kingdom of Judah”.

An important theological development within the time of the monarchy was the development
of the concept of the "Davidic dynasty". There was a strong belief that God was with the House of David in a particular way, such that this royal house was guaranteed to always have one of its descendents sitting upon the throne. One of the clearest examples of this belief can be found in Psalm 89:

I will not violate my covenant;
the promise of my lips I will not alter.
By my holiness I swore once for all:
I will never be false to David.
His dynasty will continue forever,
his throne, like the sun before me.
Like the moon it will stand eternal,
forever firm like the sky!" (Psalm 89: 35-38)

Decline, Exile, and Return

The next decades were a period of decline for the nations of Judah and Israel, and each was eventually conquered. Israel fell first in 721 B.C. to the Assyrians, and Judah later to the Babylonians in 586 B.C.. Many of the people fled before these invasions, and others were deported by their captors (the most famous of which was the Babylonian captivity, which lasted 70 years). This led to a widespread “diaspora,” with Jewish communities springing up all over the Mediterranean world (and beyond). When the Babylonians were eventually conquered by the Persians, the leadership of the Jews was allowed to return to Palestine, to re-found the nation and rebuild the Temple. The Persians were eventually conquered by the Greeks under Alexander the Great, and the territories he left became strongly influenced by Greek culture.

The Greek rulers of Palestine were called the Seleucids (the name of their dynasty). In 167 B.C., the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV issued a decree banning certain Jewish religious practices, such as circumcision and religious study, and making idolatry and the eating of non-kosher food obligatory. This was intolerable to the local population, whose ancestors had struggled to maintain the beliefs and traditions of Judaism during the period of exile. Many chose the death penalty rather than abandon their religion, and eventually a revolt was led against the Seleucids by the Maccabees, a charismatic family of brothers who would finally be successful (independence was declared in 141 B.C.). For the first time in centuries, the Jews had their own independent state once again, although it would only last until 63 B.C., when Rome conquered Judea.

This period of captivity and subjection to foreign powers proved to be very fruitful for Jewish theology. During this period the Jews as a culture went from being henotheistic (there is only one God for us) to becoming monotheistic (there is only one God, period). For the sake of the Hebrews in the diaspora the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek (a translation known as the

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85 The official teaching of the Jewish religion has always been strongly monotheistic, but that does not mean that all the people have been. The Old Testament is full of stories and prophetic messages meant to call people to a true monotheistic belief -- which implies that polytheism and henotheism were always in the background.
Septuagint, symbolized by the letters LXX), and contact with Greek culture caused a surge of writing of what are called “wisdom books” (some of which became included in the Septuagint, even though they did not have a Hebrew origin). The struggle to maintain religious purity and fidelity to the covenant of Moses led to a growth in the work of scribes and rabbis, whose job it was to teach and interpret the Law for the people, and the experience of the Maccabean revolt led to a sense of the value of martyrdom (i.e. that it was better to die for that Law rather than break it out of obedience to foreign powers). Finally, a strong longing developed for a new “messiah” to come from God, as the faith in the “Davidic dynasty” still endured despite the political setbacks. The identity of this hoped-for messiah was strongly debated, however: would he be another “messiah-king”, like Saul or David, leading the people to independence and another golden age? Or was that earthly throne now gone, with the promise to be fulfilled in a new eschatological way, as some of the prophets seemed to indicate – a ruler who would institute the Reign of God itself?

Jesus of Nazareth

Into this environment of messianic fervour and strict observance of the Law entered Jesus of Nazareth. He came from a poor family in Galilee (sort of the Newfoundland of Palestine), and his public career lasted only a maximum of three years. As far as we know Jesus never wrote any texts, and he is most famous for his reputed miracles and signs, particularly his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead. In addition to being a prophet and wonder-worker, however, Jesus was also called “rabi”. This meant that people would come to him for interpretations of the Law, and he would teach them. He himself said he had not come to abolish the Law, but to see that it was fulfilled, and in his interpretations of the Law he often sought the "spirit" of the law rather than being focussed on the exact letter of it, especially with the laws regarding ritual practices (but at the same time being very strict with regards to the moral laws). In doing so he led the people in a process of development of doctrine which favoured the poor and the religious outcasts, but which called for a more challenging form of obedience -- an obedience, not only of conduct, but of the heart. Many were attracted to this, but others felt he was threatening the existing Jewish tradition and opposed him. With regards to his teaching of the Law, the disagreement was over what elements belonged to the Jewish “grand Tradition” and what elements were merely small-t “traditions”.

The followers of Jesus, called his "disciples" because they accepted to live according to the "discipline" of the way of life he was proposing, wondered if he was the Messiah so many were waiting for. Jesus affirmed that he was, but asked them to keep it a secret until after his Resurrection and Ascension into heaven. We are not exactly certain why Jesus asked them to keep this "messianic secret," but the general conclusion is that he was fearful that his status of Messiah would be misunderstood to mean being the military founder of an earthly kingdom. His many parables of the Kingdom of God, however, indicate a much deeper meaning -- a Reign of God, not in military might, but in the hearts of men and women.

Jesus, in his life and ministry, was truly a man of his times. By proposing himself as the unique Son of God, he invited the monotheism of the Jews to an even further development in Trinitarianism, although he also was opposed precisely because of the strong defense of monotheism
of his contemporaries (who felt it was threatened by his extraordinary claim). His moral teaching responded to the intense desire of many to follow God through following the Law, but others felt that his explanations of the true nature of the Law were in fact challenging it. His death on the cross contained for many an echo of the martyrs of the Macabbean revolt, and his subsequent resurrection was not only a confirmation by God of his teachings and his status of Son, but was also seen as fulfilment of the promise to David made centuries before: the inauguration of the Reign of God with Jesus as the Messiah -- a Reign which was not only political but went even to control over the forces of nature (and even death itself).

The Apostolic Church

During his ministry, Jesus selected 12 of his disciples and gave them the title “apostle,” meaning “one who is sent”. Jesus conferred his authority on the apostles, authorizing them to speak and act in his name as a continuation of his ministry. After Jesus ascended into heaven the remaining 11 apostles (Judas Iscariot, in betraying Jesus, had left the group) once again completed their number, and after a time added even more apostles. At first they remained in Jerusalem, but after a time they began to circulate in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. They would enter synagogues, where according to tradition they would be invited to preach. There, they would announce the “good news” that the Messiah had appeared, and that it was Jesus. Eventually the apostles moved out into the diaspora, preaching in the synagogues there as well. We know they moved through Syria, Asia Minor (now Turkey), Greece, Cyprus, Malta, and Italy. There is evidence to suggest that they also journeyed as far as Spain, England, Iraq, and even India.

Wherever the apostles went, they would found small communities of Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah. These would continue to attend synagogue with their co-religionists. In addition to new Jewish disciples, however, certain non-Jews also expressed an interest in becoming followers of Jesus. Some of these were Samaritans, whose religion was usually opposed to the Jewish religion, but who shared a common ancestry with the Jews; these were relatively easily accepted as disciples of Jesus. In addition to the Samaritans, however, a number of Greek "proselytes" sought to be accepted as followers of Jesus. The proselytes were individuals who were attracted to Judaism and its essentials, but were not descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They therefore were uncertain how they might enter into the promises of the covenants God made with Abraham and Moses. These “Hellenists” realised that if Jesus were truly Messiah and Lord, the King of Israel reigning now in heaven, then perhaps by placing their faith in Jesus they could thereby be accepted as part of God’s chosen people, almost as spiritual "immigrants". The early Christians welcomed these proselyte converts, but wondered: was their faith in Jesus, expressed through baptism, sufficient? Or was it necessary for them to become Jewish as well, accepting to follow all the strictures of the Law, including circumcision? A council of the leaders of the Christian communities was eventually called, including the apostles, and they decided that faith in Jesus would be sufficient for a non-Jew to be fully included. This conciliar manner of decision-making set a pattern which would be followed throughout the centuries.

As the faith spread, persecutions followed in its wake. Jesus, after all, had been executed, and his followers were seen by some as being as dangerous as him. Some early persecutions were
led by the Jewish authorities, with Paul of Tarsus an active member. Paul had a profound spiritual experience on his way to the city of Damascus, however, and radically changed his views, accepting Jesus as Messiah and Lord. He later became possibly the greatest missionary apostle, founding communities all across the Middle East, Asia Minor, and Greece. He was also a powerful writer and apologist for the faith, and a leader in the view that non-Jews did not need to become Jews in order to be fully accepted as Christians. He was later executed in Rome around 65 A.D. in the wake of another persecution, this time led by the pagan authorities of Rome at the behest of Emperor Nero. In fact, tradition holds that all the apostles were eventually martyred except for St. John, who is said to have died of extreme old age sometime between 90 and 100 A.D.

One key theological development of the 1st century needs to be mentioned, and that is the development of the Christian scriptures, also called the New Testament. These texts came in various literary forms, such as letters, historical books (such as the Gospels, and the book of Acts), and a form of writing called an “apocalypse” (the Book of Revelation). We know that the preaching of the Apostles would first have founded an oral tradition, and St. Paul himself told the Thessalonians to “stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.” (2 Thess 2:15). Eventually these letters and other works would be compiled to form a corpus of texts which the early Christians held to be inspired. One difficulty, however, was trying to determine which texts were actually inspired and which weren’t, because a number of fraudulent letters were beginning to circulate. In the same letter to the Thessalonians, St. Paul exhorts the people:

> We beg you, brethren, not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word, or by letter purporting to be from us. (2 Thess 2:1b-2)

The process of determining which texts were to be included in the New Testament took some time. The letter of Clement of Rome, who was a bishop of Rome after the death of St. Peter, was written while some of the apostles were still alive, and yet it did not get included in the Bible; neither did the text entitled “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles” (also called the Didache), nor the “Shepherd of Hermas,” both ancient texts from about the same time. There have many attempts to try and develop a theology regarding the criteria the early Christians might have used to justify including some texts and not others, but each of these theories has its strengths and weaknesses. The bottom line is that we don’t really know what led them to propose some books and not others, and the reasons may in fact be particular to each book. Of one thing, though, we can be certain: these texts represent the earliest written witness to the faith of the first Christians, and are held to be sacred in character. The name “New Testament” for these books was first used by Tertullian c. 200 A.D., and a final, universally accepted list of the books of the New Testament finally took shape by the end of the 4th century.

The Jewish people led an unsuccessful revolt against Roman rule in 70 A.D., which culminated in the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. (A second unsuccessful revolt in 135 A.D. led to severe reprisals, including the banning of all Jews from Jerusalem.) The elders of the people met at Jamnia in Palestine c. 100 A.D., and there they made a formal decision to exclude all Christians from the synagogue. While this had already been put into practice in some other locations beforehand, at this point it was made clear: it would simply no longer be possible to be a
Jew in good standing and to profess faith in Jesus as Messiah at the same time. Another decision was made that would have consequences for the Christian world centuries later: the Greek-original texts of the Septuagint Bible were rejected as not being from God, with only the Hebrew texts being accepted as inspired.

After these decisions, both of the early Apostles to admit the Gentiles to the Church and of the elders of Jamnia to separate the Church and the Synagogue, and with the increasing missionary activity of the Church, membership of the Church went from being Jewish to being largely Gentile. This brings us to the next major phase of Christian theological history: the Patristic era.

**PART II: THE PATRISTIC ERA**

In church history the time from the Apostles to the Medieval age is usually called the “Patristic Era”. This is derived from the Latin word “pater,” meaning “father,” because the writers of this time are often called the “Fathers of the Church”. (As far as we know, there were no “mothers” of the Church from this era.) The Patristic era is usually divided into two portions: the Ante-Nicene Fathers, who wrote while the Church was still subject to persecution by the Roman empire, and the Post-Nicene Fathers, who wrote after the official recognition of Christianity by the Roman emperor.

**Ante-Nicene Fathers: the sub-apostolic period**

The period immediately after the era of the apostles is called the “sub-apostolic” period. The key theological development in this period was the consolidation of the ministries of leadership in the various local churches. In this the concept of *apostolic succession* became important. As the apostles founded communities they would eventually leave them in the charge of successors called *episkopoi*, which means “overseers” or “supervisors,” and who today are called “bishops”. St. Polycarp, for example, was said to have been a small boy who learned the teaching of the apostles from St. John himself.

Coupled with the apostolic succession in the *episkopoi* was the development of the authority structures in the early churches. Just as Jesus had conferred his authority upon the apostles, the bishops were understood to have received this authority in their turn. In his letters St. Ignatius of Antioch (written before his death in 107 A.D.) points to three ministries already described in the New Testament as being critical to the stability of a local church: the ministries of bishop, presbyter (later called “priest”) and deacon. This threefold pattern of ministry, along with an unbroken line of apostolic succession, remains a key part of the faith of the Catholic and Orthodox churches today (along with most Anglicans).

**Ante-Nicene Fathers: the apologist period**

The next period in the patristic era is called the “apologist” period. The word “apology” in
this context means “defence and/or explanation of”. Christianity was growing in an environment hostile to it, both in official government policy (which authorized brutal persecutions) and in popular prejudices. Christians, for example, called each other “brother” and “sister”, so they were accused of incest. The bread and wine of the Eucharist was (and still is in many churches) called the Body and Blood of Christ, but when others heard that Christians ate “Body” and “Blood” they were accused of cannibalism. Christians also refused to worship the Roman gods, particularly the emperor, and so they were accused of atheism. Emperor Nero labelled Christians “enemies of the human race,” and so the stage was set for the rise of the great apologists, defenders of the faith, who would employ all their skill and intellect to convince others of the true nature of Christian doctrine as being non-offensive to Roman sensibilities and interests.

One of the most prominent of these Apologists was St. Justin Martyr. A Roman citizen, born of pagan Greek parents in the region of ancient Palestine, Justin (c. 100 – 165) would prove to be the most outstanding apologist of the second century. As a young man he studied several of the leading Greek philosophies, eventually settling for Platonism. He later embraced the Christian faith (c. 130) and converted, declaring Christianity to be the only trustworthy and useful philosophy. His excellent education made him very effective in communicating his views to fellow Greeks and those versed in the philosophies of the day, and he argued tirelessly that his faith was not immoral and was in fact compatible with the best of Greek philosophical thought. His surviving works include the First Apology (c. 155) and Second Apology (c.162), as well as the Dialogue with Trypho, a dialogue with a Jew named Trypho, in which he undertakes the defense of Christianity. Where other apologists were content to refute the slanderous accusations directed against the Christians, St. Justin went further by boldly denouncing the unfair persecutions, and arguing that Christians were not merely innocent but were exemplary citizens and would add greatly to the Roman life and state if accepted. Unfortunately, others disagreed and St. Justin met a martyr's death after being denounced as a Christian and found guilty of persisting in his faith. He was executed in Rome under the rule of Marcus Aurelius.

Another important Apologist was St. Irenaeus of Lyons, who attempted to refute certain popular deviations from Christian belief, typically understood together under the heading of “gnosticism”. Gnosticism was a religious system which advocated that salvation came through the acquisition of knowledge, as the name itself implies. They believed in a form of supreme being or God, separate from the world, and were marked by a very strong dualist tendency. Their distortion of the Christian doctrine was challenged by St. Irenaeus in his writings, specifically Against the Heresies (Adversus Haereses), composed some time after 174 A.D. In this treatise he strongly refutes the (sometimes strange) theological theories the Gnostics had by stressing the importance of tradition as it was to be found in the writings of the Apostles and in the apostolic succession of bishops. In his effort to refute false interpretations of Christianity, Irenaeus succeeded not only in producing an effective counter-argument, but in developing a constructive reading of Christian teaching and tradition.

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86 TACITUS, Annales, XV, 44, “The Neronian Persecution according to Tacitus”.

87 Gnosticism derives its name from the Greek word gnostis, meaning knowledge or wisdom.
Ante-Nicene Fathers: the rise of the schools

Despite the misunderstandings and persecutions, Christian life managed to flourish in certain locations. In particular, theological schools developed in the cities of Alexandria, Egypt, and Antioch in Syria. Each had its own particular style and approach, and a certain rivalry developed between them, a rivalry that would have a serious impact years later.

Johannes Quaesten, the eminent patristic scholar, wrote this about the school of Alexandria:

> When Christianity entered the city at the end of the first century...there sprang up that strong interest in problems of an abstract nature that led to the foundation of a theological school. The school of Alexandria is the oldest centre of sacred science in the history of Christianity. The environment in which it developed gave it its distinctive characteristics, predominant interest in the metaphysical investigation of the content of the faith, a leaning to the philosophy of Plato, and the allegorical interpretation of Sacred Scripture...The Christian thinkers of Alexandria adopted this [allegorical] method because they were convinced that a literal interpretation is in many cases unworthy of God...Neither theology nor scriptural exegesis would have taken such magnificent initial strides without it...It had the great advantage of opening a vast field to nascent theology and of allowing the fertile contact of Greek philosophy and revelation...However, the tendency to find prefigurations in every line of Scripture and to neglect the literal sense was not without danger.\(^{88}\)

The preeminent scholar of this school was Origen, nicknamed *Adamantius* (“Man of Steel”) by his biographers, who were impressed with the seriousness and severity of his Christian lifestyle, which went as far as long periods of fasting, sleeping on the floor, voluntary poverty, and even self-castration (which is one of the reasons he was never declared a saint). Origen was exiled from Egypt in 232 A.D., and settled in Caesarea, where a second school in the Alexandrian tradition was founded, albeit in Palestine.

Regarding the school of Antioch, Quasten writes:

> The school of Antioch was founded...in direct opposition to the excesses and fantasies of the allegorical method of Origen. It gave careful attention to the text itself and led its pupils into the sphere of literal elucidation and historical and grammatical study of Scripture...The beginnings of the school of Antioch seem to have been very modest. It never could boast a head like Origen. Nevertheless, it was the cradle of great exegesis.\(^{89}\)

An opposition arose, therefore, between the two schools.

The scholars of the two different seats of learning were themselves convinced of

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\(^{88}\) JOHANNES QUAESTEN, *Patrology (volume II)*, pp. 2-4.

\(^{89}\) Ibid., pp. 121-122.
a deep-seated discord, a fundamental contradiction, in their respective approaches. At Antioch the object was to find in Holy Writ its most obvious meaning; at Caesarea or Alexandria the search was for figures of Christ. The one side accused allegory of destroying the value of the Bible as a record of the past, of travestying it into mythological fable; the other dubbed ‘carnal’ all who clung to the letter...

In short, the diversity of method was a diversity of mind that had already made itself felt in Greek philosophy. Alexandria’s idealism and speculative bent owed inspiration to Plato, Antioch’s rationalism and empiricism to Aristotle; the former inclined to mysticism, the latter to rationalism.  

This is not to say there was a total opposition, but often people focussed on the differences rather than the similarities. This eventually led to a hardening of certain positions that divided Christianity.

Intermission: the terror of Diocletian and the peace of Constantine

Towards the end of the 3rd century the growing pressure of barbarian tribes upon the borders of the empire demanded a larger standing army. Whereas the legendary legions that originally forged the empire where conscripted from Rome and Italy itself, the later versions were composed of soldiers issuing from all corners and all races. The armies of the late empire were an eclectic group at best, often loyal only to their respective provinces or to their own personal interests. They would prove to be almost as harmful to the empire as those from whom they were trying to defend it. Armies would often prey upon local populations where they were stationed, stealing provisions and disrupting the local economy. They grew in power to the point where commanding generals could force their way into positions of high political power. Having several legions of armed men to support one’s political ambitions has always proved very persuasive. This reach for power ignited jealous rivalries among the commanders, sometimes erupting into bloody clashes and civil war, which further weakened the fighting strength of the imperial armies. In turn, the enormous cost of maintaining such a force drastically increased the level of taxation, stifling the enterprise of the merchant classes. This triple blow of high taxes, military abuse and the plundering and destruction of resources by foreign invaders pushed the economy of Rome to the brink of collapse. The efforts of two late emperors, Diocletian (c. 284 – 305 A.D.) and Constantine I (c.306 – 337 A.D.) were all that saved the empire from imploding earlier than it did.

Diocletian attempted to save the empire by reorganizing its administration, splitting it into four prefectures, two in the east and two in the west. Each of these was in turn subdivided in dioceses. In addition to this reorganization, however, a radical shift in imperial policy regarding Christians occurred during the rule of Diocletian. In his desperate attempts to maintain the integrity...
of the empire he could not afford to allow any influence that was deemed subversive and tending towards separatism. The emperor was initially convinced by his co-ruler Galerius that Christianity as a religion and as an organization was a threat. Diocletian enacted some of the harshest measures to date in order to root out and eliminate Christianity. His issued a series of edicts in A.D. 303 stipulating that no Christian could hold Roman citizenship, which meant that none could hold a post in imperial and municipal services, and none could appeal a judicial verdict. No Christian slave could be freed. All churches and sacred books were to be destroyed, and the clergy were to be arrested and forced under torture to sacrifice to the gods. These measures were to be applied to all Christians. However the emperor underestimated the extent of their presence and influence. What had begun as a religion of the lower classes had grown, and by the end of the second century boasted members in virtually every sector of Roman life. They included some of the most educated and influential people in the empire. Christianity had developed into a more mature organization, better able to clarify its doctrine in the face of questions of how it related to everyday Roman life. Ultimately, the policies regarding Christians would see a momentous reversal.

The edicts condemning Christians were officially reversed by an Edict of Toleration issued in A.D. 311, by the very same Galerius who encouraged the emperor to enact policies of persecution in the first place. Galerius, it seemed, was stricken with a long and particularly unpleasant illness and sought to obtain a miraculous cure from the God of the Christians by ending the persecutions. The Christians’ rights as Roman citizens were restored and they were encouraged to pray to their God for the unity of the empire. It could use all the help it could get, for greater threats to the unity of the empire would come in the form of power struggles between rival claimants to the throne.

Christianity’s eventual place as the official and favoured religion of the empire would be anchored by two important events: the conversion of Constantine I, and the Edict of Milan. According to legend Constantine, the son of a ruling official of Gaul and Britain, received a vision on the eve of a decisive battle with his arch-rival Maxentius. Described by the ancient historian Eusebius, “the Emperor beheld in the heavens, above the sun, a cross of light, around which were woven the words: ‘In this sign thou shalt conquer’”. His victory over Maxentius at the battle of the Milvian Bridge, in A.D. 312, secured Constantine’s position as ruler of the Western portion of the empire, and is considered to be the catalyst for Constantine’s conversion, and subsequently his issuing of the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313. The edict was proclaimed that all citizens, including Christians, would be given the freedom to follow the religion that suited them, guaranteeing unrestricted religious practice. Church property which had been seized during the persecutions was restored, and all Christians were legally recognized. Although the edict was general in tone, addressing all religions, Constantine personally had strong sympathies for the Christian Church. This created frictions with his counterpart in the east, Licinius, who made no secret of his contempt for Christians. While Christianity enjoyed a favorable new atmosphere in the west, it continued to be met with harsh persecution in the east. These frictions ignited into open conflict, setting the stage for a final confrontation between Christianity, championed by Constantine, and paganism, heralded

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92 EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, Life of Constantine

93 EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, Ecclesiastical History, 9.9.12; 10.5.2-14
by Licinius. Constantine achieved supremacy as sole Roman emperor in A.D. 324, after thwarting his rival Licinius, finally putting an end to civil conflicts, and definitively settling in his new eastern capital. The Church now not only enjoyed legal recognition, but imperial patronage from a Christian emperor, and eventually the status of official religion of the empire.

It should be noted that there were Christians living outside of the Roman empire at this time, and some of these events only touched them remotely. For example, the first official adoption of Christianity as the religion of the state occurred in the kingdom of Armenia and preceded the Edict of Milan by quite some time. St. Gregory (c. 261 - 332), surnamed the “Illuminator,” was a missionary to Armenia who succeeded in converting the king Tiridates II. By royal decree, Christianity was declared the religion of the state, and this marked the first instance of mass conversion, which would become characteristic of this period.

The Post-Nicene Fathers: major doctrinal categories

The era following the peace of Constantine was a period of intense theological discussion, in which the 4 major doctrinal categories (seen in chapter 4) were developed.

God-as-Trinity

The category of the Trinity saw major developments in the 4th century. Arius, a priest of the church of Alexandria, Egypt, began to preach that Jesus was not fully divine. This caused a major stir, until the Emperor himself had to intervene to maintain order. He called for a council of bishops to meet at Nicea in Asia Minor. It was the largest gathering of bishops ever up until that point, with representatives of both East and West. The council met in 325 A.D., and decided against Arius and in favour of the divinity of Jesus. The Emperor then made sure that this decision was enforced within his empire -- by force if necessary.

One interesting thing to note is that the council of Nicea used the word \textit{homoousios} (meaning “of the same substance”) to explain the divinity of Jesus, which is a word not found in the Bible. There was some debate as to whether or not it was appropriate (or even permissible) to use non-Biblical words to describe spiritual realities. The final decision was that we could use such words, not because we are trying to add something to the Bible, but because we are trying to explain its meaning with even greater clarity. It was an affirmation of the principle of development of doctrine.

The doctrine of the Trinity received another development when questions then arose about the status of the Holy Spirit. Another council was called, this time held at Constantinople in 381 A.D., and the final decision was that the Holy Spirit was indeed also a divine person. While there would be continued development of the doctrinal category of the Trinity, the essential core of the Trinitarian doctrine was now set: "One God in three Persons".
Incarnation

The doctrinal category of Incarnation was the next major focus of theological interest, with the major discussions occurring in the 5th century. Jesus had now been acknowledged as both human and divine, but how did these two natures interact? Patriarch Nestorius of Constantinople, a member of the school of Antioch, taught that these two natures operated in parallel, with only a weak unity between them, such that in effect Jesus not only had two natures, but that he was in effect two persons, one human and another divine. His view was challenged at yet another ecumenical council, led by proponents of the Alexandrian school, this time held at Ephesus in 431 A.D. The council affirmed that there was only one person in Jesus, and that his two natures were united.

This conclusion, however, led to an exaggeration in the opposite sense. The Egyptian monk Eutyches taught that, if these two natures were in fact united, then the divine nature (being so much greater) must have swallowed up the human nature "as a drop of honey in the ocean". His views were challenged at the 4th ecumenical council now held at Chalcedon in 451 A.D., which decided that, while the two natures in Jesus were indeed united, they were not united in such as way so as to become confused with each other. This time, it was the Antiochians who were victorious over the Alexandrians.

A continuation of the monophysite controversy came decades later in monotheletism. It taught that Jesus, even if he had two natures, had only one will. Promoted by the Emperor, it was an attempt at a compromise, to try and restore the unity that had been lost with the Oriental Orthodox church. It was rejected, however, at the Third Council of Constantinople, held in 681 A.D. (by now the 6th ecumenical council).

A final controversy related to the Incarnation was iconoclasm, in the 8th century. By this time Islam had become ascendant in the Middle East, and was having some theological influence in the Christian world. Beginning in 695, the Saracen caliphs began an aggressive banning of all depictions of God or of human beings in a religious context. Bishop Constantine of Nicaolia, finding similar ideas in the Old Testament, agreed with this practice. His ideas influenced Emperor Leo III to undertake an aggressive campaign against images (icons), starting in 727 A.D. The theological issue at stake was: now that God had become incarnate in Jesus, did the prohibition of the Old Testament still apply? Just as Jesus had reinterpreted parts of the Old Testament in order to find its true essence and escape the mere letter of the Law, could the church set aside the absolute prohibition against images? Or was it an eternal prohibition? The conflict turned bitter and bloody, and finally an ecumenical council (the 7th) was called and met in 786-787 at Nicea (called Nicea II). It decided in favour of the use of icons.94

94 It should be noted that the iconoclasm controversy erupted again during the Protestant Reformation, during which a number of Protestants adopted an anti-icon position. More on this later.
Salvation & Holy Spirit

The doctrinal category of Salvation received the greatest growth when theology began to consider the question of grace. The Bible, especially in the letters of St. Paul, mentions that God “gives us his grace,” but what does this mean exactly?

The English monk Pelagius was a renowned spiritual director. As spiritual director, he became tired of hearing men use their human frailty as an excuse for sin and tepidity. He believed that every man is quite capable of perfection by his own efforts provided that he only applied them to action. In other words, God’s supernatural help (grace) is not strictly speaking necessary to attain salvation, but at most is an assistance to our natural powers which otherwise should suffice. For Pelagius, original sin is not so much a weakening of human nature as simply the bad examples that we have for evil conduct. The sin of Adam and Eve, for example, does not have any internal consequences for us; it only set a bad external example.

Against this view came St. Augustine, who had struggled for years with moral questions in his relationship with God. When he finally converted, he felt he knew in his heart it was not really through his own powers, but through a special intervention from God in his life. Accordingly, he was quite horrified by the teaching of Pelagius. St. Augustine’s teaching on salvation, justification and grace as a free gift from God (and not as something earned by our efforts) is considered his greatest theological monument. Pelagianism was rejected at the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.), but continued in a modified form as Semi-Pelagianism, especially in England and Wales.\textsuperscript{95} Semi-Pelagianism was rejected at a local (not ecumenical) council called the Council of Orange (529 A.D.), but its decrees received special approval of the Pope, and so were generally well received, (especially in the West).

\begin{quote}
It could be argued that much of our modern society is actually Pelagian. The religious culture of England had an enormous impact in the world through the British Empire, and the culture of the United States has many Pelagian features, such as the “American Dream,” whereby if you “work hard enough you can make it”.
\end{quote}
Post-Nicene Fathers: other theological developments

Monasticism

The 3rd century saw the beginning of a spiritual movement called monasticism. The early monks were hermits who would go off to live in the desert by themselves, but this proved exceptionally difficult with time, not simply because life in the desert was difficult, but because reports of their holiness spread so they received a lot of visitors! Some took extraordinary measures to try and live in a solitary manner: the stylite monks, for example, would build pillars and live on top of them, so that they could have greater separation from the world. Eventually, though, these hermits would band together in small communities of hermits, each with their own “hermitage” or “cell”. They would come together for prayer and subdivide community tasks among themselves, and in particular they would elect a leader (often called an abbot, from the Aramaic word “abba,” meaning “father”) to take care of matters of organization and discipline, as well as contact with the outside world. While each rule of life was a bit different, eventually this common form of life evolved to become true monastic communities living in common in monasteries.

Monasticism proved to be very popular, as it combined a serious approach to spiritual life with the resources (mutual support and guidance) needed to attain greater spiritual perfection. While generally successful, there were cases of monasteries that had problems and which seemed to spin out of control. Gradually monasteries grouped themselves into monastic families, in which each monastery would be independent but would share the same “rule of life” with other monasteries of the same family. In the East, the rule of St. Basil was particularly prominent, while in the West the rule of St. Benedict became the most significant. In fact, it is not unreasonable to state that the Benedictine rule was one of the foundational documents for the preservation and development of Western civilization. Monasteries were required to be financially independent, not accepting charity but in fact being sources of charity for others. Because they themselves lived in voluntary poverty there was usually a surplus to share with the poor of the community, such that the monastery became a source of charity and social welfare. The obligation to study, present within the Benedictine rule led to the development of prominent libraries and even universities, and prominent citizens would send their children to monasteries for their education. The obligation under the Benedictine rule to offer hospitality to strangers meant that sick people, cast out of the village or town, would knock on the door of the monastery where they knew they would have to be received. The monks would place them in a special wing where they could be cared for; these special arrangements became known as “hospitals,” where hospitality was always assured.

The Vulgate Bible

A significant theological moment occurred in the 4th century when Pope St. Damasus asked the renowned scholar St. Jerome to translate the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into Latin. Greek was still the preferred language of the upper classes, but the Pope wanted to be able to present the Scriptures to the common people as well. Older Latin translations already existed, but there was
no guarantee as to their accuracy (or even their honesty, as people sometimes tried to slip in certain theological conclusions in their translations rather than remaining faithful to the original text). St. Jerome moved to Bethlehem and set up shop in the very cave where Jesus was said to have been born, and completed the Vulgate Bible (from the Latin word “vulgus,” meaning “common people”).

As he worked, however, St. Jerome was confronted with a problem: which books to translate? St. Damasus provided St. Jerome with a list of books, and so in the Western church this list became normative. St. Jerome was familiar with the exclusion of certain books by the Jews, and was inclined to agree with them, but St. Damasus insisted. Nevertheless, while St. Jerome did translate the Greek-only portions of the Old Testament, he relegated them to a kind of second-class status. This would prove significant centuries later during the Protestant Reformation.

_Caesaro-papism_

Caesaro-papism is a technical term which means a tendency for secular authority (the “caesar”) to assume a position of authority and dominance over the Church (i.e. to take the place of the “Pope”). The separation of Church and State has been a question with a long and thorny history. Jesus himself advocated a separation when he was asked by his adversaries about the paying of taxes to the Roman emperor:

> The Pharisees went and took counsel how to entangle him in his talk. And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true, and teach the way of God truthfully, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position of men. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the money for the tax." And they brought him a coin. And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said, "Caesars." Then he said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesars, and to God the things that are Gods." (Matthew 22:15-21)

While the two authorities are separate, however, in practice there has often been a question as to who is really in charge. Prior to the peace of Constantine this was a moot issue, as the secular authority was usually trying to destroy the church, not control it; once the emperor became its official protector, however, Church-State relations became a lot trickier. Often, the Fathers of the Church had to fight for the independence of the Church -- for example, for the right to appoint its own bishops, rather than have those bishops confirmed or even imposed by the imperial authority. This kind of thing still happens even today,96 and Church-State relations remain sometimes difficult, especially when the decisions of the secular authority affect matters of conscience. It would not be hard for us to return to the persecutions of the early Roman empire -- more subtle, perhaps, but no less real. Of course, there were also times when the Church acquired the power of the State, and this

96 For example, on September 28, 2003, Pope John Paul II named a Vietnamese bishop as one of his Cardinals. The communist Vietnamese government declared it did not “recognize” this appointment as it had not been made with their prior approval.
occasioned its own problems. There was a time, for example, when the Pope was also the ruler of a large tract of Italy, and was responsible for taxation, public works, and even the maintenance of an army. These secular considerations proved a terrible distraction from the spiritual mission of the Church, and sometimes led to a confusing of the roles (or even outright corruption).  

**PART III: FROM THE PATRISTIC TO THE MEDIEVAL ERA**

There are two major developments which characterize the shift from the Patristic era to the Medieval era of Christian theology.

**The rise of school theology**

Thanks to the special focus on study and the development of libraries, monasteries became key centres of culture and learning. As already seen, convent and monastery schools were important for educating the elites of society. As well, this manner of life favoured the *lectio divina* form of prayer, which provided the template for the eventual rise of *scholasticism* as a method of doing theology. These developments caused a shift in the place for theology, from the seat of the bishop to the schools of monasteries and (eventually) the faculties of theology of universities. In fact, the most educated theologians were usually monks, not bishops, and with the negative influences of caesaro-papism and nepotism, often bishops would be quite theologically inept and happy to transfer the responsibility for the exposition and development of doctrine to the schools.

This shift to the schools gradually led to a shift in theology itself, from being a practical science to being a theoretical science. Of course the two are always present together, but it meant a gradual neglect of practical studies like liturgy and homiletics in favour of more speculative questions. This meant a shift even in the sense of the meaning of faith itself. To have faith traditionally meant to commit your entire being to the following of Jesus as one of his disciples, and theology was supposed to help you actually accomplish this discipleship in the day-to-day. Under the more rationalistic approach of the schools, however, this was already a given by means of following the monastic rule of life. Faith came to mean instead the intellectual assent to a list of doctrines, rather than the personal donation of self to Jesus as Lord.

There are still echoes of the influence of the school approach, especially in the Catholic and Orthodox churches. There is often a sense in many people’s minds that the only “real Christians” are the professionally religious (such as priests or monks or nuns), but this may be largely due to the relative neglect of the question of lay discipleship in the monastic schools. In addition, Christian religious catechism is still often taught as a list of things to be believed, without always successfully connecting these things to everyday lived reality "out there in the real world". The modern trend

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97 In my opinion as your teacher, I honestly think one of the best things to ever happen to the Catholic Church was the loss of these “papal states” in the 19th century. I am glad that the Vatican is recognized as a sovereign state, as this frees it from outright external political control, but I also think that the reduction of the Vatican to being the tiniest country in the world allows the church to focus on its spiritual mission above all else.
of having many more lay people take up the study of theology may help us a great deal in this regard.

Alienation between East and West

The division of the Roman empire into east and west started as just an administrative convenience but truly became a cultural divide. The patristic era saw an alienation developing between the Greek-speaking Easterners and the Latin-speaking Westerners, driven in part by tension between the two Romes: the “Old Rome” in Italy and the “New Rome,” the other name given to Constantinople (now Istanbul). The collapse of the Western Roman Empire and its replacement by the empire of Charlemagne further reinforced this cultural divide: as the West fell into the Dark Ages, the East saw tremendous growth in a new, truly Byzantine identity.

This cultural divide eventually spilled over into the realm of the church. The Patriarch of Constantinople had been 5th in rank of the patriarchs, but once the imperial capital was moved sought to be elevated to 2nd place, right behind the Pope of Rome. The 3rd canon of the first council of Constantinople read:

Because it is new Rome, the bishop of Constantinople is to enjoy the privileges of honour after the bishop of Rome.  

The council of Chalcedon re-addressed this question in its 28th canon, but this new canon (which was considerably longer and in effect added additional interpretations to the original canon) was rejected by the bishop of Rome.

There was also a rivalry in terms of missionary activity, particularly in the missions to the Slavic peoples. Were they to adopt the Latin liturgical traditions, and thus fall under the jurisdiction of Rome? Or would they adopt the Byzantine traditions, and tend to Constantinople? This unstable situation led to extensive polemics between the two groups about which liturgy was superior to the other, and by extension which was deficient.

The final straw came with the deposition of Patriarch Ignatius of Constantinople in 857AD by King Michael III. The king nominated St. Photius as successor, but Rome refused to recognize the new appointment. Eventually the two went into schism, with Photius calling a council at Constantinople in 867 to condemn certain Latin liturgical practices and expressions of faith, and to declare the Pope deposed! But only a few months later, the government had changed and Photius was out, with Ignatius being restored as Patriarch. A council was called at Constantinople in 869-870 which in turn condemned Photius. The matter seemed closed, but upon the death of Ignatius in 878 the King asked Photius to resume the throne! The Pope agreed to let bygones be bygones, and a new council in 879-880 declared the matter closed. But the damage was still done: duelling jurisdictions and the calling of all the multiple councils led to a weakening of communion.

The final rupture between East and West took place in 1054, in what is called the Great

98 Council of Constantinople I, canon 3.
Schism. It could be called the “Big Bang” of Christianity, because while it originally only involved the sees of Rome and Constantinople, it eventually led to the entirety of Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics being out of communion with each other. In 1052 Patriarch Michael Cerularius closed the Latin churches in Constantinople and ordered all clerics of the Latin rite to adopt the Greek liturgical observances. The Patriarch encouraged attacks on the Latin practices by certain monks, and it was said he condoned the actions of Chancellor Nicephorus who burst open Latin tabernacles and trampled on the hosts (supposedly "invalidly" consecrated because they started as unleavened bread). A furious exchange of letters began between Rome and Constantinople, and the Pope sent 3 legates to Constantinople to settle the situation. They arrived in March 1054, but unfortunately these were not the most diplomatic of men. On July 16, 1054, Cardinal Humbert and the other two legates walked into a packed cathedral during a service presided by Patriarch Michael and dropped a bull of excommunication on the altar. After hastily leaving town they were in turn excommunicated, and a sad state of division began which persists to this day.
The theology of the second millennium of Christianity was affected by two major historical events: the Great Schism of 1054 A.D., and the Protestant Reformation (which began in 1517 A.D.). Each event caused the Christian world to "explode" into separate branches, with the respective theologies following suit. The remaining portion of this history of theology will trace the development of each theological tradition.
The development of Eastern theology can be divided into 5 distinct historical periods.

Hardening of the East-West Schism

The Great Schism began as a split among ruling elites, and the excommunications were originally meant to include only the individuals involved. The split did not immediately have an effect on the popular sentiments of the body of the faithful. In fact, they were unaware of the existence of a schism, or at least did not demonstrate it in their actions. They continued the inclusion of the name of the Roman Pope in the Eucharistic prayers of the Eastern liturgy for some time after the diplomatic ugliness. Western pilgrims to the Holy Land continued to be well-received by their Eastern brethren and participate in their liturgies. The attitude among the general populace was only one of gradual hardening, resulting from a string of events which hurt the solidarity once shared between these two peoples. The comportment of the Western crusaders and the ill treatment of members of the Eastern church, aggravated the hostility and spread anti-Latin sentiments among the masses. An event which forever cemented this animosity occurred in the year 1204.

During the Fourth Crusade, an army led by the Venetians sacked the city of Constantinople, slaughtering their fellow Christians and stripping them of the spoils of war. In addition, the Venetian forces sought to replace the Eastern church leadership by establishing a Latin patriarchate instead of the traditional Greek one. This disastrous development sent East-West relations into a freefall, deepening and cementing the feelings of mistrust and anger that the eastern Christians felt towards their western brethren.

An attempt to heal the schism was made in 1274, at the 2nd Council of Lyons, but it met with failure, due to widespread opposition among Eastern clergy. At this point, the divisions which originally only existed between the Church leadership had become a widespread and firmly entrenched fissure between the common faithful.

The Defense of Hesychasm

Another important development in the theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church was the question of Hesychasm, or Hesychastic prayer. This form of prayer, otherwise known as the “Jesus prayer,” is practised by the individual, and involves the repetition of the phrase "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner" based on breathing patterns. Although generally found in monastic spirituality, its simple and easy character, as well as the fact that no special ordained minister was required for its execution, made it very accessible to the general body of the faithful. As this form of prayer gained popularity, it began to raise concerns among the political and ecclesiastical authorities. It is important to understand the Byzantine societal context in which this question arose in order to appreciate why the hesychastic prayer provoked such suspicion. The governmental and church structures, as well as the cultural mindsets, were intensely hierarchical,
with sanctioned authority firmly controlling and assuring the proper functioning of civic and church services. Moreover, the established forms of prayer and worship were much more corporate and hierarchical as well, with the community of believers gathering together to celebrate their liturgies under the guidance of a priest. Hesychastic prayer seemed to suggest that it was possible to achieve holiness outside of this hierarchical and liturgical pattern, and so seemingly attacked or at least eroded the structure of the Byzantine society. It required nothing less than the intervention of one of the greatest of the Eastern theologians in order to salvage this form of mysticism from the censure of the authorities.

St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), a monk since the year 1316 and one of the brilliant lights of Orthodox theology, successfully defended hesychastic prayer, citing the theory of *divinization*, that is, the process of sanctification made possible through prayer that restores the “likeness” of God in his human creatures. In other words, the purpose of this prayer is to help the faithful become “like” God. This theory reveals of vision of man’s ultimate destiny as being far more than just an idealized version of earthly life. Heaven is more than an eternal and incorruptible gift of youth, health and happiness as it is experienced in the world we know, but a radical transformation of our human life. A strong emphasis on Trinitarian theology is behind this understanding of redemption. The change in the human person is made possible by the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ, enabling the Holy Spirit to actualize the restoration of humanity, by incorporating certain characteristics of the Father. St. Palamas’ specific contribution to understanding this theory was his identification of a distinction between God’s essence and what he calls God’s “uncreated energies”. The “likeness” or characteristics of the Father that are shared with humanity does not mean that they become God, or that their essences become fused and indistinguishable from that of their Creator, as is seen in Hindu and Buddhist spirituality. Rather, they are infused or connected with God’s energies, so that their nature, essence, body, mind and will are all informed and empowered by His. Thus, the division between God and humanity introduced by the original sin is healed, and their original relationship is restored. Mankind regains what was lost and becomes what it was always meant to be, god-like! The image par excellence of this theory is found in the episode of the Transfiguration of the Christ in the gospels (Luke 9: 28), where the veil of the world is dropped for a brief moment and the true glory of Jesus is revealed in all its staggering radiance. Indeed, the image of luminescence is very marked in Eastern spirituality, as is manifested by their iconography and the literal radiance among their saints. Thanks largely to the efforts of Saint Palamas, hesychastic prayer was sanctioned and became the focus of a strong spiritual current among the faithful.

The East Under Siege

The Byzantine empire was the eastern portion of the classical Roman empire. After the

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99 Images of saints often have their heads surrounded by a glowing "halo," which is meant to represent participation of the saint in the "glow of holiness" that Jesus himself experienced in the Transfiguration. In fact, there have been Eastern saints who actually began to physically glow as they attained greater and greater degrees of personal holiness.
collapse of the West from a subsequent series of barbarian invasions, Constantinople became the seat of a new empire: indeed the capital was referred to as the “new Rome”. However, soon after its inception, the imperial heir had to face a new and militant force springing from the Arabian peninsula. Arab Muslims marked what may be the beginning of the end for the Byzantine empire. The Middle Eastern portion of its realm was lost during the rapid expansion of Islam during the 7th and 8th centuries, and the empire would come under increasing pressure from Muslim forces, especially from the Turks, culminating in the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The gradual crumbling of the Byzantine empire, as well as the imminent invasion by the Sultan’s forces in the 15th century, prompted the emperor Constantine XII to seek help from Christian western allies, or the Latins, as they were called.

In order to make the prospect of military engagement more inviting for the Latins, the emperor added the incentive of arranging a reunification of the Eastern and Western Churches. Towards these aims, the council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence was organized in 1439, at which occasion the emperor proclaimed that the two Churches were now one. However, not everyone in the Eastern Church welcomed the prospect of reunification. Bishop Mark of Ephesus, an Eastern Bishop, rallied the faithful in opposition to the imperial proclamation and succeeded in forcing the rejection of the initiative. A well-known slogan at the time was “better the Sultan’s turban than the Pope’s tiara!” The immediate consequences of the failure of the emperor’s bid for reunification was the refusal of the Western powers to lend any military support against the advancing Turkish forces. Ultimately, the Byzantine empire could not hold off the invaders and collapsed with the fall of its capital.

Under the rule of the Ottoman empire the patriarchate of Constantinople was allowed to survive, but only under the condition that he be subservient to the Sultan. In effect, the office of Patriarch became just another administrative position in the Sultan’s bureaucracy, and the job was sometimes bought and sold. In such a situation the Patriarch becomes nothing more than a Christian vassal of the Sultan, and by depriving the Christian population of a strong leader, the Sultan could assure that they would remain politically weak and not present any threat to his rule.

The Catholic Church, meanwhile, adopted a different approach to Christian unification. If no headway could be achieved by dealing with the Patriarch, then another course of action could be charted without his involvement. A strategy called “uniatism” was put into effect whereby the Catholic Church would systematically reunite with portions of the Eastern Church, rather than all of it at once. A "uniate church" refers to any Eastern Church that joined itself to the Roman Church, while retaining their particular customs and rites. This stratagem resulted in the Union of Brest in 1596 (which formed the Ukrainian Catholic Church) and the Greek Melkite union in 1724. While the initiative for some of these partial reunifications came from the Easterners themselves, the Catholic Church did sometimes employ political efforts in order to “break off” parts of the East, much to the dismay of the Easterners.

As a result of these numerous challenges from abroad, the Eastern Church was deeply affected in its view of outside institutions. A spirit of defensiveness entrenched itself among the church leaders who perceived themselves as under siege from hostile neighbours. Strong polemics between the Eastern and Western Churches following the losses of the "uniate" churches further soured relations. Three religious traditions (Orthodox, Catholic and Muslim) now co-existed within Eastern borders, with animosity growing between them over time. Indeed, one could say that this
pattern sowed the seeds for the many wars in the Balkan, including the conflicts of the late 20th century.

Renaissance of Eastern Theology in Russia

With Constantinople under the rule of the Ottomans, the Patriarchate became far less effective, as the Patriarch was unable to enact measures or speak out in ways which were contrary to the wishes of the Sultan. Subsequently, the sphere of importance in the Eastern Church began to shift to a new capital, Moscow. The subservience of the Patriarch of Constantinople was but the first impetus which spurred the shift of the centre of gravity towards Russia. The rise of Moscow as the leading light of the Eastern Church was so prominent that it was even referred to as the “Third Rome,” and it signalled the waning influence of the Patriarch of Constantinople in favor of his Russian brother. The effects of this shift are felt even today, as the vast majority of members of the Eastern Orthodox Church are in fact Russian.

A second major impetus which stimulated the “Russian renaissance” of Orthodoxy came from an unlikely source: the arrival of the Roman Catholic Jesuit order. The Jesuit order was experiencing a wave of suppression in the Western nations of Europe, but was offered political protection under the reign of Catherine the Great (who ruled Russia from 1762 -1796). The Jesuits earned a reputation as a significant intellectual force in the Catholic Church during the years of the Counter-Reformation. They were highly-trained scholars and missionar
dy and were known for running schools, universities, and for participating in the intellectual life in general. Their invitation and arrival infused Moscow with a powerful group of scholars that would ignite the growth of theological studies and establish it as the new intellectual capital of the Eastern Church. The presence of the Jesuits also sparked a renewed dialogue and exchange of ideas between Eastern and Western theology.

The third important impetus in this Russian renaissance was the publication of the Philokalia in 1782 by the monks of Mount Athos in Greece. This was a book of hesychastic spirituality which became wildly popular in Russia and spurred a spiritual renewal. A contemporary example of this form of spirituality can be found in the book The Way of the Pilgrim, which is still in print today.

Each of these developments (strong hierarchy, intellectual development, spiritual renewal) is significant on its own. Taken together, they constituted a remarkable time of growth for the East.

20th Century Developments

The 20th century was the harbinger of drastic and tumultuous change within the Eastern Church and deeply affected the development of its two main branches, the Greek Orthodox and the Russian Orthodox.

The Greek Church

The first world war (1914-1918) marked the collapse of the Ottoman empire and the
subsequent reformation and founding of the modern secular state of Turkey in 1920. The effort to form a secular nation required that the population be able to identify with and unite to some common factor other than religion. The obvious choice was nationality. The nationalist forces that seized power proceeded to establish a strong ethnically Turkish identity: they changed the name of the city of Constantinople to Istanbul, and resorted to an aggressive form of “ethnic cleansing” within Turkish territory. The tragic consequences of this policy were the forced deportation of over two million Greeks back to Greece, and the Armenian genocide in which over one million Armenians died. Apart from the local consequences intended by these actions, there was a unforeseen yet profound effect on the character of the Greek Patriarchate.

The exodus of Greeks back into their original homeland led to the founding of an autocephalous Greek Church in Athens. The influx of millions of faithful bolstered the relative importance of this branch of the Eastern Church. The loss of his flock in Turkey (which consisted largely of the Greek and Armenian populations) forced the Patriarch of Constantinople to open himself to the world outside his local arena. The deportation of the Greek population also launched a Greek diaspora where they spread and settled in a host of different nations, thus stretching the boundaries of the Eastern Orthodox church to truly global scale. These displaced Orthodox believers still looked to the Patriarch as their spiritual leader, despite the physical distance that separated them. The Patriarch suddenly found himself to be a global pastor in a very literal sense, but with very little flock left at home.

This upheaval coincided with a marked evolution in the attitude of the Eastern leadership. In 1920, the Patriarch of Constantinople wrote a letter to the churches of the world proposing Christian unity, opening a new era in ecumenism. In 1965, the softening of relations between East and West was made manifest in a mutual act of reconciliation in which Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras both lifted the excommunications imposed on the other in 1054. Despite some intra-Orthodox tensions, the Patriarch remains an important world religious leader.

The Russian Church

The principal development in the recent history of the Russian Orthodox Church began with the Communist Revolution in 1917. Very suddenly, the Church found itself under the rule of an extremely hostile, atheistic power whose ideology had no room whatsoever for religion in any form. A terrible persecution of the Church, particularly its clerical arm, ensued. Bishops, priests and monks were systematically hunted down and either imprisoned, exiled or executed.

The communist government eventually offered an uneven proposal to the remaining clergy: cooperate or die. Faced with such prospects, many members of the Church were forced into a position of compromise in which they were made to collaborate with the KGB (the Soviet secret police force) by informing on enemies of the state and walking the line established by the government. Again, as in the time of the Turkish conquest of Constantinople, with Moscow, the heart of the Russian Orthodox Church, under the yoke of a hostile power, the satellite communities gradually grew in importance. Another shift occurred towards the Russian communities outside the Soviet Union. Two major organizations were founded and continued the development of Eastern theology in areas where they would not be persecuted by local governments: the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR), founded in 1922, and the Orthodox Church in America (OCA),
founded in 1926. The head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Tikhon, decreed in 1920 that dioceses cut off from Moscow should take the initiative to form local Church administrations. This led to the formation of the Supreme Ecclesiastical Authority Abroad in 1921. The Soviet authorities, who hoped to retain control of the Russian Church, deposed Patriarch Tikhon, and replaced him with their own man, Patriarch Sergius. Sergius immediately declared that the Authority Abroad submit to his authority, but the church abroad considered itself to be the free part of the Russian Church with the Moscow Patriarchate dependent on the communist authorities. The conflict between Moscow and the new assembly would continue. In 1928 Sergius ordered them to disband, accusing them of being schismatic. In 1934 he went so far as to suspend the Church Abroad from their clerical functions. Despite his tough talk, he was never considered seriously by those outside the Soviet Union. In turn, the Orthodox Church in America, under the leadership of Metropolitan Platon, also sought to free itself from the Moscow Patriarchate, as well as become independent from the Church Abroad. They broke away from both authorities in 1926, after repeated warnings that such a act would be illicit and schismatic. The American Church decided to leave the ranks of the Church Abroad and establish their independence. This did indeed create a division of loyalties among the members of the North American Church, who remain split between the ROCOR and the OCA.

Important theological centres opened in Paris (the Institut St-Serge) and in New York State (St. Vladimir’s Seminary). This de-centralization and re-location of theological studies has spurred a renewed dialogue and exchange with Western theology. With the Russian motherland eclipsed behind Soviet communism, the theological work of the Eastern Church would establish itself and flourish elsewhere.

Conclusion: Eastern Theology Today -- Challenges and Crossroads

The Eastern Orthodox Church of today continues to develop and grow under its present circumstances. Along with the positive and hopeful signs there exists unavoidable challenges, particular to this era, with which the Church must deal with in order to progress.

The first important issue in the whole question of modernity. Beginning centuries ago, a profound change has swept across the whole spectrum of Western civilization and continues to inundate the rest of the world. Developments in all branches of human affairs, such as science, philosophy, politics, culture, etc. has dramatically altered the societies we live in. The Eastern church now faces the conundrum of remaining faithful to its roots while at the same time adapting to modernity. Just one example of this struggle to integrate into the modern reality, is the Old Calendarists in Greece. This group insists on maintaining the Old Julian calendar from the long defunct Byzantine Empire, even though it is two weeks out of sync with the calendar respected by the rest of the world. The impact is the lack of harmony between key events on the respective calendars, where the most obvious example is the dating of Easter. There is a two-week deferral of Easter for those who follow the Julian model with respect to the rest of the Christian world. How the Eastern Churches adapt to the differences between themselves and the rest of the world will affect the development of their relations with their Christian brethren.

The modern age has been deeply marked by the rise of nationalism, and the Eastern
Orthodox Churches are no exception. Orthodoxy is divided into several national or ethnic Churches, such as the Greek Orthodox, the Russian Orthodox and the Serbian Orthodox Church. The identification with a particular nationality can sometimes override the sense of unity that is supposed to be shared with others who are of the same faith despite being of different ethnic backgrounds. The question of which of the two elements pre-dominates in one’s identity, faith or ethnicity, is an important one. This problem has important effects on the question of episcopal jurisdiction. If a particular city contains Orthodox Christians of different ethnic backgrounds, it is not obvious to which bishop their allegiance may lie. Although, it would make practical sense to divide jurisdiction and authority along geographical lines, with one bishop being responsible for a delimited area around one city, the faithful may not comply to this arrangement. Many prefer to remain attached to their ethnic ties. For example, the Greeks may wish to remain under the jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox bishop even if they live in a city with a Russian Orthodox bishop. This phenomenon, known as phyletism, has actually been condemned by the Orthodox church (at a council held in Constantinople in 1872). This inability to resolve jurisdictional overlaps is one of the contemporary headaches that needs to be resolved.

Another important question that plagues the Orthodox Church is the issue of primacy: who speaks for the Orthodox? Contrary to the Roman Catholic Church, which has a clear and established leader in the person of the Pope, the Orthodox remain divided along nationalistic lines faithful to one of several Patriarchs. For instance, many faithful of Greek origin follow the authority of the Archbishop of Athens, others follow the Patriarch of Constantinople, the Russians follow the Patriarch of Moscow while the Lebanese generally follow the Patriarch of Antioch in Damascus. When left unresolved, without a clear measure of establishing agreement on particular issues, the danger of ambiguity or even conflicts among the different Patriarchs and Churches remain a strong reality. The inability to call a general council for the East, in the planning for decades now, continues to demonstrate the disunity that arises from the lack of clear leadership.

Despite the turbulence that the Orthodox Church has endured in modern times, especially over the last century, it continues to be a dynamic branch of Christianity, numbering its members at over 150 million. The relaxing of religious oppression in the former Soviet Union and its vassal states, as well as the global expansion of Orthodox communities, has opened fresh opportunities for the development of theology, for dialogue with other Christian traditions, and in general signals the potential for a time of renewal and progress.

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100 Most recent examples of this include conflicts between the Patriarch of Moscow and the Patriarch of Constantinople regarding jurisdiction in the nation of Estonia, and conflicts between Constantinople and Athens regarding the right to appoint bishops to certain dioceses in Greece.
Pre-Reformation Catholic theology is marked by two major developments: the rise and decline of scholasticism, and the struggle over conciliarism.

The zenith and decline of scholasticism

As already mentioned in the previous lecture, the rise of monasticism led to a shift in theology from a pastoral exercise to a scholastic exercise (i.e. taking place in schools of theology). In the West, this development culminated in the rise of scholasticism, a movement of theology based on a particular method (the lectio, quaestio, disputatio method already seen in chapter 7).

The list of scholars who employed the scholastic method reads like a litany of genius. Some of the early users include St. Anselm (1033-1109), the author of the Proslogion, famous for its rational proof of the existence of God; Peter Abélard (1079-1142), an aggressive and brilliant personality whose incessant questioning of the accepted ideas of his day set a standard for technical strictness and intellectual rigour; Peter the Lombard (1095-1160), whose book of Sentences became a standard textbook for higher studies; St. Albert the Great (1206-1280), a brilliant intellectual polyglot with an exhaustive knowledge of all the branches of knowledge known in his day; and Duns Scotus (1266-1308), a major force in perpetuating the neo-Platonist philosophy.

However, the most prominent of the scholastics, the big three, so to speak, are acknowledged as St. Bonaventure (1217-1274), St. Thomas Aquinas (1221-1274) and William of Occam (1285-1349).

The Golden Age of Scholasticism was blessed by the presence of two titanic intellects hailing from the Franciscan and Dominican orders. St. Bonaventure was a brilliant Franciscan whose definition of theology as "the believable turned intelligible by the addition of reasoning" is still considered a classic. He brought to a culmination the philosophical thought of Plato within Christian theology. From the Dominican order came St. Thomas Aquinas. Where it required centuries for the ideas of Plato to be integrated in Christian thought, beginning most notably with St. Augustine and finding their most perfect expression in the works of St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas achieved the same feat for Aristotelian philosophy in a single lifetime. His major works, the Summa Theologica and the Summa Contra Gentiles, as well as numerous philosophical and theological works, have proved to be the key influences on Catholic theology for centuries and even to this day. These two contemporaries represented the pinnacle of scholasticism and of Platonist and Aristotelian thought in Catholic theology. St. Thomas Aquinas died on the way to the council of Lyons II in 1274 from ill health. St. Bonaventure died later that same year -- an unfortunate year for the world of theology.

William of Occam was part of the scholastic movement but came towards its end, and is principally known for his development of nominalism. Through his interest in singulars, rather than universals, intuition rather than abstraction, induction rather than deduction, he prepared the ground for a more scientific approach to reality; but by questioning the bridge between words and concepts with the real objects that they represented, nominalism would undermine the value of the scholastic method, which takes the link between words and definitions with real objects as a given.
Despite enjoying centuries as the dominant form of intellectual speculation in Western thought, scholasticism would decline due to two principal factors; the constant feuding between the two major intellectual orders of the Church, the Franciscans and the Dominicans, and the rise of Nominalism.

The rivalry between the Franciscan and Dominican orders was essentially a pride-fueled battle for status in the field of theology. In a race to outdo their rivals, the scholars from each order strove to “score points” by either securing coveted positions within the universities or demolishing the positions of their opponents through the clever use of dialectics. This intellectual warring among the two most powerful groups of Western scholars severely compromised the original search for truth that scholasticism was designed for.

The second factor that eroded scholasticism was the rise of nominalism as an influential current of thought, which swept away the fundamental assumptions that established scholasticism as a legitimate method of exploring the truths of the world. Prior to nominalism it was accepted that definitions and words did in fact contain truth, by virtue of the fact that they were directly linked or related to the objects they described. For example, when we spoke of the definition of a lion, then the definition contained some irrefutable and objective truth about lions. The topic of discussion during much of the period of Medieval theology revolved around the existence and nature of universals. Although humans exist as individuals, they share a common human nature, a similarity that makes all humans part of a particular species and which differentiates them from other species. The question is, does this universal thing called humanity actually exist? How does it exist, as something separate or outside individual humans, or inherent and somehow contained within each individual? If all humans were suddenly destroyed, would this thing called humanity still exist, or would it vanish also? Such theoretical questions proliferated under scholasticism and drew criticism from some thinkers as being a sterile product of purely dialectical discussions. The inability to attain a definite and generally accepted answer to many of these questions sowed a deep sense of frustration with some. William of Occam expressed his opinion that the source of this sterility is the illusion that universals are real things, if not in themselves, then at least in individuals. He initiated a movement that rejected this assumption and claimed that universality cannot be attributed to things, but to words alone. This thing we call “humanity” is not a real, distinct being in itself, but only a word that we use to classify a group of real things, namely human beings, who we perceive as sharing common attributes. The universal of humanity is merely a label, or a name, from whence we get the term nominalism.

If Occam’s assertion is true, then all the dialectics practised in the scholastic schools, striving to determine the nature of reality, are nothing more than complex mental gymnastics. The raging debates between the rival orders are just a duel of words using logical foils. If the basic assumptions concerning universals are false, then all of this tremendous intellectual effort is ultimately cut off from reality because, in actual fact, they are not even talking about anything real. What profit can be extracted by endlessly debating the nature of humanity, if “humanity” as such does not even exist? This disconnect from reality implies that almost any conclusion can be justified, as long as it follows the rules of logic. If the fundamental assumptions underpinning our understanding of the world are nothing more than names, invented by the mind, without being anchored in some form...
of reality, then we can argue our way to whatever ends we wish.

The scholastic method is based upon the analysis of texts, and assumes that words are truly capable of expressing something about reality as it really is. By stripping away this background assumption, Nominalism turned Scholasticism into a fancy-sounding but ultimately sterile word game. The challenges of Nominalism needed to be honestly addressed, of course, but in the meantime theology was left debating points which seemed increasingly remote from the concerns of the ordinary person. At its worst, the weaving together of Nominalism and Scholasticism would lead to conclusions which seemed powerful because they were internally logically consistent -- but which could be employed to reach just about any desired conclusion, just or unjust.

The struggle for authority and the rise of conciliarism

In the twelfth century the Catholic Church was rocked by a severe crisis in leadership. The political situation between the Popes and the kings of Europe resulted in a move of the Papal court to the city of Avignon, France, in 1309. The Pope continued to exercise his position as bishop of Rome, which is the definitive criteria for retaining his status as Pope, but this extraordinary situation persisted for seven decades. Finally in 1378 the cardinals elected Urban VI as the new Pope, who unfortunately turned out to be mentally unstable. His hours-long tirades at the cardinals and his attempts to legislate every detail of their lives, even regarding what they could eat at meals, were only a few examples of the odd behaviours that failed to endear him to those who placed him on the Papal throne. Soon the very cardinals that elected him announced that their original choice was made under pressure and therefore declared the election of Urban VI null and void, and elected a new pope, Clement VII in 1378, the same year as Urban’s election.

However, this raised some serious questions. What was at stake was the principle of apostolic succession itself. How does a man become a successor to an episcopal throne? How can he be replaced? And what if it is the local church of Rome itself? Urban VI countered the Cardinals' move by appointing another group of cardinals loyal to him. This tug of war between the two factions created what is know as the Great Western Schism, the time of the two (and eventually 3) claimants to the papal office, which lasted from 1378 until 1417. Confusion reigned as it was unclear who was at the reins of the Catholic Church. Each Pope claimed that he was the rightful successor, and was backed by their loyal group of cardinals. This crisis proved to be more stubborn than the men by whom it was initiated. Even after the deaths of the two Popes, the respective college of prelates elected different successors, thereby perpetuating the schism for decades. Several attempts to resolve the problem were attempted, but unfortunately they failed to repair the divide. Some attempts only exacerbated the problem, as in the case where several kings and princes, fed up with the uncertainty and conflict, decided that the only solution was for both Popes to resign and a third to be elected. Using their political influence, they pushed for the election of a new Pope, Alexander V in 1409, who was succeeded shortly thereafter in 1410, by John XXIII, who was soundly rejected by the other parties as an illegitimate anti-pope. All this accomplished was the adding of more confusion, as there were now three Popes laying claim to the throne of Peter. If two is company, then three is definitely a crowd, especially if all three claim to be the most powerful religious authority in Europe.
The theologians of the day strove to find a solution to the impasse, developing the theory of conciliarism. It proposed that the supreme governing body of the Church was actually the institution of the Ecumenical Council, such that the Pope would be bound to its decisions and would govern personally only in between council meetings. Significantly, the council had the power to depose or install a Pope, a prospect that had an immediate appeal for the Church of the day. Conciliarism was first put into practice in 1414, when the political leaders of Europe called the council of Constance to try and settle the schism once and for all.

Three important events that transpired during the council would have a lasting impact for the future of the Church, the first of which was the trial of Jan Hus, a Czech theologian with novel ideas that many considered heretical. Hus was invited to the council under the guarantee that he would not be persecuted for his somewhat radical positions. Satisfied that he could safely participate in this momentous event, Hus accepted the guarantee and travelled to Constance. Unfortunately for Jan Hus, the council members broke their promise. The council condemned him, and the secular authorities burnt him at the stake the very same day. The ideas of Jan Hus were driven underground, to be resurrected decades later by Martin Luther, the initiator of the Protestant Reformation.

The second significant accomplishment of the council was the hoped-for resolution of the Western Schism, in which all current Popes were deposed and a new compromise candidate was recognized as the new legitimate Pontiff. The three were reduced to one: Martin V.

Thirdly, in order to ensure that the institution of formal conciliarism be an effective method of Church governance, it was resolved that councils were to take place every ten years, in which Church affairs were to be discussed and decisions made. The next effective council would take place only thirty-five years later at what is known as the council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence in 1449. The reason for the triple location was due to the fact that the council was required to relocate for different reasons that threatened the participants, ranging from plague to political instability.

Despite the fact that conciliarism did succeed in resolving the confusion and crisis of the multiple Popes, it did not take very long before a new struggle erupted between pro-conciliarist and anti-conciliarist positions. It was not overly surprising that the Popes, including the beneficiary of the council of Constance, Martin V, were opposed to conciliarism. Nevertheless, conciliarist ideas remained strong, and would continue to exert an influence on the way in Church politics and decision-making.

In summary, the situation at the beginning of the 16th century was as follows:

- In the intellectual sphere, scholasticism was in decline, while nominalism was on the rise.
- Authority in the Church was marked by a struggle between the Popes and the council.
- A general fear of being accused of dissension and heresy and a lack of trust in Church authority was palpable in the wake of the execution of Jan Hus.

This atmosphere of disillusion and suspicion, marked by numerous power struggles and abuses of authority which stained the reputation of the Church’s ruling elite, all contributed to a dissatisfaction that would soon explode in one of the greatest upheavals in the Church’s history.
In 1517, a Catholic Augustinian monk in Germany, named Martin Luther, posted a list of “95 theses” about Catholic teaching and practice that he wanted debated onto the door of the chapel of the ducal castle at Wittenberg. This act of defiance and protest against the status quo would launch the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther was a prolific writer, a man of prayer, a reputed homilist, and was even known to write music. As an Augustinian, he was trained in a tradition that favoured Plato over Aristotle, and he later declared himself to be a follower of Occam. Luther adopted certain theological positions that would form the foundation of Protestant theology that followed, and they initially caught on like wildfire, aided in part by a decline in scholasticism, as well as a heavy-handed (and sometimes corrupt) use of authority in the Catholic Church. The Catholic theological response to Luther’s ideas came through the Counter-Reformation, in which the Catholic church engaged in an extensive self-examination, re-affirmed certain elements of its faith, and corrected abuses.

Luther’s original wish was not to begin a new church, but to reform the Catholic Church (hence the name “Reformation”), including some of its theological positions. In the end, though, the Lutherans did wind up forming their own church, and Catholics and Protestants have been divided ever since. The differing theological points of view seem to simply be irreconcilable. In reading the exchanges between Catholics and Protestants, however, we quickly see that each position seems somehow unable to understand the other, or to believe that the other position is reasonable within its own system of thought. A large part of the reason for this “dialogue of the deaf” is because each side (Catholic and Protestant) is approaching the question from its own philosophical vantage point as well. As we study a few of these differing elements of doctrine, we will examine not only what each side teaches, but also how the philosophical choices each side has made has coloured that teaching.

Faith, works, and justification

The central debate between Protestants and Catholics revolves around the question of justification. How do we receive the healing grace of God so as to be able to enter salvation?

Protestant view

We need to recall that Luther was an Augustinian monk. St. Augustine had himself struggled against the doctrine of Pelagius (who taught that grace, while helpful, was not -- strictly speaking -- necessary for salvation) by proposing that grace was, in fact, necessary in order to become just in the sight of God (this is the grace of justification). The question was: how do we receive this grace? Luther taught a doctrine which was the polar opposite of Pelagianism, called sola fides (which means “by faith alone”). Under this doctrine, forgiveness of sins (i.e. justification) from God comes from faith in God alone -- it is not (and cannot) be earned by doing good works, no matter how many might accomplish. This does not mean that good works are unimportant, but that their presence is subordinate to the act of faith. This is illustrated in the following diagram:
The Catholic Church believes that after death most of the souls destined for Heaven need to undergo a special period of final purification first, known as Purgatory. This experience of Purgatory can be reduced, however, by performing acts of penance here on Earth. The Catholic Church also believes that these acts of penance (such as prayer and fasting) can be strengthened even further by attaching to them an "indulgence," which makes that act of Faith (a spiritual act) more effective.

This position closely resembles the idealist priority of the spiritual principle over the material principle. This importance of faith over works was well summarized in Luther’s proclamation, “sin boldly, but believe even more!”

Catholic view

Contrary to what many believe, Catholics do not believe that justification can be received by works alone, or that good works have a priority over faith. Good works, however, do have an important place in the Catholic vision of justification, which hold that justification is the fruit of faith and good works acting together in an organic fashion. In this view, good works done for the sake of the love of God are themselves acts of faith. Conversely, acts of faith are worthy of justification only if they are themselves acts of love.

Faith + Works = Justification

This position closely resembles the realist vision which sees reality as an integration of matter and form. The key Biblical passage typically cited to illustrate this position is James 2:17 -- “Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”

Scripture and Tradition

As we have seen, two of the sources of theology are Scripture (i.e. the Bible) and Tradition. The understanding of the relationship between these two sources is quite different between the Protestant and Catholic perspectives.

Protestant view

Luther objected to certain traditional practices in the Catholic church, especially the use of indulgences.\(^\text{101}\) He also saw that those traditions were maintained and defended by Church...
authorities, and were even abused by them. Luther therefore decided to make a review of all the traditions of the church and find where they were founded in Scripture. If they were not, they were to be discarded (or at best, considered optional).

Scripture (source of knowledge of God’s word and will)

interprets and judges

Tradition (expressed in concrete traditions)

This practice and doctrine became known as **sola Scriptura**, which means “by Scripture alone”. Of course, this led to the question of how the Bible was to be interpreted. The Protestant answer was that the Bible interpreted itself, based upon the relationship of the passages or books in question to the “Gospel,” which is not so much a particular book but the “ultimate message” that God seeks to convey which transcends even the words of the Bible itself. Eventually this approach led to the development of the notion of a “canon within a canon,” i.e. a hierarchical ordering of the importance of the books of the Bible according to their relationship to this “Gospel”. Certain books were rejected from the canon of Scripture, such as the Greek books of the Old Testament, and others were relativized, such as the Letter of James, which Luther called an “epistle of straw”.

**Catholic view**

Catholics also believe in both Scripture and Tradition, but believe that they are held together in an organic unity. It is not that one is supreme in all circumstances, but that they interpret and judge each other.

Scripture + Tradition = source of knowledge of God’s word

Scripture is ultimately the source of knowledge (the *matter*) of God’s word and will, but Scripture is sometimes hard to understand. Tradition provides a context (the *form*) in which to interpret that

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102 I was once told by a Lutheran ministry student that there were certain Biblical passages she would never preach on, because the literal message was not part of the Gospel. She even asked me, “When you preach, do you preach the Bible, or the Gospel?” My naive answer was, “I though the Bible *was* the Gospel.” It showed the difference in the two approaches.
word. Each hold the other in a dynamic (and hopefully creative) tension.

For Catholics there is no real “canon within the canon”, and the “gospel” is something which suffuses the whole of the text (consequently, Catholics did not follow the Protestants in rejecting certain books of Scripture). The function of Tradition is not opposed to Scripture, but exists to help people put the whole of Scripture into practice, and to keep it in balance, as at certain points in history certain Biblical passages receive more attention than others. Scripture, in turn, becomes a living source for the renewal of the traditions that make up Tradition.

The Sacraments

Sacraments are ritual prayer celebrations of the Christian community. It has long been held that these rituals accomplish something on the spiritual plane (i.e. pouring water on someone in baptism does more than get them wet), but what exactly this effect was (and how it worked) became a point of contention between Catholics and Protestants.

Protestant view

Because of the importance of faith in the process of justification, the Protestant theology of the sacraments is derived from it. For Protestants, sacraments are considered to be rituals which serve as tools that can encourage the faith of the participants, and it is this increase in faith that leads to the reception of grace in that person. They do not impart grace on their own, but only is so far as they can inspire someone to increased faith. Faith remains the key to unlocking the power of grace that alone can lead to justification. Strictly speaking, the sacraments are not necessary to attain salvation if faith can be elicited by other means, for example, by preaching, which has pride of place in Protestant Churches. This is illustrated in the following diagram:

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SACRAMENTS → FAITH → GRACE → JUSTIFICATION
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Catholic view

Catholics also believe that sacraments, faith, and grace work together to attain justification, but do not hold a linear view of how they work together. The Catholic understanding is more
organic, and is illustrated in the following diagram:

The cycle of sacraments, grace, and faith leads to Justification. It can work in the opposite direction!

Justification, then, is not an end point in itself, but is a fruit of being in the cycle itself. Of course, this model places a much greater importance on the sacraments. First of all, they become a test of one’s faith, verifying that it in fact exists. As well, they become genuine sources of grace in and of themselves.

How do sacraments go from being simple rituals to being sources of grace? Catholics believe that celebrating sacraments is a form of fidelity to Jesus, such that when the visible element of a sacrament happens, it is Jesus himself who is, through the action of the Holy Spirit, mysteriously performing the spiritual element. As St. Augustine himself said, “when someone baptises it is really Christ himself who baptises.”

Church order

Any complex organization requires a structure by which to lead and direct itself, and both the Protestant and Catholic Churches have specially designated leaders for this purpose. However, the process by which the leadership is chosen and formed, as well as the meaning and place that these leaders have within the organization, varies significantly. The differences are hardly accidental since they derive from two unique visions of the Church itself.

Protestant view

The Protestant view of ministry is derived from the two “sola” teachings. Because faith alone is needed for justification, and sacraments are not (strictly speaking) necessary, this calls into question the need for a special group of people to administer the sacraments. As well, since the word of God is in Scripture and Scripture is to be made accessible to all persons (something Luther

103 St. Augustine, Tractate in John, VI, no. 7.
did himself in translating the Bible into German), any lay person could, in theory, be able to discern and communicate the Gospel to others. In the end, these views led to the Protestant view that there is no special class of clerical priesthood, but that instead all believers had a share in a common priesthood (called the “royal priesthood,” or sometimes the “priesthood of all believers”). Ordained ministers, then, exercise ministry subordinate as a manifestation of the common priesthood, and subordinate to it.

Royal priesthood (part of being God’s holy people)

is the source of the essence of

Ordained ministry (expression of royal priesthood)

In this view, ordained ministry is simply a special set of functions particularly associated with the service of the Gospel. Anyone can be ordained, and in fact should a group of believers find themselves abandoned on a deserted isle, they could (in theory) simply designate one of their own to act as their ordained minister and preside the sacraments, etc.

Catholic view

The Catholic view of ministry is quite different from the Protestant view, particularly because of the different view of the sacraments. As already discussed, for Catholics the sacraments are efficacious in themselves because when the minister is performing the sacrament, it is Christ himself who is mysteriously performing the sacrament. The point of union between the material sacrament and the spiritual effect therefore comes, in part, through having a minister who is capable of acting in the place of Christ. In fact, this is what Catholics believe occurs in the sacrament of Holy Orders: the soul of the new deacon, priest, or bishop is altered, receiving a special “seal” from God such that the new minister is able to act in the person of Jesus, such that it is truly Jesus who is performing the sacrament in question.

Catholics accept the distinction of “royal priesthood” and “ordained priesthood,” but believe that it is not just a difference of degree, but of essence. One does not “rule” the other, but they must work together:

Royal priesthood + Ordained priesthood = yields God’s holy people

In this model, the ordained priesthood is not meant to be a force of dominance, and it is not received for the personal benefit of the minister alone (as though it turned someone into a “super-Christian”), but rather is meant to be a form of service to the “royal priesthood,” whose members it gathers and attempts to strengthen.
Authority in the Church

In comparing the two models of Church, we discover a fundamental difference in the way the Church is envisaged, particularly in regard to the role of leadership.

Protestant view

As we studied, prior to the Protestant Reformation the question of conciliarism had been in the air. Luther declared himself to be in favour of conciliarism, in which the Pope (or other head of the Church) received authority as a form of delegation from the institution of the Ecumenical Council, and is subject to that authority. In all fairness, given the other Protestant views examined, conciliarism is really the only logical position to take. Different Protestant churches have differed regarding who exactly constitutes the “council” (is it the ordained ministers? the community leaders? all the believers of a community?), but all agree that the specific leaders (because their ordination is a matter of delegation) are themselves subject to a larger body. For the Protestants, the mark or sign of the Church is the faithful proclamation of the Gospel of Christ as the Apostles knew it. The essential is what is proclaimed, not who proclaims it.

The body of believers (e.g. an Ecumenical Council)

\[ \text{has the practical authority over} \]

Specific Church leaders (e.g. the Pope)

A common organizational principle in Protestant churches is *congregationalism*, in which it is the local congregation itself that has the authority to hire (and fire) its minister based on its perception of the faithfulness (and skill) of the minister regarding the proclamation of the Gospel.

Catholic view

In the Catholic church, the highest form of Church leadership is the bishop, who is ordained in an unbroken *apostolic succession* (which we have already seen), and this ordination is itself a sacrament. What is essential, then, is not only what is proclaimed, but also who proclaims it. And because ordination (in Catholic belief) is a sacrament, it cannot be revoked by any human authority. That being said, there are many bishops in the world, and so the question “who is in charge” sometimes arises. The Catholic view is that supreme authority is not a question of the Pope

\[ ^{104} \text{A person can be deprived of the right to exercise a specific ministry, but it does not touch upon their status as ordained persons per se.} \]
over the other bishops, or the other bishops over the Pope (like in conciliarism), but rather as follows:

Pope + bishops = supreme authority

In the Catholic view, an Ecumenical Council represents the Pope and the bishops acting together in communion with each other, not in opposition to each other. Between gatherings of bishops in a council the Pope does act with supreme authority, but again the purpose of that authority is to promote communion among the bishops with him and with each other, even if they are dispersed throughout the world.

Acts of penance and the doctrine of purgatory

One of the major controversies of the Protestant Reformation surrounded the question of indulgences, which are meant to be acts of penance approved by Church authority and “enriched” with special graces (called merits) to help a person enter heaven directly after death, without having to pass through a temporary state called “purgatory”.

Protestant view

Protestants utterly reject the concepts of indulgences and purgatory. The former are seen as “dead works” as we have already studied, and while acts of penance are not totally rejected (as they may be useful to inspire faith), in general they are regarded suspiciously as attempts to replace the merits of Jesus with our own (infinitesimally smaller) merits. Luther used the analogy of a coating of snow on a manure pile to illustrate how, through faith, we receive the merits of Christ (the snow) to cover our sins (the manure). While still present, our sins are no longer visible, and so we appear beautiful once again in the eyes of God, “covered” in Christ’s infinite merits.

The merits of Christ’s sacrifice

covering

The ugliness of our sins

In such a model, purgatory is simply rejected, as it seems to imply that the “covering grace” that Christ offers is less than total, and that it needs to be supplanted by our own actions. The usefulness of Masses offered for the dead is also denied. After death one is either in heaven or hell, period.
**Catholic view**

The Catholic view is actually not that far from the Protestant one in many ways. First of all, Catholics recognize that the Protestants were generally correct to have protested the abuses regarding indulgences, although Catholics disagree that part of the solution was to change the underlying theology. Catholics also agree that the merits of Christ, made real in his sacrifice on the cross, are the ultimate source of grace and salvation. Where Catholics disagree with Protestants is in how those merits are made applicable to ordinary people.

The merits of Christ’s sacrifice + our acts of penance = our configuration to Christ

In the Catholic view, our configuration to Christ is meant to be something not simply received but lived, sometimes in our very bodies, even to the point of suffering as Jesus did. Because this configuration is understood as something real, and not just an appearance, it is possible for it to be more or less perfect. This is where purgatory comes in: if this configuration is imperfect here on Earth, purgatory allows a person to complete their configuration to Christ in a temporary state before entering heaven. There is, in the end, still only heaven or hell, with everyone in purgatory eventually entering heaven.

As an aside, Catholics still have indulgences, but they have been greatly reformed. An indulgenced work today generally consists of an act of offering meant as a practical expression of faith, out of a desire to be more configured to Christ. Catholics undertake acts of charity, self-denial, and prayer (as well as “offer up” their sufferings) in a spirit of faith, to make concrete their practical configuration to Christ. This approach is essentially an interpretation of the comment from St. Paul: “In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (Colossians 1: 24).

**Prayers to the saints**

We will examine one final controversy: the place of prayers to the saints.

**Protestant view**

Because of the overriding importance given to the place of the merits of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, Protestants are generally suspicious of prayers to the saints. After all, why pray to a saint if you can pray to Christ directly, who is the Holy One himself? For many Protestants, this suspicion goes even farther, denying any practical connection between the “saint on earth” and the “saint in heaven”, or at least no “upward” connection. It does seem to have a dualist bias in it:
God’s people in heaven (the saints)

movement of prayer

God’s people on earth

In other words, while presumably the saints in heaven can pray for us, and we can pray for each other on earth, we have no business approaching the saints in heaven for anything.

Catholic view

Catholics have a more organic vision of the unity of God’s people.

People in Heaven + people on Earth = God’s people

This more hylemorphic view simply does not see the problem with petitioning God’s saints in heaven. If I can ask a fellow Christian on earth to pray for me, why not ask a fellow Christian in heaven for the same favour? Even the words of the “Hail Mary” only conclude with the words “pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death”.

Protestants do raise the objection that, at times, prayers to the saints are offered with a request for special favours from that saint (e.g. the idea of a “patron saint”), and once again this is seen as diminishing the place of Christ. However, we must recall that Catholics believe that a saint in heaven has been perfectly configured to Christ, sharing in his glory. In such a perspective, while it may be the saint who is being directly addressed, faith is still being placed in the power that comes from being configured to Christ and sharing in his glory. It is still always, ultimately, the merits, power, and glory of Jesus that are being called upon. It should be noted that, within this organic vision, Catholics also believe that intercessory prayers can move from Earth to Heaven. Obviously the saints don’t need our prayers, but it is believed that the souls in purgatory can benefit from our prayers, thanks to the (albeit imperfect) configuration to Christ that has already begun while we are here on Earth. “The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects,” as the letter of James (5:16) states, and the Catholic vision is a broad interpretation of this passage.

Conclusion

A study of the historical dialogue between Catholics and Protestants sadly reveals what was frequently a dialogue of the deaf. While there are genuine underlying issues, Catholics and Protestants need to recognize that each other is coming from, not simply a different theological perspective, but even a different philosophical perspective. The failure to recognize this particular difference is one of the major sources of Catholic-Protestant theological misunderstanding, and prevents any kind of true dialogue from advancing.
Protestants, for their part, need to recognize that Catholics (in their official theology) are not just mirror-image dualists. Yes, Catholics believe in Tradition, but as a complement to Scripture, not over it or in opposition to it. Yes, Catholics believe in good works, but as a complement to faith, not as a replacement for it. Catholics, in their official theology, are coming from a very different philosophical perspective that does not see the need for the dualism inherently present in the Protestant system. They are not acting in bad faith, but have a genuine, well thought-out position.

Catholics, for their part, need to recognize the good elements of the Protestant system. First of all, while Catholics are not theological dualists, they should recognize that the dualism present in Protestantism is definitely preferable to its opposite. It is more Christian to place faith in the merits of Christ than in merits we might hope to earn through good works. It is more Christian to prefer to place faith in the intercession of Christ than to prefer to place it in the intercession of saints. Catholics also need to admit that not all fellow Catholics are true hylemorphists, but that many of them have in fact become the mirror-image dualists that many Protestants accuse Catholics of being (i.e. that some individual Catholics do put their trust in works, or pray to the saints in an inordinate manner). Catholics need to work on this, for the sake of the Gospel and of Christian unity.
This chart shows the major families of Protestant churches, the names of which are contained in the solid boxes.

You will also note that some boxes are dashed. These do not represent actual churches, but spiritual or theological movements that the churches in question have encountered or passed through. The dashed lines, in turn, indicate the historical influences of those movements.

Students may find it useful to have this diagram on hand as they read the following section.
This portion of our course is generally a history of theology, not a history of the Church, but in the case of Protestantism it is impossible to divide the two. The simple fact is that Protestantism is incredibly diverse in its theological positions. As well, because there is no central doctrinal authority within Protestantism, there is often a tendency for a Protestant church to split into 2 or more churches when a doctrinal dispute arises. To study the major elements of Protestant theology, then, we need to look at the various Protestant churches and their historical origins.

Phase I: the establishment of Protestantism and early divisions

**Lutheranism**

Named after Martin Luther, originating with his posting of his 95 theses on the door of the chapel of the ducal castle in Wittenburg, in 1517. Lutheran theology is based on the views of Martin Luther (b.1483 – d.1546), assisted by Philip Melanchton (b.1497 – d.1560). These views are explicitly stated in the Book of Concord, which proposes (among other things) justification by faith alone (sola fides) and the supreme of authority of the Bible as the Word of God (sola scriptura).

**Calvinism**

Originating in the Swiss reform movement and based primarily on the teachings and activity of John Calvin (b.1509 - 1564) in 1534, and pioneered by the Biblical emphasis of Ulric Zwingli (b.1484 – d.1531). This Protestant branch, although influenced by Luther’s writing, represents a new understanding of the Bible and the nature of Church. based on a more literal interpretation of the Bible, and also includes the Presbyterian Church (originating in Scotland) and the Reformed Church (originating in Holland). It included a new vision of the Church as being a fellowship of the Christians of a particular area, and transferred church authority from individual bishops to a "collective bishop" called the presbytery (a gathering of all the Elders of the community).

**Anglicanism**

As explained in an earlier lecture, Anglicanism began as a schism with the Catholic Church concerning the question of authority, rather than as a Protestant Church diverging from Rome on theological grounds. Indeed, Henry VIII even received the title of “Defender of the Faith” from Pope Leo X for his efforts to reply to Protestant ideas. Despite the initial doctrinal similarity with the Catholic Church, however, Protestant ideas entered Anglicanism over time and were officially adopted as part of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer.
Anabaptists

An early branch of the Lutheran line, originating in Saxony Germany in 1525, this group was marked by a strong belief in restricting baptism to adults only. Luther opposed their teaching, and they were brutally repressed by certain princes loyal to Luther. This church did not long survive its persecutions, and no longer exists today. However, Anabaptist traditions are today echoed in the Baptist and Mennonite traditions.

Non-conformist churches

Following the Act of Supremacy of Henry VIII, by which everyone in the English realm was required to swear an oath accepting the monarch as the head of the Church of England, several groups refused to comply, and were subsequently persecuted by the authorities. Among the groups were Catholics, who recognized the Pope as head of Christendom, as well as certain Protestant groups who, in principle, did not recognize any human being, apart from Jesus Christ, as head of the Church. These protestant groups included the Quakers, Puritans and the Congregationalists who saw themselves as self-governing, rather than following the authority of an established hierarchical system of bishops and monarch. It was the congregation itself that directed its own practical and spiritual affairs. To escape persecution at home many of these groups chose to establish themselves in the English colonies of North America.\(^{105}\)

Historical sidebar: The Wars of Religion

The religious differences of the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation eventually spilled over into the political sphere, leading to the Wars of Religion. This was a prolonged and bloody episode in European history, with Catholic, Protestants, and Anglicans bitterly contesting each other. While these wars definitely included a religious component, they were often used by secular authorities to make a bid for power and gain. The wars were mercifully brought to an end with the Edict of Nantes in 1598 in France and the treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

Phase II: the introduction of Pietism

Pietism was a cross denominational movement that sprung from the Lutheran Church and exerted a strong influence upon several Protestant branches, especially the later Evangelicals and Methodists. A key figure in the rise of Pietism was Philip Jakob Spener (b. 1635 – d. 1705), and his book *Pia Desideria* (the Desire for Piety) published in 1675. His book was very influential in expounding and expanding the basic principles of Pietism, which included:

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\(^{105}\) The Pilgrims who came over on the Mayflower in 1620 to found Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts were members of a non-conformist church.
A minimalisation of the role of clergy as a necessary element in the religious life of a Christian community. The notion of a distinct clerical class as necessary intermediaries between the faithful and God was done away with.

The personal reading of the Bible in its entirety by ordinary people was encouraged, along with the creation of small Biblical study groups to promote and support this form of interaction with the Word of God.

There was a strong emphasis on the “living Christ”, that is, the present actions of Christ in the lives of his faithful, and their personal experiences of conversion.

Pietism was a reaction to the heavy politicized wars of religion, as well as a reaction to the clerical class that seemed to always emerge whenever a particular denomination was established as the official denomination of a nation. Pietism sought to bypass this "denominationalism" by focussing on the importance of the personal, rather than collective, relationship with God.

**Methodists**

One of the churches inspired by pietism was founded by Charles Wesley (b. 1707 – d. 1788), and branched away from the Anglican tradition. Originally a movement within Anglicanism, it was marked by a strong concern for the poor and the desire to unite preaching and evangelization with social action. Drawing from the Pietist ideals of personal devotion to Biblical reading and a more individualist model of religion, combined with an effort to improve the lot of the poor, Wesley and his collaborators developed a method by which they hoped this could be achieved. An example of the method was the laudable goal of teaching people how to read using the Bible as a reading text. This was designed to promote literacy, giving members of the lower classes a chance to improve their lot, while at the same time developing their knowledge of the sacred texts. The adoption of a specific method to achieve their aims led to the labelling of the followers of the movement as Methodists.

Unfortunately for the Methodists, they were viewed with a great deal of suspicion by the English political and church establishments. In a society heavily marked by class distinction between nobility and commoners, the empowering of the lower classes through social action, as well as the diminishing of the importance of the clergy, was seen as threatening by the elite. The institutional character of Anglicanism, imbued with its class divisions, was a stark contrast to the ideals of the Methodists. This resulted in a split within the Anglican church, and the formation of an independent Methodist church.

**Holiness movement**

The Holiness movement, a spiritual current particularly strong within the Methodist church, grew out of a reaction to two tendencies within Protestantism. The first tendency could be seen as resulting from a misconstrued understanding of one of Luther’s phrases “sin boldly and believe all the more.” Originally intended to bolster belief in the redeeming power of Christ and faith in His forgiveness, some wrongly interpreted Luther’s words as being a permissive approval of sinful actions. With faith as the sole criterion for salvation, there occurred an eclipse of the importance
of acts of charity and other virtues. The emphasis on faith, a pillar upon which Protestant theology was supported, led to an unbalanced view of morality among certain groups, where some went so far as to suppose that any sin was permitted as long as one maintained their faith. The Holiness movement attempted to shift emphasis back onto personal virtue as a necessary complement, and as a true sign of faith.

A second tendency, entrenched by the deep divisions and allegiances during the period of the Wars of Religion, was the notion that in order to achieve holiness and communion with God it was necessary to be a member of a Church. The idea of membership entailed the exclusion of certain social groups. If one is a member of a specific group, a Church that promises salvation to its followers, then those that are not members are often considered in a contemptuous light. Exclusion from membership can come to imply exclusion from God’s grace and salvation itself. To combat this dividing mentality, the Holiness movement preached a concept of brotherhood among Christians, in order to emphasize the shared identity of believers over the divisions of denominations.

Churches in the Holiness tradition are known for their strong commitment to social justice and assistance to the poor, oppressed, and downtrodden. The Salvation Army is one of the best known churches in the Holiness tradition.

Evangelical churches

The Evangelical “church” was not so much a single, distinct ecclesiastical body, but rather a broad movement that included a combination of Congregationalist, Pietist and Anabaptist ideas. The common features shared by the evangelical churches were a focus on a personal relationship with Christ, a personal reading of scripture, a self-governing congregation and adult-only baptism. An important example of the evangelical churches are the Baptist churches.

Phase III: Liberal Protestantism and reactions to it

All the major Protestant branches shared a similar encounter with a new form of theology, called Liberal Protestantism. The founder of liberal Protestantism is Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). The fundamental ideas of Liberal Protestantism revolve around the novel notions of historical criticism and criticism of literary forms, applied to Sacred Scripture.

Historical criticism is a method of interpreting a written text by examining the historical context within which it was written and attempting to ascertain the meaning of the text in light of that context. Whomever the writer of a text may have been, it is certain that they were writing for a particular audience of their day, an audience that lived within a particular time and in a particular place, within a particular culture. Using tools such as archeology, history and linguistics, a researcher could unearth the nature of the culture that the ancient audience and writer existed in, thereby helping a contemporary reader of the same text better understand its meaning. For example, in the Book of the Apocalypse, St. John has a vision of a beast with seven heads and ten horns. Did the visionary literally see an image of such a beast, or was he merely using a symbol that carried a particular significance to his intended readers, in their time and place? A historical-critical
analysis of the text would lean toward the latter interpretation.

Form criticism, or criticism of literary forms, examines the nature of the text itself. By looking at the style of writing used in constructing a biblical text, its true meaning can be better understood. The different possible literary forms include histories, fables, legends, parables, biographies, poetry, and so forth. Each different form possesses a different character and is intended to be read in a different manner. One does not read the morning paper in the same fashion as one would read a work of fiction. In the same manner, form criticism seeks to respect not just the content but also the style in which the authors wrote the texts. For example, the Bible is composed of dozens of different texts, written by different authors from different historical and cultural contexts. It is not only the backgrounds of the authors that vary, however: the very writing styles, or "forms" of the texts, are also varied. The letters of St. Paul are just that, letters addressed to a particular person or community, recounting the experiences and events surrounding the life and work of St. Paul himself. On the other hand, the book of Jonah, which tells the tale of the prophet devoured by a whale, is often regarded as a fable, and if the biblical story of Jonah was intended as a fable by its author, then it should be read and understood as a fable by its readers, regardless of which century they inhabit.

This new method for examining the Bible was explicated in Albert Schweitzer's book *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, and continues to inspire contemporary authors, such as John P. Meier's *A Marginal Jew – Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. The effects of historical and form criticism have been largely positive, by re-invigorating the field of theological studies and infusing Biblical analysis with a rich new comprehension of the Biblical texts. However, certain consequences of this method have also crept into theology as a result, and with the advent of the historical and form critical method, a new challenge was introduced into the world of Protestant theology. Up until now the Bible was always seen as the sole and final source of authority regarding matters of God and religion, but critical analysis of form and history does also permit a very subjective view of Sacred Scripture and could theoretically be twisted to make the Bible say almost anything the critic wishes. The challenge is to separate the eternal truths of God, intended to be valid for all humanity regardless of the historical and cultural context they inhabit, from the culturally conditioned elements in scripture. Can it be done? If God is speaking to humanity through the Bible, the Word of God, how do we know what comes from Him, and what was a product of the human writer, being a product himself of a particular culture?\footnote{Take, for example, St. Paul's admonition that women cover their heads in church (1 Cor 11:2-15). Is this an eternal truth meant to be obeyed in all ages and cultures? Or is it something simply culturally conditioned for St. Paul's time? Similar questions quickly arise whenever any controversial topic arises, such as the ordination of women, or the blessing of homosexual unions.} The challenge is to separate the eternal truths of God, intended to be valid for all humanity regardless of the historical and cultural context they inhabit, from the culturally conditioned elements in scripture. Can it be done? If God is speaking to humanity through the Bible, the Word of God, how do we know what comes from Him, and what was a product of the human writer, being a product himself of a particular culture?\footnote{Take, for example, St. Paul's admonition that women cover their heads in church (1 Cor 11:2-15). Is this an eternal truth meant to be obeyed in all ages and cultures? Or is it something simply culturally conditioned for St. Paul's time? Similar questions quickly arise whenever any controversial topic arises, such as the ordination of women, or the blessing of homosexual unions.}

*The Oxford movement*

Among the Anglicans, the Oxford movement arose to stem the flood of religious ambiguity by making reference to the early Church fathers, examining how they lived their faith, as well as
what they believed. This movement ended with several key players deciding to join the Catholic Church as a result of their findings, but it nevertheless had a profound impact within the Anglican Church, helping to strengthen High Church Anglicanism.

Fundamentalism

In the Evangelical churches, the reaction against Liberalism was Fundamentalism. As the name implies, this movement sought to return to the fundamentals of the faith and establish those things which were “non-negotiable”. Fundamentalism led to the belief in the absolute inerrancy of the Bible, literally understood. That is, the literal interpretation of the Bible is free from all error. Therefore, if the Bible says that God created the world in six days, then God literally created the world in six days. If the Bible says that Jonah was swallowed by a whale, then Jonah really was swallowed by a whale. The Fundamentalists began a campaign of distributing pamphlets between 1910 and 1918 in order to propagate their views. This eventually came to a head in the Scopes Monkey trial in 1925 in Tennessee, in which a schoolteacher was accused of teaching evolution rather than literal creationism in school. It was a classic confrontation between the fundamentalist view and a more liberal view. The whole theory of evolution was effectively on trial because it opposed the creationist vision of the world, and the question of whether or not it should be taught in schools was at issue. The Fundamentalists won the trial, but in many ways lost the battle for public opinion, although the literal reading of the Bible (including creationism) is still vigorously promoted by Fundamentalist groups.

Phase IV: 20th century developments

The start of Pentecostalism

One of the most significant developments within the modern Christian churches is the advent of a widespread movement called Pentecostalism. Although issuing forth from established traditions, particularly the Methodist Church, it has cut across the spectrum of Christianity and found a strong following in many denominations, including the Catholic Church. Despite its historical continuity with other lines, its debut marks the introduction of a new theology. Its origins can be traced to Charles Parham, founder of Bethel College in Topeka, Kansas, in which his students were investigating the story of Pentecost:

When Pentecost day came round, they had all met together, when suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of a violent wind which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and there appeared to them tongues as of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak different languages as the Spirit gave them power to express themselves. (Acts 2: 1-4)

The members of the group asked themselves how they should interpret the story. Should it be understood literally, or figuratively? Did tongues of fire really appear and touch the heads of the
apostles, and were they really empowered to suddenly speak foreign languages? Or was it merely a symbolic use of language intended to indicate some sort of interior zeal? This group endeavoured to better understand what the scripture passage was trying to say by studying other incidents of speaking in tongues described in the Bible, and discovered that there existed a link between the act of speaking in tongues and the act of laying on of hands (the ritual imposition of hands of one person onto another in a form of blessing and transferal of grace).

It was during a New Year’s prayer vigil that, on January 1st, 1901, the gift of tongues was given to Agnes Ozman, and shortly thereafter to other members of the group. Shortly afterward at the Azusa revival of 1906, the zeal of the first Pentecostals was transmitted to others, and the “New Pentecost” movement began. Inflaming others by its intensity, a newfound zeal and confidence in the Lord and Scripture would soon spread like wildfire across the face of Christianity. Today, some have estimated that Pentecostals number in the area of up to 800 million members, and continue to grow. This spectacular conflagration of faith has been one of the most remarkable developments in recent Christian history.

Most Pentecostal Churches are Protestant in origin and tradition, initially from Methodism, but they tend to lean toward Fundamentalism because of their experience which seem to confirm a literal understanding of the scripture passage concerning Pentecost. However, the Pentecostal experience, marked by a very animated expression of faith through song and praise of the Lord, as well as the practices of laying on of hands and speaking in tongues, can be found in all Christian denominations (even within the far-from-Protestant Catholic Church, in the form of the Charismatic movement).

An interesting, and uncannily coincidental, event related to the origins of the Pentecostal movement occurred in the late 19th century. Pope Leo XIII was said to have a vision while he was celebrating mass. In this vision he “overheard” an exchange between God and Satan, similar to the story of Job. In this conversation, God agreed to allow Satan to use all his power to task the Church and persecute it for one hundred years. Needless to say, Pope Leo XIII was shaken by this experience and in order to prepare, he promulgated three things. Firstly, he drafted a special prayer to St. Michael the archangel and stipulated that it be recited at the end of each mass. Secondly, he published a new, revised exorcism ritual, and thirdly he asked for prayers to be said in every Catholic Church in the world at the dawn of the new century, January 1st, 1901, for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit onto the world as in a new Pentecost. How curious it is that this was the exact same day the Pentecostal experience was first felt.

The Missionary and Ecumenical movements

The strong colonial trends in the 19th century brought Christianity into contact with new territories in Africa and Asia, opening the opportunity for a strong missionary push into these new lands. An unexpected problem was encountered when different denominational missionary groups, with varying doctrines, made contact with a new people, all claiming to present the gospel of Jesus Christ. This embarrassing division among Christianity hurt their credibility and seemingly contradicted the Gospel of John where Jesus prays for the unity of his disciples. This problem was addressed at the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910, where a link was made between Church unity and missionary success. They recognized that differences among Christians were scandalous
and often irrelevant in non-Christian lands. From the Edinburgh conference followed the Life and Work Conference of 1925 in Stockholm, as well as the Faith and Order Conferences, which discussed doctrinal matters with a view to unity in faith and order. The World Council of Churches (WCC) was formed in 1948 as a way to continue progress towards Christian unity. This laid the foundations for the 20th century *ecumenical movement*, which heralded a new spirit of openness to dialogue between Churches that had, for centuries, seen each other as bitter enemies and heretics. The movement, originally confined to the Protestant Churches, eventually grew to include the other major branches of Christianity: the Eastern Orthodox joined in 1920, and the Catholic Church followed in 1963.

It should be noted that one of the early successes of the Ecumenical movement was the founding of the United Church of Canada. The following is taken from their web site:

> The United Church was inaugurated on June 10, 1925 in Toronto, Ontario, when the Methodist Church, Canada, the Congregational Union of Canada, and 70 per cent of the Presbyterian Church in Canada entered into an organic union. Joining as well was the small General Council of Union Churches, centred largely in Western Canada. It was the first union of churches in the world to cross historical denominational lines and hence received international acclaim. Impetus for the union arose out of the concerns for serving the vast Canadian northwest and in the desire for better overseas mission.  

Since this time other forms of reunion have had some success, such as a recent agreement for “full communion” between the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. And while enormous obstacles in the areas of faith, the sacraments and the role of authority still prevent full Christian unity across the denominations, the ecumenical movement has continued to progress, spurring an increased willingness to honestly appraise the elements of other Churches, as well as encouraging a spirit of mutual forgiveness and cooperation for the good of humanity.


107 UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA, “History”, http://www.united-church.ca/ucc/history/home.shtm
The initial Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation was the Catholic Counter-Reformation, which had its key theological moment in the Council of Trent (1545-47; 1551-52; 1562-63). The theological positions have already largely been discussed, however, and so will not be repeated here. It should be noted, though, that the Council of Trent also instituted a number of administrative reforms as well, which corrected many of the abuses which the Protestants had pointed out.

A renewed Church

The fruit of this prodigious internal reform was a strong blossoming of new religious communities, and the reform of existing established ones. Spain in particular was a hotbed of spiritual energy with such notables as St. John of the Cross (b.1542 – d.1591) and St. Theresa of Avila (b.1515 – d.1592) undertaking the reform of the Carmelite order. These reforms were mainly aimed at re-grounding the Carmelites in contemplative prayer and a simplicity of lifestyle, cornerstones of religious life which had become neglected. Also from Spain came the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits, founded by Saint Ignatius of Loyola (b.1491- d.1556) in 1540. This dynamic new force proved to be the most effective agent of Catholic recovery and would play a great historical role in the reform as well as the expansion of the faith. With a mere seven members in 1534, the Society grew to 16,000 members by 1625, less than a century later.

This era also marked a renewed energy in the missionary field, with strong pushes into the newly discovered American continents, with a strong French presence in the North and Spanish in the South. Figures such as the Jesuit St. Jean de Brebeuf, tortured to death in 1648, inspired generations of missionaries with their selfless exploits among the native populations. St. Francis de Sales (b.1567 – d.1622) represented the Catholic Church in Protestant lands, attempting to win back “the heretics”. He inspired many with his description of the spirituality of everyday life in his Introduction to a Devout Life. This was also the beginning of the uniate strategy of reunification with the Eastern Orthodox Churches. The shock generated by the schism of the Protestant churches jolted the Catholic Church into a renewed state of fervour, intent on returning to a truer devotion to its mission and producing a re-energized religious fervour among its members. While this dynamic reassertion certainly affected the practical actions of the Church, it would also have an effect on its theology and renew debate in important areas of Christian belief.

One of the major outcomes of the Council of Trent and the renewal that followed on the theology of the Catholic Church revolved around the issue of soteriology, i.e. the theology of salvation. A tension arose between a more “open” form and a more “closed” form of soteriology. Reacting to the challenges of the Reformation churches, who claimed legitimate status as Christian churches in their own rite, the Council of Trent reaffirmed the pre-eminence of the Catholic Church as the “one true Church of Christ,” with all others considered beyond the pale. This identification of the Catholic Church as the sole legitimate representation of Christ’s Church (outside of which there was no salvation) naturally led to a more closed understanding of soteriology. This one-sided stand had, however, to face new realities in the New World. The Catholic missionaries arms were
encountering vast populations of peoples who had never been in contact with the Christian Gospel, let alone ever heard the name of Jesus. This raised the question of whether these peoples were denied heaven because they were not a part of the Church. The idea that these newly discovered civilizations were all damned, through no real fault of their own, was too horrible a prospect, and thus encouraged a more open soteriology. The Catholic theology of salvation, particularly regarding the place of the Church in the plan of salvation, has tended to oscillate between these two poles ever since.

**Jansenism**

Jansenism was a theological and philosophical movement in the Catholic Church begun by the Flemish theologian Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638). His early work earned him deserved renown, and was perfectly in accord with the teaching of the Church. His final work was entitled the *Augustinus*, and was meant to be a review and renewal of the teachings of St. Augustine of Hippo. Jansen died before it could be published, and as he lay on his sickbed he confided the manuscript to his chaplain for posthumous publication. Jansen died a faithful Catholic.

Despite this, the doctrine contained in the *Augustinus* was a radical re-interpretation of Augustine’s doctrine of grace. Augustine had opposed the Pelagians, who themselves stated that salvation is achieved through our own efforts and that grace was useful to accomplishing these efforts but (strictly speaking) was not necessary for salvation. To counter this doctrine, Augustine defended the necessity of grace for salvation *but* also emphasized that it was free to anyone to receive -- it did not need to be earned. Jansen, however, took this even further. He rejected the Pelagian idea that our active efforts are the source of our salvation, but replaced it with the idea that the soul is perfectly passive and at the mercy of the spiritual forces of grace and sin. He also emphasized the necessity of grace for salvation, but said the reason it was so necessary was because human nature was fundamentally corrupted by original sin. As stated in this article on Jansenism:

> In Jansenist thought, human beings were born bad, and without divine help a human being could never become good. This meant that one had to be very careful about one's choices, exhibit a high level of piety and moral rectitude, and prepare carefully through prayer and confession before receiving Communion (hence they favored less frequent reception). The Jansenist idea of predestination, based on Augustine's writing and close to that of Calvinism, was that only a small number of human beings, the "elect," were destined to be saved.\(^{108}\)

The practical result of this was the creation of a school of religious piety that appeared to be very pious, but which was very suspicious of any natural human good (such as physical pleasure) and which emphasized a tremendous rigourism in religious practice, often through repeated warnings about the wrath of God and the dangers of going to Hell. These are not bad warnings in themselves, because Hell is (after all) a bad place to end up. Nevertheless these teachings, combined with a

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suspicion of human nature and of natural goods, tended to drive the joy and fun out of religion, and replace it with a dour seriousness.

While Jansenism is more of a footnote in Catholic theological history, it is important for a more complete understanding of North American Catholic religious culture, especially here in Quebec. Jansenism took hold especially in France, in a convent near Paris called Port-Royal, and so had a large influence on the French church. As well, Jansenism had a large influence on the Irish church, because during the time of the persecution of the Irish Catholics by the Anglicans, many Irish priests received their seminary training in Paris. Jansenism may have also reminded the Irish students of the old stories of the severe penances of the early Irish monks. These monks were considered heroes to the Irish, so Jansenism may have had a fertile ground in the Irish mindset.

Quebec, of course, was founded by France, and when the English Catholic population arrived it would have initially been largely Irish (not just in Quebec but in the whole of North America). While not every Catholic priest was a Jansenist, of course, it did create a sense of “mandatory rigourism” in the populace, both English and French. Of course, today many persons have rejected Catholicism for its rigourism, but this begs the question: are they really rejecting Catholicism? Or are they rejecting Jansenism?

Jansenism as a theology was repeatedly condemned by a number of Popes, but it had set roots in the popular piety of many of the ordinary faithful. It took the example of a simple young woman, St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1987), to broadly reawaken a sense of God’s parental love for us, and our confidence in responding to and accepting that love. Her autobiography, the Story of a Soul, has been a source of spiritual inspiration for millions of readers since her death. She has since been declared a “Doctor of the Church”, which means that her theological doctrine is considered an authentic representation of the true Catholic tradition.

The Church versus the Enlightenment

The historical period known as the Enlightenment stretched across 17th and 18th century Europe and deeply marked the sphere of intellectual thought. Reliance on dogma and tradition as standards of knowledge melted away in the light of a new faith in the power of human reason and experience. Profound changes in thinking, ushered in by the likes of Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant, diverted the course of philosophy into a rational, idealistic stream. Modern science as we know it originated in this era, prodded along by the development of a new scientific method. Political and social goals focussed more and more on humanitarian agendas. A sense of awakening seized the minds of the day and a feeling that a new era was emerging, shedding the husk of an obsolete past. This period marks a difficult transition for the Church, as its theology struggled to keep up with the pace of progress within the sciences and philosophy, and found itself generally on the defensive. The old scholastic method proved inadequate to respond to these new intellectual challenges. Attempts to adhere to long-held truths and doctrines, threatened as they were by new

\[109\text{ Urban VIII, 1642; Innocent X, 1653; Alexander VII, 1656 and 1664; Clement XI, 1703; the list goes on and on.}\]
discoveries and theories, sometimes resulted in an unfortunate perception of rivalry between the religious sciences and the emerging natural sciences. Blunders occurred on the part of the intellectual authorities as they tried to ensure that the new theories did not contradict and challenge any of the important theological truths defended by the Church. Perhaps the most infamous of these blunders involved the case of the Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei.

On the political level, the Church had to contend with one of the consequences of the Enlightenment: the Age of Revolutions in Europe, beginning with the French Revolution and its bitterly anti-clerical tone. The new National Assembly attempted to push state control of the Church to its extremes with the passing of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in 1790. This constitution went far beyond all previous attempts to usurp papal power in the governing of the French church. All Church property and holdings were nationalized. All nominations of bishops would be determined by election in the same way as departmental officials, i.e. through the government. The number of parish priests was to be reduced to one for every 6,000 faithful, for any greater ratio was deemed unnecessary, and they too would be selected in the same manner as lesser officers of the State. Clergy would be trained and educated in state seminaries, and their salaries would be paid by the taxpayer, as any other public official would be. Religious communities devoted to contemplation and prayer were deemed unproductive, and of no practical use. Most religious communities were suppressed, deprived of their properties and starved from funding. Only those religious communities which were engaged in useful work such as education, hospital work and charity, were tolerated. Needless to say, such attempts to seize control of church affairs did not sit well neither with the bishops of France nor with the pope of Rome. Forced to take a pledge of allegiance to the new constitution, many priests and bishops resisted, thereby disqualifying themselves from their now state-funded livelihoods, and officially barred from performing their liturgical functions in the newly expropriated state churches. Some clergy, loyal to the revolutionary doctrines, did conform to the demands, and this led to a schism, between an "official" state church, and the body of clergy still loyal to Rome. As the revolution descended into bloody persecution during the Reign of Terror, many clergy were subject to exile, imprisonment or the guillotine.

As the principle of anti-monarchical revolution spread throughout Europe it shattered all sorts of social conventions. In France itself, the new republican government even dreamed of radically changing the calendar itself: the years would be renumbered, so that the first year of the revolution (1789) would become the new "Year zero," a new axis around which history revolved. The papacy itself was often under attack, and even Garibaldi himself is said to have declared that he would “hang the last King with the guts of the last Pope”. The theological reaction to this pressure was ultra-montanism, a devout loyalty towards the papacy and Rome (which many saw as a bulwark against the chaos of the time). Ultra-montanism found a voice at the Vatican I council of 1870. Two of the principal proclamations issuing forth from this council were the doctrine of Papal infallibility and Papal supremacy of jurisdiction. Papal infallibility affirmed that the Pope could not err in his decisions regarding questions of faith, while his supremacy of jurisdiction upheld his pre-eminent position among the bishops. Both proclamations were re-affirmations of the Pope’s authority in an era where it seemed to have been severely diminished in the political realm (by the loss of the Papal states) and in the spiritual and moral realm (by the powerful currents of atheistic philosophies that carried many of the revolutionary ideas across the continent). The proclamations
of Vatican I were enshrined as dogmas of the faith, articles that every faithful Catholic was required to believe.

A steady barrage of Papal documents attacking the waves of modernity were issued in efforts to instruct and warn the faithful regarding the dangers of the rapidly emerging new world order. Pope Saint Pius X issued the letters On the Doctrines of the Modernists and Syllabus Condemning the Errors of the Modernists, urging the faithful to remain prudent in the face of modern thought. A strengthened bond with Rome was proposed as a strategy of guarding against the excesses of the Moderns, to be able to better retain the truth regarding the faith in the midst of the storm of new ideas and doctrines. One striking example of ultra-montanist tendencies here in Quebec is Mary Queen of the World Cathedral in Montreal. It is essentially a scaled-down version of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, complete with a more modest copy of Bernini’s famous baldacchino over the altar. The Cathedral stands as a monument to the Church of Montreal’s allegiance with Rome and the Pope.

**Vatican II: a breath of fresh air**

Prior to the second Vatican Council (1962 - 1965), the Church was still very much on the defensive from liberalism, modernism and the relatively new threat of European Communism. However, in the aftermath of the two World Wars, Western society was rapidly changing, and the Church, perhaps sensing the profound changes only beginning to manifest themselves, decided to respond. In 1958 Blessed Pope John XXIII surprised many by calling a second Vatican Council to reflect on the Church’s place and role within the modern world. What made this gathering extraordinary was that this was the first council convened not to react to a particular crisis, but to promote reform before a full crisis struck. This gathering called together virtually all of the Church’s leaders, and was the largest assembly of bishops in history, with over 2000 participants. Because the focus of the council was mainly pastoral, concerned with how the Church should shepherd her flock in the 20th century, and had less to do with questions of dogma, it was also the first council not to issue any condemnations of false teachings.

The ensuing discussions resulted in several significant reforms affecting the universal Catholic Church.

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The renewal of the liturgy introduced new forms of worship, such as the language of the people replacing the use of Latin.

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A more energized episcopate fostered a more dynamic role of the bishops in formulating solutions to problems and questions and encouraged frequent visits with the Pope and dialogue with each other.

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One of the most marked differences between the pre- and post-council Church is a much more visible Pope. No longer a prisoner of the Vatican, the modern pontiff has begun to travel extensively, visiting his far-flung flock and reaching out to them both personally and through an increase in the publication of his writings and speeches.

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A more international and multi-cultural Church is immediately evident in the makeup of the Roman church bureaucracy, known as the Curia. No longer composed almost exclusively
of Italians, the Curia now has members from all continents, particularly the Southern Hemisphere, resulting in a greater influence of non-European cultures and mentality on the governance of the Church. In particular, the College of Cardinals, which has the responsibility to elect the next Pope, has representatives drawn from all over the world.

One of the most important renewals in the realm of theology has been a vigorous return to the study of Patristic and Biblical works, effectively trying to catch up with the positive developments in liberal Protestantism.

The Council also saw the Catholic Church join the ecumenical movement, resulting in a renewed contact and dialogue with other churches. A parallel initiative has occurred in dialogue with other religions, with the Catholic Church acting as the central force for two "World Days of Prayer for Peace" -- once in 1985, and once in 2001 shortly after the attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon buildings.


A new universal Catechism of the Catholic Church was issued in 1992. It is intended to serve as a basis for local instruction of the faith.

As is the case with most events that usher in significant changes in a relatively short period of time, the reforms were accompanied by some important problems. The rapidity of the change was disconcerting for some members of the Church, especially for those with a weak understanding of the distinction between "Tradition" and "traditions". Rather than embracing the changes and trying to implement them effectively, some preferred to seek security in the familiar practices and rituals predominant before the Council.

The reforms also saw a large-scale challenging of authority across the spectrum of Church hierarchy, ranging from bishops, to priests, to religious and laity. Often spurred by a vision of more radical reform, some interpreted the changes as going too far, or not far enough. An eruption of the old rivalry between a more open or more closed understanding of the Church contributed to the formation of fringe elements in the Church which pushed the interpretation of the reforms and sometimes simply contradicted what was proposed. On the one end was a liberal push for greater change than what was sanctioned by the Council. In the name of “the spirit of Vatican II” certain groups attempted to go beyond and even against what was literally stated in the Council declarations. This led to liturgical abuses, alternate moral teachings and a rejection of structure and authority. On the other hand, a conservative branch led to what is known as the Radical Traditionalist movement. Rallying around a French bishop named Marcel Lefebvre, this conservative group rejected the reforms as heresy and a betrayal of true Catholicism and went on to found a small schismatic version of the pre-council Church.

The changes of Vatican II are still being implemented, but are widely considered to have been a necessary preparation for the Catholic church to be able to face the challenges of the postmodern world, while at the same time always remaining faithful to the best of its tradition.