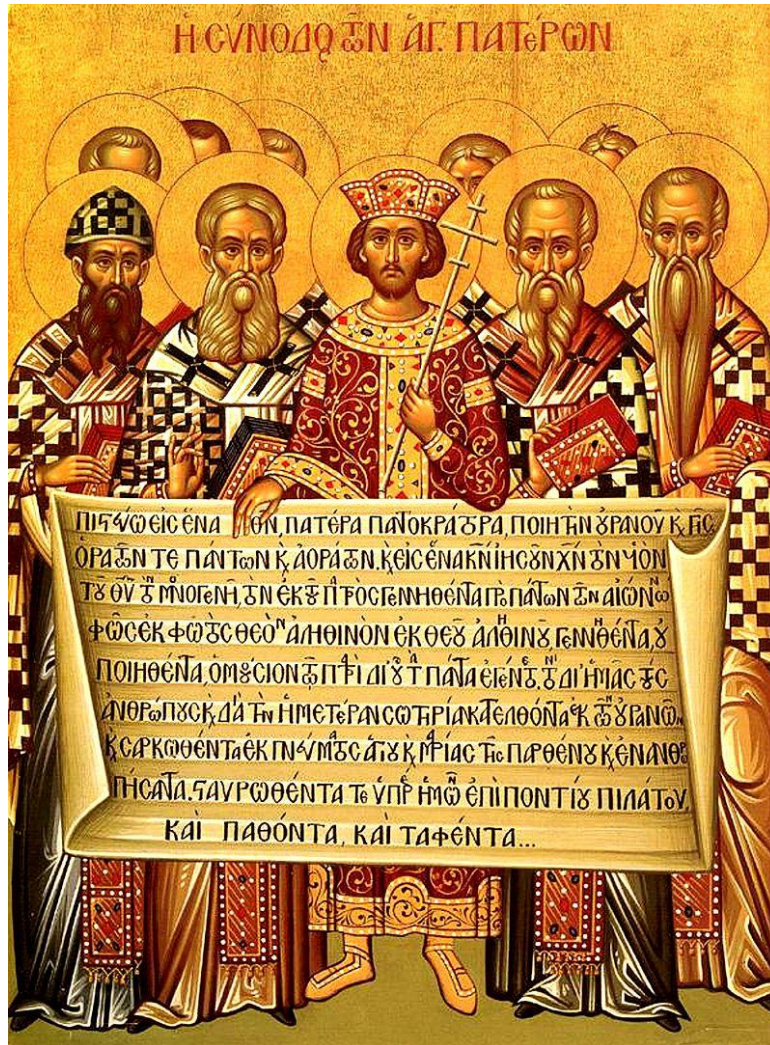


Journey in Faith



Module 3

The Development of Christian Doctrine

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Module Three: The development of Christian doctrine

Introduction

We move now to the New Testament (NT) but we don't leave the Old Testament behind. Firstly, the books of the Old Testament (OT) were the scriptures for Jesus and for the first three generations of his followers. The New Testament canon was finally agreed at the Synod of Cathage in 397. Secondly, the Old and New Testaments are not separate stories but a continuous unfolding story of God and his people.

Aims of Module 3:

- to gain insights into NT history
- to introduce the key theological themes from the New Testament
- to gain a deeper understanding of key Christian doctrines.
- to make connections between the NT and today, applying learning to discipleship, ministry and worship

Our desired outcomes

At the end of the module participants will be expected to demonstrate:

- an understanding of the NT theological theme of Kingdom
- an understanding of different ways of reading the NT – including imaginative approaches
- an understanding of the terminology associated with study of the NT
- an understanding of the basic doctrines of the Christian faith concerning the Trinity
- an understanding of how all of this affects our hearing of God's call in today's world

At the end of the module participants will be able to:

- apply the resources of the NT to today's context and their own growth in discipleship, ministry and worship
- understand how the New Testament relates to the development of Christian doctrine

We hope by now you will feel able to share some of the leading in the group e.g. opening or closing prayers, doing some research for the group, leading of a discussion from the course outline. You may find it helpful to review how you are working together as a group. Include in this anything you want your tutors to feed back to the organisers.

Module Three: Book list

Books to resource the assignments:

Adam p, *Living the Trinity*, 2nd Edn. (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2000)

Barrow S, Bartley J (Eds) *Consuming Passion: Why the Killing of Jesus Really Matters* (London, DLT: 2005)

Blyth M, *Celebrating the Trinity: Faith, Worship & Mission* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2003)

Bockmuehl M(ed.) *Introducing the New Testament: The Real Reason for the Year 2000*. (Cambridge: Grove, 1999)

Drane J *Introducing the New Testament* (Oxford: Lion, 1986/1999)

Fee G, Stuart D *How to Read the Bible for all its Worth* 2nd edn. (London: SU, 1994)

McGrath A, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* 4th Edition (Oxford) Blackwell, 2007

Rohr R *The Divine Dance* (London SPCK, 2016)

Sanders EP *Paul: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford OUP)

Wright NT *The Challenge of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2000)

Books to resource your thinking about God's calling:

Magdalen M *Vocation: Exploring Call and Identity* (Grove Cambridge 2008)

Torrey M *Diverse Gifts* (London Canterbury Press 2006) [All]

Other useful books:

Charpentier E *How to Read the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1981)

Barton J, Muddiman J (ed.s), *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: OUP, 2001)

Morisy A *Beyond the Good Samaritan* (Continuum, London, 2007)

Module Three: Assignments

These are the optional assignments for Module 3 of which you choose one only.

Don't forget! For all these assignments you will need to have read around the subject and be able to quote from several books (not just, for example, John Drane). Tutors can help with which ones would be most suitable. Remember you are aiming to write to meet the learning outcomes of the module.

1. A Parish Magazine Article: The Four Gospels

Write an article for the local church magazine on the four Gospels – we hope that this may be published in the magazine, perhaps in part at least to advertise the course to your church members!

i) In your article, give pictorial images for each gospel with an explanation.

(Count each picture as 80 words)

ii) Outline (a) the difficulties and (b) the benefits of having 4 gospels

Please give particular emphasis to the **benefits** of having 4 gospels and how you seek to interpret the differences between gospels.

The total word count for the assignment should be 2,000 (+ or – 10%), giving about 600 to (i) and the rest to (ii)

2. A Parable for Today

John Drane in his book *'Introducing the New Testament'*, Ch. 7 claims that the parables in particular are teaching for all times.

"The parables of Jesus are more like works of art than discourses on religion and like all art their characters and situations have a correspondingly universal quality that can be understood by anyone, for they deal with the basic condition of what it means to be human".

Rewrite (or present in any suitable format) a parable of Jesus for today's context – which could be a local Church or a wider context in the Nation or World. (Up to 500 words) (+ or – 10%)

Explain why the particular parable was chosen, what you think was the meaning in the original context and how you interpreted it for the new context. (Up to 1,500 words) (+ or – 10%)

3. The Kingdom

Write 2,000 (+ or – 10%) words on the following:

How did Jesus understand the Kingdom and what is its relevance for discipleship and ministry today?

4. A Christian Doctrine

Read through this quotation from Tom Wright's book *Following Jesus*:

"How are you to address this world with the gospel of Jesus? You can't just hurl true doctrine at it. You will either crush people or drive them away. That's actually no bad thing, because mission and evangelism were never meant to be a matter of throwing doctrine at people's heads. They work in a far more holistic way: by praxis, symbol and story...I'm reminded of St Francis' instructions to his followers as he sent them out: 'preach the gospel by all means possible', he said; 'and if it's really necessary *you could even use words*'. I am reminded, too, of the power of symbolic praxis to go beyond words, when I think of one of the greatest ballerinas of all time. After one of her great performances, somebody had the temerity to ask her what the dance *meant*. Her reply was simple, and it speaks volumes as we consider mission in the postmodern world. 'If I could have said it', she said, 'I wouldn't have needed to dance it.'

Choose and state one area of Christian doctrine and consider *critically* how you might express this teaching in your own life of discipleship or ministry. How helpful to you is Tom Wright's view expressed in this passage?

5. Meditation

Prepare a meditation for a visiting group of Christians from a link Diocese or partner church in another part of the world on "The British Christ" using at least one image each of:

- a) his birth or life and ministry
- b) his death
- c) his resurrection or ascension

The images do not necessarily have to be by British artists, but they should express something of what it means to believe and follow Christ as a British person.

Provide both some representation of the images and the words for the meditation (up to 500 words, + or – 10%)

Explain your choice of images and how they connect with "The British Christ" (1,500 words, + or – 10%)

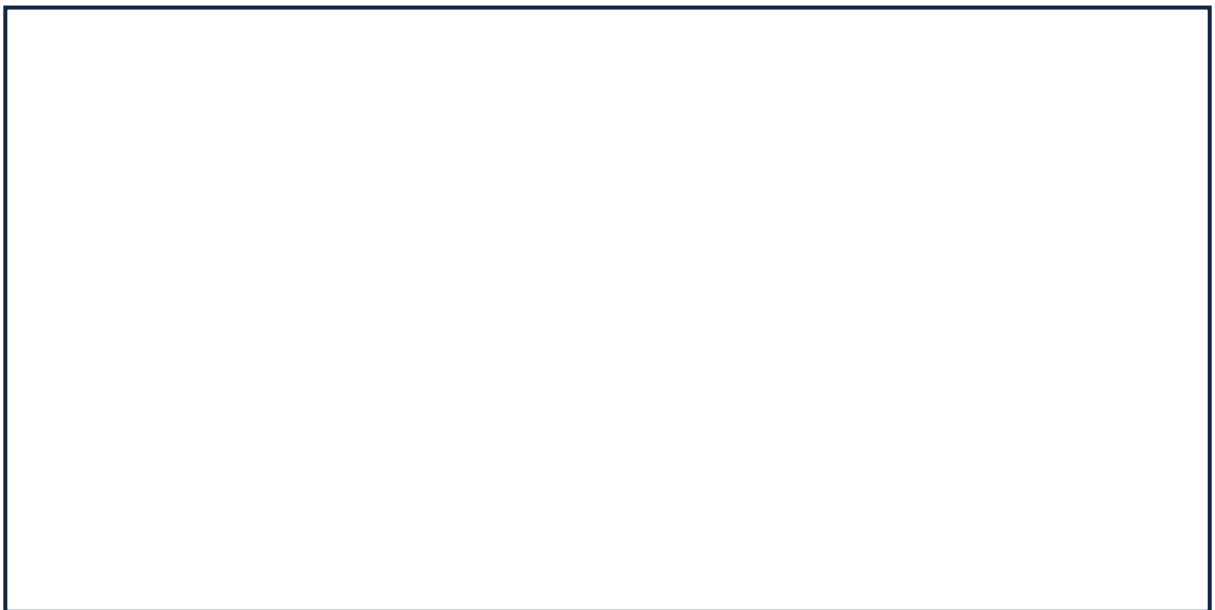
Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 1 We Worship One God in Trinity Preparation

Welcome back to the Journey in Faith Course. Hopefully you have enjoyed the Easter break. We begin this term by reflecting on the Trinity. The Trinity is central to Christian theology, doctrine and worship. When we use the word 'God' Christians always mean the three persons of the Trinity.

Describing the Trinity is notoriously difficult because we can only use human language and imagery to understand the mystery of the divine and our descriptions will always fall short. Perhaps the problem is also that the Trinity is not so much a 'thing' as a relationship and relationships are always rather complex to define.

Spend a few moments thinking about how you picture the Trinity, what metaphors have you heard? Jot down your thoughts or images in the box.



Imagery and the Trinity

Look at the images of the Trinity in Appendix 1.

What in them do you find helpful and what are their limitations?



The Circle Dance

The ancient church fathers and mothers described the Trinitarian God as a 'divine circle dance' or *perichoresis* in Greek (the same root as the term choreography). Richard Rohr describes it thus

'Whatever is going on in God is a flow, a radical relatedness, a perfect communion between three – a circle dance of love' (The Divine Dance by Rohr and Morrell p.7)

Rohr goes on to describe how this relationship within God relates to creation.

'Every vital impulse, every force towards the future, every creative momentum, every loving surge, every dash toward beauty, every running toward truth, every ecstasy before simple goodness... every bit of ambition for humanity and the earth, for wholeness and holiness, is the eternally-flowing life of the Trinitarian God... this triune God allows you, impels you, to live easily with God everywhere and all the time.' (The Divine Dance by Rohr and Morrell p. 37-38)

Take some time to think about what this means for you.

Reflection on the word 'in'

Read these few verses from John's Gospel:

John 6:54-57

John 7:37-39

John 10:30

John 10:37-38

John 14:20

John 15: 4

John 16: 13-15 John 17: 20-26

- What do these verses say to you about the relationship of Father, Son and Spirit?
- What do these verses say about our relationship to the Trinity?

Language and experience

Think about your own journey of faith.

- Which of the three persons of the Trinity did you find it easiest to relate to?
- Which may have been more difficult?
- Think about why that might be?

Jesus consistently refers to God as Father using the Aramaic term “*Abba*” (Mk. 14: 36). [you might want to refer to the article in Appendix 7]. This practice of referring to God in this way continued in the early church (Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:6). It is a term that encapsulates the way in which respect would have been shown by a loving son to his father.

It does, however, introduce two problems for us. One is the question of gender and God and the other is that the term ‘father’ may be loaded by our experience of a human father. Pause to consider what assumptions you bring to your understanding of God as Father – what might be unhelpful for you?

Gender - The Church has always maintained that God is not gendered as ‘male’ or ‘female’ (Cunningham, 1998), but in English we do not have non-gendered singular personal pronouns so we have to make a choice in referring to God as he, she or they (the plural pronoun brings other issues of the ‘oneness’ of God). Suffice to say we need to be careful in our use of language and think carefully about how we reflect and experience the feminine attributes of God and the female or ungendered imagery the bible provides for God.



The Trinity in worship

Think about your own devotional life and the worship of your church – is each person of the Trinity equally emphasised? What have you noticed?

Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 1 We Worship One God in Trinity

Aim: To consider approaches to understanding the Trinity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit

To discuss how our lives reflect belief in God the Trinity

To develop our understanding of collaborative ministry

Introduction 10 mins

Share with one another a 'glimpse of glory' you have experienced since you last met.

Opening Prayer 15 mins

Reflection based on Rublev's Icon found in Appendix 2

Reflection on the preparation 20 mins

Made in the image of the Trinitarian God 30 mins

We are perhaps familiar with the idea of human beings created in the image of God. Let us now begin to explore what it might mean to be made in the Trinitarian image of God.

In his book *These Three Are One*, David S. Cunningham looks at how our belief in the Trinity can shape our lives. Cunningham describes the relation between the Trinity as one of *mutual indwelling* and *participation*. The participation he has in mind is where we participate not in something but in someone; e.g. to participate in the sufferings of another or to "take part" in someone's life. Indwelling points to a union so profound that those in the relationship cannot be said to exist without the other.

This way of looking at the Trinity can

'...help us begin to think about ... the character of our relations. After all, such relations are not good in themselves; they can be trivial, insincere, abusive, or worse. In the contemporary context, especially, relationships are often entered into for one's own convenience. By contrast the doctrine of the Trinity encourages us to understand ourselves not as "individuals" who may (or may not) choose to enter into relationships, but rather as mutually indwelling and indwelt, and to such a degree that – echoing the mutual indwelling of the Three – all pretensions to wholly autonomous [independent] existence are abolished.'

David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology*, (London: Blackwells, 1999).

It could be argued then that if any one person of the Trinity is removed (or perhaps just not taken seriously enough) then what is left is not even the other two persons. You can't have one without the other two!

Group task

Have a conversation around the following questions

- 1) What are the implications of this concept of 'mutual indwelling and participation'?
- 2) David Cunningham sees Western culture as 'anti-Trinitarian' in that it encourages individualism and the idea that we can control our lives and our environment. What are the challenges of this for us?
- 3) What perspectives might other faiths have on the Trinity?

BREAK

How we live together matters

30 mins

We have been thinking about the nature of the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the relationship of individual Christians to the Trinity. However, the whole of creation is called to reflect the nature of God and the church is called to be the embodiment and herald of the Trinity to a broken world.

Group task

What does the life of the Trinity have to say about?

- 1) The nature of our life together in worshipping communities.
- 2) Leadership in the Church.
- 3) Our response to living well in the different spheres of our lives.

Closing Worship

5 mins

Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 2 Christ has come Preparation

We are now exploring the world of the New Testament into which Jesus was born. The location of the events might be the same as the Old Testament but history and culture has moved on. The region has come under the control of the major empires of Persia, Greece and Rome. Now in the Roman province of Palestine, this area is home to a number of different communities from a range of ethnic, cultural and faith backgrounds. Most people would have needed command of several languages to conduct their business.

Introduction to the New Testament

Have a look through the New Testament

- Which bits are familiar to you; which bits are less familiar?

Watch the Bible Project video – the New Testament overview

The people in the New Testament

Jesus was born into a Jewish community in the northern region of Galilee, nearby were cities established by the Greeks alongside other gentile towns and villages. Between Galilee and Jerusalem was Samaria. The **Samaritans** were descended from those forcibly settled there by the Assyrians and original Jewish inhabitants following the fall of Israel. They practised a hybrid form of Judaism combined with other faith traditions. They were considered by their Jewish neighbours as apostates and they were forbidden from mixing with them.

The Roman Empire was in political control and at various times the authorities were tolerant and allowed a degree of freedom to the Jewish people and at other times they outlawed the practice of other faiths and oppressed Jewish and later Christian worshippers. The Romans eventually destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem in 70CE.

Within the Jewish community were several influential groups. The **Pharisees** (literally means separated ones) were convinced that the troubles facing the nation were because of their failure to keep the Levitical law and so responded by meticulous observance and developed a complex set of regulations to ensure religious purity. The Pharisees would try to impose this strict interpretation of the law on others.

The **Teachers of the Law/scribes** were a class of scholars who preserved the scriptures, developed its teaching and taught the faith. The **Sadducees** were a group mainly drawn from the most powerful families. They were more focussed on maintaining political power than religious purity.

They were the dominant group on the **Sanhedrin** – the 71 member council that acted as the Jewish Supreme Court.

The **priests/Levites** were descendants of Aaron and were responsible for worship in the Temple. The High Priest was appointed annually. The **Zealots** were a group intent on freeing the Jewish nation from its Roman rulers, they committed acts of civil disobedience and later outright rebellion.

Common cultural norms in New Testament times

Significance and identity – a person's identity came from their family status and lineage, their trade, their religious affiliation. If one person within a particular group was shamed it would affect the status of all other members. In this stratified society, there was little sense of individual identity and mobility between social groups was rare.

Gender roles – most women's lives were restricted to the home and going out to fetch water or buy food. They would usually do these tasks in groups – lone women being particularly vulnerable. Women would generally marry at a young age and were considered the property of their husbands. Having children was crucial to a woman's honour, especially sons. Being childless or widowed was a source of shame. Few women had economic independence but some wealthy women did support the ministry of Jesus and later the ministry of Paul. Men were able to divorce their wives for any reason. Women were not permitted to have roles in the public sphere and their testimony could not be considered valid. Few women were literate at this time. Most men would expect to follow the family trade – many Jewish boys would have had some level of education at the Synagogue.

Slavery

Slavery was an accepted reality at this time. People could be born into slavery or be taken as slaves as the spoils of war. Some people sold themselves or their children into slavery if they had no other means of support. It was possible to acquire freedom from slavery either as a reward from your master or by buying freedom. Some slaves were paid for their work and had responsible roles thus gaining a degree of respect but many had to suffer harsh conditions and were considered of little value or significance.

The geography of the New Testament

Palestine is a small country, the distance from the Sea of Galilee to Jerusalem being about 90 miles. A map of the earliest churches shows they are concentrated largely where Jews had travelled for work and trade or due to persecution (called the Jewish diaspora) – mostly these settlements were within the Roman Empire to the West but some travelled East into Persia and India and others south into Africa.

Their World and our world

From what you have read, note here the differences and similarities you recognise between their world and ours.

What is different:	What is similar:



Watch A History of Christianity 2009 Season 1 Episode 1 **on YouTube**

Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 2 Christ has come

Aims: To examine Christian belief that Jesus was God in human form
To reflect on the challenge of this belief in the light of the creedal claim to Jesus' divinity.

Opening worship

10 mins

Dwelling in the Word

- Read John 1: 1-18
- In the silence see where your attention is drawn, what you notice, how it makes think and feel?
- Share your thoughts with your neighbours
- What common themes have emerged?

Collect

Almighty God, you have given us your Son to take our human nature upon himself.
Grant that we, who have been born again and have become your children by grace,
may daily be renewed by the Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen

Reflection on the preparation

15 mins

Who is Jesus?

10 mins

We begin with the same starting point as the first Christians by asking the question: Who is Jesus?
On a flip chart jot down your initial responses to this question.

Look at what has been written – using two different coloured markers mark those that relate to the historical Jesus (what he said and did) and those that reflect the nature of Jesus (who he is).

The study of the identity of Jesus is known as Christology and that is what we will look at next.

Jesus: human and divine

20 mins

A further question is: How can Jesus be both God and human?

Group task

Have a discussion around the following two questions:

- What is the problem with Jesus only (or mostly) God?
- What is the problem with Jesus being only (or mostly) human?

As the whole group joins together share the reflections from the smaller groups

BREAK

Telling the Story

20 mins

Read Luke 24:13-35

The ideas these disciples had about who Jesus was had been shaken to the core by the horrifying events of the previous Friday. So what had they been expecting of Jesus and how does Jesus respond to their disappointment on the Emmaus Road?

Tom Wright sheds some light on this in the following extract from his book *The Challenge of Jesus*. Read this section through and take a few moments to think about it.

'The response of the stranger [Jesus] is to tell the story [of the Bible] differently...Yes, the scriptures were indeed to be read as a narrative reaching its climax. But no, the story was never about Israel beating up her enemies and becoming established as the high-and-mighty masters of the world. It was always the story of how the creator God, Israel's covenant God, would bring his saving purposes for the world to birth through the suffering and vindication of Israel...Israel as the bearer of God's promises for the world, then focused on the remnant as the bearer of Israel's destiny, and focused finally on Israel's true king as the one upon whom the task even of the remnant would finally devolve. He [Jesus] had been the servant for the servant-people. He had done for Israel and the world what Israel and the world could not do for themselves.'

N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, (London: SPCK, 2000).

For discussion:

- Jesus was correcting the disciples' interpretation of the OT and certain expectations of the Messiah that went with it. How had they understood the situation Israel was in and what role had they expected Jesus to play?
- What interpretation and understanding of Messiah is Jesus giving?
- It says in the story that in the breaking of the bread 'at once they knew who he was'. Who do you think the disciples thought Jesus was at this point?

Moving towards belief in the divinity of Jesus

20 mins

Was it at this point the disciples realized Jesus 'was God' whatever that might mean?

Tom Wright puts forward some thought-provoking ideas about how the first Christians began to see Jesus as more than human:

'Again and again one hears it suggested that the resurrection somehow proves Jesus' divinity...Nothing in the Jewish expectation of resurrection indicates that anyone would conclude that, faced with someone alive again with a new sort of life following death, such a person must be in some sense divine...No: the resurrection awoke the dejected disciples to the truth that Jesus was in fact the Messiah; from this they concluded both that...his death, rather than being a shameful defeat, was in fact the strange but glorious victory over all the forces of evil; and from this combination of beliefs they went forward into the unknown, to declare that since Jesus had thus accomplished the mighty saving act which could only be the personal work of YHWH, the God of the Exodus, Jesus was somehow to be identified as the personal manifestation, the embodiment, of the one God of Israel.'

Group task

Have a conversation around the following questions:

- What is your reaction to this view of how the first disciples came to believe in the divinity of Jesus?
- What difference would it make if we did not believe that Jesus was both fully God and fully human?
- Christology is tricky and it is easy to drift into what might be considered 'heresy'. What happens when we get to the 'touchlines' of the theology 'pitch'? Who blows the whistle (and even shows the 'red card')? Some of the views we hold might even fall into this category – if so what are we to do?

Reflection on 'who is Jesus?'**15 mins**

Read Philippians 2: 5-11

Spend some time in silence reflecting on your response to God the Son who has come to dwell among us.

Share with one another one key thought from this session.

Four people can take it in turns to read each verse of Hebrews 1:1-3

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways.

But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe.

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty of heaven.

Amen.

Look ahead: next preparation**5 mins**

Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 3 Christ has died Preparation

The death of Jesus and its interpretations

The mystery of the crucifixion and the resurrection lies at the heart of Christianity. At the time, crucifixion was considered a shameful and particularly agonising form of execution used by the Romans for common criminals, but especially slaves. It was only in the light of the resurrection that the disciples had to consider Jesus' death as something other than a tragic failure.

In the New Testament we can see how the first Christians began to interpret Jesus' death as God's means of dealing with the problems of the world – evil and death – and of offering His people salvation. To try and make sense of this incredible sequence of events the disciples used pictures, metaphors and symbols drawn from their Jewish faith and contemporary culture. In first century Judaism it was the sacrificial system that operated in the Temple which reconciled people to God. Thus, Jesus is seen as the sacrificial lamb whose life blood brings redemption, reconciliation and justification.

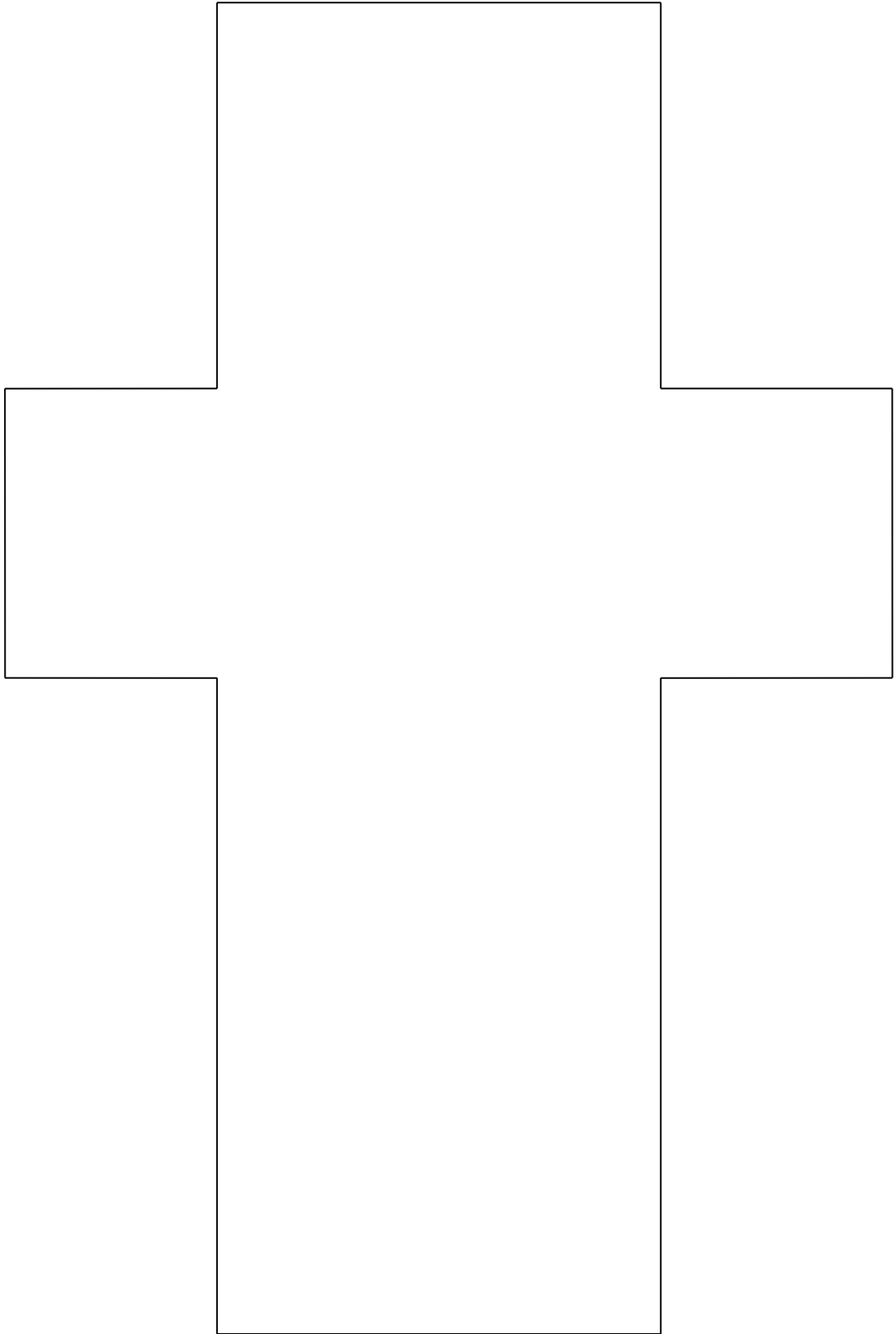
The New Testament claims that it is Jesus' death that brings reconciliation, at-one-ment, with God but it is less clear on exactly why Christ had to die. It is on this mystery that Christians through the ages have continued to meditate and which has led to many "theories of the atonement".

It is worth noting that there has never been any one 'official' explanation of the mystery of Christ's saving death. This is why there has been and will, no doubt, continue to be, a variety of emphases and interpretations.

1. Take some time to reflect on what the crucifixion means to you. Use the cross outline overleaf to express your thoughts in a visual way.
 - You could make some kind of collage of words or pictures or could concentrate on colour.
 - Is there a favourite Good Friday hymn that says it all for you?

It's up to you – whatever time, ideas or resources allow! However, you do need to bring these with you to share with the group next session.
2. If there is an image of the cross that is particularly meaningful to you, bring it along if you are able to.
3. Familiarise yourselves with the theories of the atonement found on pages 20 and 21

There is a helpful glossary of some theological terms used in this module at the end of the booklet



The following 2 pages offer a variety of theories that have been put forward to understand the death and resurrection of Jesus. They are not mutually exclusive of course and may focus on a different 'problem'. Something to ponder as you think about them is 'what is the problem to be solved?'.

For example, is the problem personal sin to be forgiven or the presence of evil to be overcome? Are humans the cause of the fall and in need of mercy or victims of the fall in need of rescue? Is the cross and resurrection about humanity alone or relevant to the whole of creation? Is the death of Jesus essential to forgiveness? You might want to consider the experience of forgiveness in the Old Testament – look at Psalm 32.

You might want to imagine what was going on in the spiritual realm when Jesus was on the cross and in the tomb and think about what was going on in the being of the Trinity.

Theory	God's attribute	Goal	Object	Reference	Proponent
Recapitulation	Omnipotence	Reverse the fall	Satan	Romans 5:15-21	Irenaeus
Ransom	Wisdom	Defeat Satan	Satan	Mark 10:45	Origen
Moral example	Love	Revelation of love	Humanity	Romans 5	Pelagius Abelard
Satisfaction	Mercy	Restore the sinner	Humanity	1 John 2:1 Luke 19:10	Aquinas
Substitution	Justice	Appease wrath	God	Isaiah 42: 21	Calvin

The Cross of Love

Put forward by Peter Abelard (1079–1142) and developed by 19th century German F.D.E. Schleiermacher.

The death of Christ is the perfect example of sacrificial love. Its power to change lay in the effect it had on the sinner who, contemplating the events of Calvary, would be moved to love and repentance.

Brian Hebblethwaite wrote “God’s forgiving love does not depend on the death of Christ, but rather is manifested and enacted in it”

Key text: John 15:13

Evil Healed

Colin Gunton “Actuality of Atonement” (1988) and Vernon White “Atonement and Incarnation” (1991) argue that whereas there may be problems with classical theories of the atonement which make them unpalatable to post-modern culture, we need a robust answer the needs felt by humanity “for the real evil of the world ... (to be) healed ...” (Gunton) so the life, death and resurrection of Christ achieve something, constitute a change in the cosmos.

Key Text: 1Jn 3: 8. cp. Col. 2:15; 1:15 – 23

THE MYSTERY OF THE CROSS, the Church’s attempts to formulate an understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ, has led to many theories of the Atonement. These form a wide spectrum of models and are broadly summarised under four headings:

- > **the objective** (the Cross of Christ has worked a real difference in God and humanity),
 - > **the subjective** (the example of the Cross inspires love and devotion in humanity)
 - > **the constitutive** (Christ achieves something for us which makes salvation possible)
 - > **the illustrative** (the Cross reveals something which is eternally true of the nature of God).
- Clearly there is some overlap. And no one of them covers the whole of the NT witness.

The Satisfaction Theory

This approach was developed in the writing of St Anselm (1082–1109), who was Archbishop of Canterbury. The image of ‘satisfaction’ was borrowed from feudal law which stated that someone should make amends for an injury or offence by means of payment, compensation or punishment. Sin is an offence against God which required ‘satisfaction’. No human being was able to offer ‘satisfaction’ to God so God himself paid the debt owed.

Theologians at the time of the Reformation developed this theory in one particular direction which has become known as “Penal Substitution”. Martin Luther and John Calvin argued that Jesus bore the sins of humanity and suffered punishment in our place.

Key texts include: Mark 14: 24 ‘And he said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.” John 1: 29 ‘John . . . said, “Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”’ See also Romans 3: 23 – 25, 1 Cor. 5: 7, 15: 3.

The Cosmic Battle Theory

Developed in the second and third centuries by some of the early church Fathers (theologians whose writings are seen as important in the development of Christian doctrine) such as Irenaeus, Origen and Gregory the Great. Gustav Aulen gave this theory a new approach and popularity in the 20th century with his 1930/1 book “Christus Victor” (SPCK 1970), a view “re-mythologised” by Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich in existentialist terms, and recently re-worked by Paul Fiddes in “Past Event, Present Salvation “ (1989) “...the victory of Christ actually creates victory in us...The act of Christ is one of those moments in human history that ‘opens up new possibilities of existence.”

This position sees the cross as being the moment of victory in a cosmic battle between God and Satan (not taken literally in modern versions). Humanity had been in the clutches of Satan since the Fall. The death of Jesus was the ransom paid for our freedom.

Key texts include: Matthew 20: 28 ‘the Son of Man came ...to give his life as a ransom for many’. See also 1Pet. 1:17-20,

For a fuller summary of this discussion, see Alister McGrath “Christian Theology, an Introduction” 4th Edn. , chapter 13 “The Doctrine of Salvation in Christ” or his “Historical Theology”(1998) pp.282ff. Case Study 4.2 ‘The Basis and Nature of Salvation’

Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 3 Christ has died

Aim: To evaluate different interpretations of the death of Jesus
To reflect on how the cross speaks in our discipleship and ministry

Opening Prayer 5 mins

Opening up the Topic 10 mins

Place the crosses that you have brought on a central table and take some time to study them. As a group discuss anything that strikes you, whether the images are very different or whether there are common themes.

The cross in art 20 mins

Continue as a group. Can you recall any depictions of the cross that you found striking? Share any pictures that have been brought in.

Look at and discuss the picture by Fransisco Zurbaran – Agnus Dei or Bound Lamb – painted in the 1630s (page 26). What ideas about Christ's death do you think are being conveyed? What is your own reaction to this picture?

Traditional theories of the atonement 30 mins

Most of our contemporary beliefs about the atonement (shown on the diagram on the previous page) have been passed down through the centuries from as far back as the Apostolic Age – the time immediately following the New Testament period. These beliefs have gained a central place in Christian theology and are seen as classical or traditional theories. They are all seen as having strengths and weaknesses.

Group task

- Read through the quotations on the following page and decide which atonement theory they best describe.
- What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of each atonement theory in the diagram?

Thoughts about the Cross

'There is enormous dramatic beauty in this view, and part of its power lies in the fact that it seems to correspond to human experience. Life does often feel like a battle'. Bishop Richard Holloway

*'See from his head, his hands, his feet
Sorrow and love flow mingled down:
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown.'*

Isaac Watts

'The most common criticism of this view is that it is purely 'subjective'. All it effects is man's response to God's act of love...if it did not establish a different relationship between God and man, why was [the death of Jesus] necessary?'

Frances Young

What the cross is not...the Son standing in my place to take the punishment that I ought to have. Such a view is immoral...'

Bishop Hugh Montefiore

*When Satan tempts me to despair
And tells me of the guilt within
Upward I look and see Him there
Who made an end of all my sin
Because the sinless Saviour died
My sinful soul is counted free
For God the Just is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me
To look on Him and pardon me*

Charitie Lees Smith

'I know you because, in a way that's impossible to explain, I saw – I almost became each of you, during the three hours that I spent dying all those years ago on that hill...'

Adrian Plass

'Dualism: The belief that there are equal and opposite forces of good and evil at work in the universe. This is an old heresy which it is all too easy to fall into when speaking of the devil.'

Definition given in An Introduction to the Christian Faith

'[This] understanding of the cross is more powerful than it is sometimes given credit for. Love poured out in death does have a compelling effect. The price of love was high...'

Frances Young

'...the theory has had powerful psychological and evangelical force because one who responds to it feels that something objective has been done to resolve the guilty situation in which he finds himself...'

Frances Young

BREAK

More recent interpretations of the death of Jesus

10 mins

Images of the crucifixion produced in the 20th century, and particularly after the Second World War reveal a growing preoccupation with the idea of suffering and a change in emphasis on the death of Christ. Look at the pictures on the following pages and read the stories that inspired them.

What theological understanding do you find in each?

Jesus as 'Pain Bearer'

20 mins

The latter half of the twentieth century Christians have re-interpreted the death of Jesus to address issues such as suffering, social injustice and oppression. New 'theologies' have arisen to grapple with these questions in the shadow of the cross.

In the death of Jesus, **Liberation Theologians** see the example of being prepared to suffer on behalf of your fellow human beings including challenging evil political regimes. *Dom Helder Camara*, R.C. Archbishop of Olinda and Recife in Brazil, is famous for stating,

"When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a Communist".

At the time of the Vietnam War he wrote a tract urging the youth of the world to break the 'spiral of violence' to which their elders had become addicted.

Another (R.C.) Bishop, Oscar Romero of El Salvador spoke out to condemn human rights abuses. As he finished a homily at Mass in the Cathedral in 1980 he was assassinated by a right wing group.

The German theologian *Jurgen Moltmann* writes that the crucifixion and resurrection declare to suffering humanity that God suffered too and has conquered death. Indeed, his compatriot Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from his Nazi prison cell that only a suffering God can save.

In her book *Can These Dry Bones Live?* Frances Young sums up the sea change in thinking about the cross:

'If there is one thing that has emerged...it is that the meaning of the cross must be related in some way not just to sin, but to all suffering, all pain, all disaster, all injustice, all decay and death – indeed to all that is wrong with creation, human nature, and human society as we know it...'

Frances Young, *Can These Dry Bones Live?* SCM, 1982.

Group task

- Why do you think the emphasis on Christ's death has shifted?
- What interpretations of the cross speak most powerfully to the issues in your context?
- Does what we affirm in the creed in worship week by week have any real meaning today?

Closing Worship

5 mins

Sources for Quotations

Richard Holloway, Dancing On the Edge, (Fount Paperbacks, 1997)

Hugh Montefiore, Confirmation Notebook, (London: SPCK, 1984).

Adrian Plass, The Visit (Harper Collins, 1999)

Isaac Watts, 1674 – 1748, taken from the hymn 'When I Survey'

Frances Young, Can These Dry Bones Live? (London: SCM, 1982)

Look ahead: next preparation

5 mins



Agnus Dei by Francisco De Zurbarán (1598-1664)

The Lamb of God

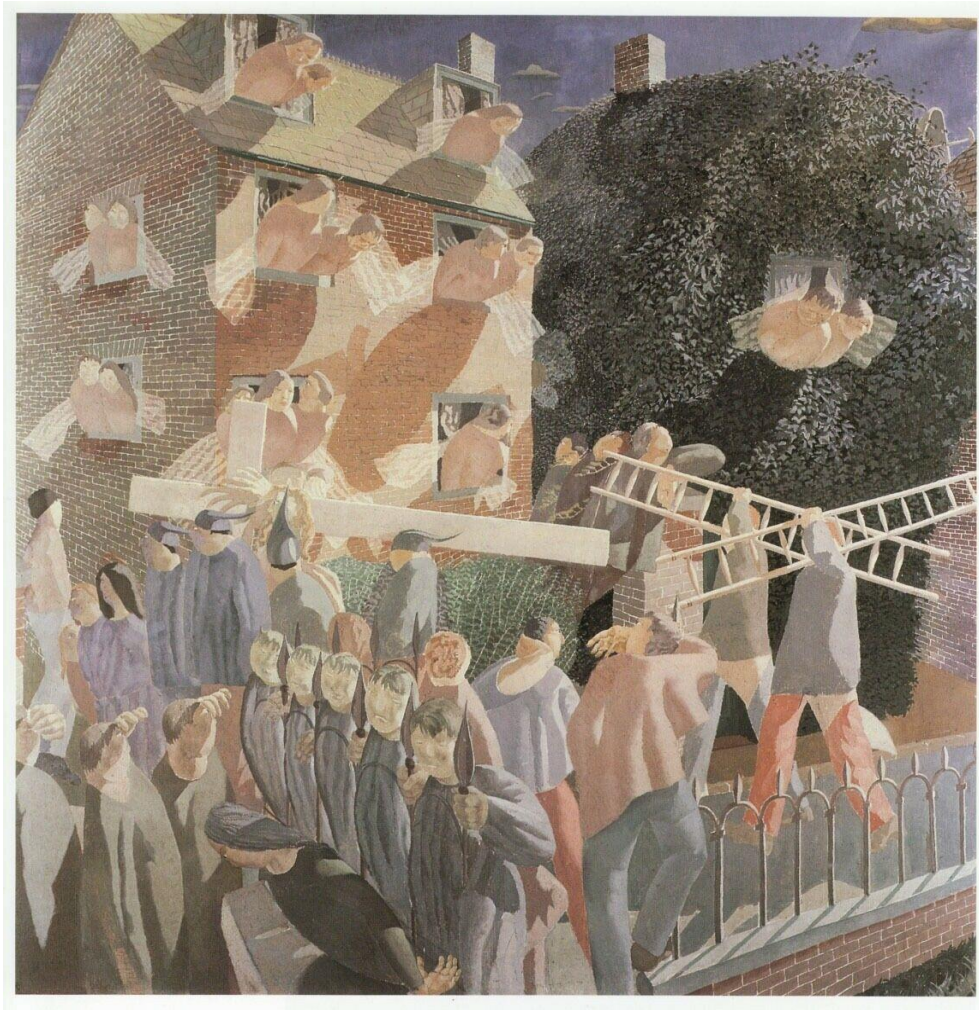
Zurbarán's paintings of lambs were widely admired. By setting the brilliant white lamb against the dark austere background, the artist has intensified the sense of the animal's physical presence. It is intended to represent the sacrifice of Christ and on some of the six painting he did, he included a faint halo.

The Old Testament offerings of an unblemished lamb came to be seen as a foreshadowing of the death of Christ, a sacrificial substitute for sinful humankind. In his letters, Peter makes the explicit comparison:

'You were not redeemed with corruptible things.... But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot'. 2 Peter 1. 18-19

And John in his gospel has John the Baptist, when he saw Jesus approaching, calling out,

'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' John 1.29

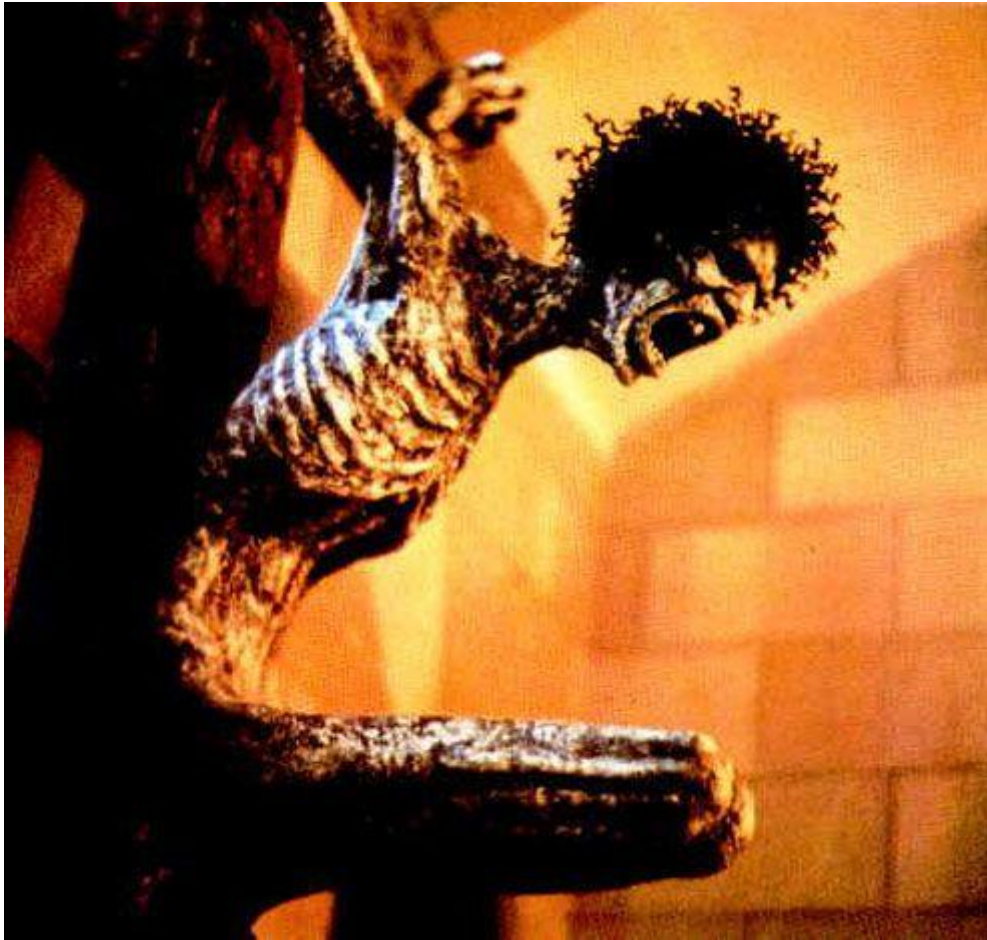


Christ Carrying The Cross by Stanley Spencer 1920

This picture locates the way of the cross in Cookham high street. The light seems to come from high up on the right as we look. The men on the bottom left are shielding their faces from it. The people are looking out of windows, the net curtains are blowing out rather like angels' wings as the people look all about. The presence of the ladders derives from what actually happened when Stanley Spencer was working on this composition. He saw workmen carrying ladders across the houses and this provided, as he put it "the reality of everyday life" The ladders are a visual echo of the shape of the cross. Women with doll-like faces are by the railings, which are in the shape of sharp spears suggesting violence. Christ himself is hidden under the cross whilst men with caps, perhaps bricklayers with hods, and a slight sense of Klu Klux Klan menace. Overall there is a sense of people being out and about and busy, with the procession to the crucifixion hardly noticed, lost amidst ordinary, everyday things.

The Tate Gallery originally mistitled this picture "Christ **Bearing** his Cross" which intensely irritated Stanley Spencer. As he said, the false title implied

*A sense of suffering which was not my intention. I particularly wished to convey the relationship between the carpenters behind him carrying the ladders and Christ in front carrying the cross. Each doing their job of work and doing it just like workmen . . . Christ was not doing **a** job or **his** job, but **the** job.*



‘The Tortured Christ’ – Guido Rocha, Brazil.

The Brazilian sculptor Guido Rocha depicted his own experience of torture, as well as that of others, in this sculpture of the tortured Christ. In his own cry of pain, Rocha remembered the Christ who carried our sins on the cross, so that this Golgotha-cry became for him the great promise. Here was a human being who while enduring the fiercest torments, still remained fully human right into the hour of truth, and by doing so fulfilled his mission of love...the agonized face of the dying Christ is not an image of revulsion, but a sign of hope.

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‘Pieta of Kwangju’ – Taeko Tomiyama.

Taeko Tomiyama grew up in the Manchuria province of China. During the labour strikes of 1960 she came into contact with mine workers, becoming increasingly involved in third world struggles... This ‘Pieta’ [an image of Mary with the dead Christ across her knees] was painted when the people’s occupation of the Korean city of Kwangju was brutally suppressed by the military.

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Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 4 Christ is risen Preparation

Read and think about the ideas put forward by Tom Wright in this quotation from his book *Following Jesus*:

‘When we speak of ‘following Christ’, it is the crucified Messiah we are talking about. His death wasn’t simply the messy bit which enables our sins to be forgiven but which can then be forgotten. The cross is the surest, truest and deepest window on the very heart and character of God; the more we learn about the cross, in all its historical and theological dimensions, the more we discover about the one in whose image we are made, and hence about our own vocation to be the cross-bearing people, the people in whose lives and service the living God is made known. And when therefore we speak...of shaping our world, we do not – we dare not – simply treat the cross as the thing which saves us ‘personally’, but which can be left behind when we get on with the job. The task of shaping our world is best understood as the redemptive task of bringing the achievement of the cross to bear on the world; and in that task the methods, as well as the message, must be cross-shaped through and through.’

N T Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*, (London: SPCK, 1994)

- What do you think it means to bring ‘the achievement of the cross to bear on the world’?
- What would that involve for you in your own life and ministry?
- What might cross-shaped methods look like?

Be prepared to share some of these reflections next week.

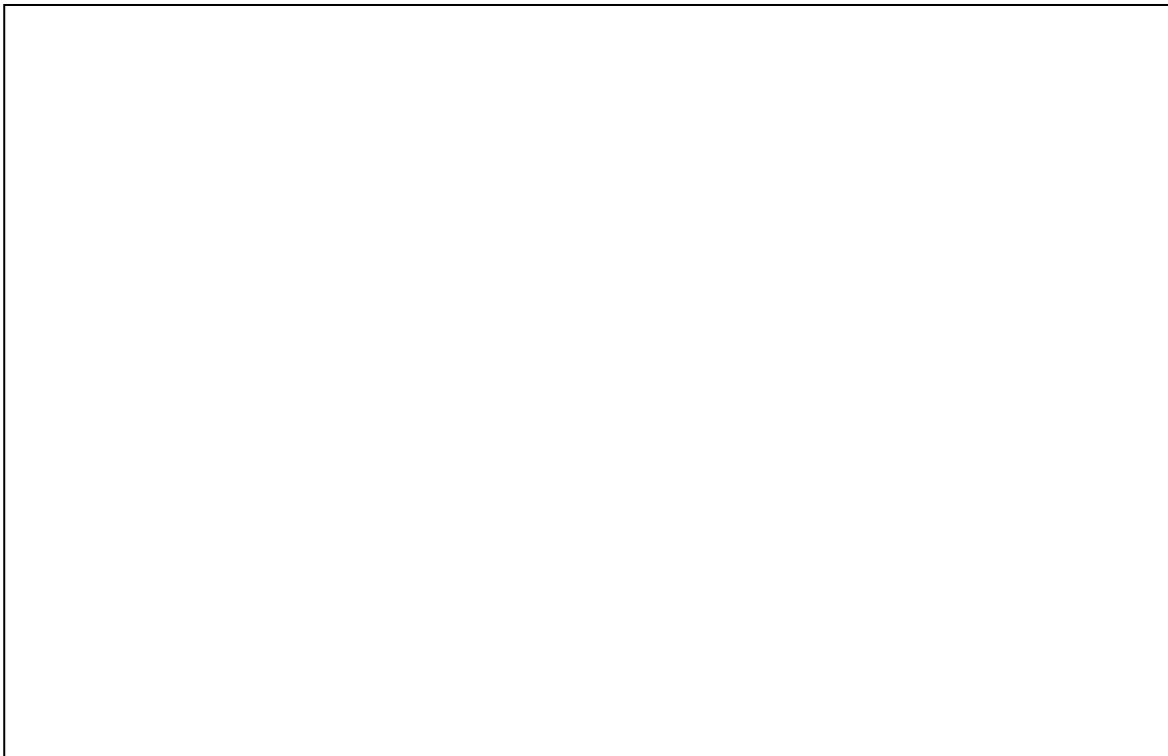
In preparation for our next session on the Resurrection, please read through:

- 1 Corinthians 15:1-34

You might try this in several translations of the Bible – including, if you can manage, one in another language (even if you're far from fluent!)

Now think:

- What happened to Jesus when he rose again?
- What did it mean for him as a human and as God?



Some theologians have argued that the resurrection can only be understood as a 'mythical' event which is not strictly verifiable as history. So, if the bones of Jesus were to be found in Palestine what would remain of the Christian faith?

Put aside a couple of newspapers, magazines or some images from the news to bring to the next session that illustrate current world issues.



Look at the Resurrection appearances of Jesus in each of the four Gospels and see what you notice.

Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 4 Christ is risen

Aim: To examine our belief in the resurrection of Jesus and to explore what implications this belief has on our life and ministry.

Opening Prayer and Review

10 mins

As a group, share any continuing insights and reflections from last week's session.

Opening up the topic

10 mins

Group task

- Discuss how Easter is celebrated in your home, your church, your culture
- What do these tell an onlooker about what you believe?

As a group, feedback and review your ideas.

Resurrection of the body or the immortality of the soul?

25 mins

The Christian belief in resurrection, first of Jesus and ultimately of all believers, speaks to us of a hope of life beyond death. But it is a much bigger idea than just the soul moving on to be with God at the end of the body's physical existence. The Christian story tells of the healing, life-giving, re-creating power of God breaking into the world of death and decay. Read the following quotation:

'We know of that Good Friday which Christianity holds to have been that of the Cross. But the non-Christian, the atheist, knows of it as well. This is to say that he knows of the injustice, of the interminable suffering, of the waste, of the brute enigma of ending, which so largely make up not only the historical dimension of the human condition, but the everyday fabric of our personal lives. We know... of the pain, of the failure of love, of the solitude which are our history and private fate. We also know about Sunday. To the Christian, that day signifies an intimation, both assured and precarious, both evident and beyond comprehension, of resurrection, of a justice and a love that have conquered death... The lineaments [distinguishing marks] of that Sunday carry the name of hope... But ours is the long day's journey of the Saturday.' (1)

George Steiner, *Real Presences*, University of Chicago, 1989.

As a group discuss your responses to the following questions:

- Many people in Britain today continue to believe in the survival of the spirit or soul after death. What do you think is different about our Christian belief in resurrection?
- What happened to Jesus (refer to your preparation) and will the same thing then happen to us?
- Again the question of 'heresy' might not be far away here – there are many ideas about life after death including reincarnation and 'intermediate states' ... what can and what can't we believe as Christians? How do we know what is 'orthodox' faith?
- The current slogan for Christian Aid is "We believe in life before death." How might this idea be seen as reflecting our resurrection faith?

BREAK

Making sense of the concept of Resurrection

20 mins

To understand this more fully we need to look at the Jewish background to the events of the first Easter.

Read through the information given below individually

One of the earliest accounts of the resurrection is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. This is thought to have been written in the early 50s CE. Paul testifies to the fact that the gospel as he received it proclaimed that Christ was raised from the dead, appeared to Peter, the twelve disciples and in excess of 500 other witnesses.

This gives us a glimpse into the very earliest days of the church: an incredible event, which the followers of Jesus spoke of as his Resurrection, transformed his defeated disciples and acted as the driving force behind their mission.

By using the word resurrection, the disciples were using the language of their Jewish faith. For them the idea of resurrection did not mean going on to be with God in some general sense. Look at one of the most vivid images of resurrection in the Old Testament in Ezekiel 37:1-14.

This passage was probably written at the time of the exile, sometime after 587 BCE when the refugees had all but lost hope. Ezekiel paints a vivid picture of God restoring his people. From this time on the word resurrection spoke of some sort of re-embodiment of God's people. This would happen when God finally forgave his people, ended their 'death' in exile, defeated their enemies and brought in the new age of God's Kingdom on earth. It would bring the old corrupt order of the world to an end and all the righteous dead would be raised to partake in the new creation.

Suddenly, against all expectations, the disciples began to claim that this had happened, not to the whole nation of Israel, but to one person – Jesus – in the middle of the present age.

As a group have a conversation about what thought and feelings this raises for you.

The meaning of Jesus' Resurrection

15 mins

In spite of what Jesus might have said during his time with them, the disciples did not appear to anticipate his Resurrection. In the light of the events of Easter the first Christians had to adjust their world-view. What had happened? Bishop Hugh Montefiore argues that, for Paul, Jesus' resurrection meant that:

- Jesus' ministry had been affirmed by God (Romans 1:4)
- The cross is God's means of ending the 'exile' of the whole of creation and defeating evil and death (Phil 2:9ff; Romans 8:1ff)
- The New Age of God's rule, His Kingdom, had broken into the old order (Romans 6:8ff)
- Those who belong to Christ are given assurance of also being raised to life (1Cor.15:20)

Hugh Montefiore, *Confirmation Notebook The Content of Christian Belief*, SPCK, 1984.

Questions for the group

- Do any of these truths depend on Jesus' bodily resurrection in history?
- What does the group think of theologians who prefer to think of the resurrection as a 'myth'?

Refer to your preparation here.

Resurrection people

20 mins

Group task

As Christians, we are called to allow the power of the crucified and risen Christ to live and work through us.

Go through the words, images, headlines you brought that reflect 'the exile' of the world.

Put some of the themes that emerge on post-it notes.

Bring these post-its back to the whole group and place them so everyone can see them.

As you look at them, ponder what the resurrection life of Christ made manifest in our lives and ministries might mean to them.

Closing Worship

5 mins

Light a large candle in the centre to symbolise the resurrection. Each member lights a votive candle from the main one, or from each other.

Standing in a circle some members of the group read out loud the comforting sentences of scripture spoken at the start of the funeral service.

'I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord, those who believe in me, even though they die, will live and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die' John 11:25-26

'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life' John 3:16

'Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. So we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.' 1 Thessalonians 4:14, 17-18

'The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is his faithfulness' Lamentations 3:22-23

Conclude by all saying the words of the Grace to each other.

Look ahead: next preparation

5 mins

Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 5 Christ will come again Preparation

A key Christian doctrine is that Jesus will return to renew creation and inaugurate the Kingdom of God in all its fulness. This week we will be focussed on the first three Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke (known collectively as the Synoptic Gospels) to help us think about themes of the Kingdom. In Matthew this is referred to as the 'Kingdom of Heaven'; in Mark and Luke's Gospel as the 'Kingdom of God'. Jesus begins his ministry with his proclamation: 'Turn away from your sins, because the Kingdom of heaven is near'. Matthew 4:17.

In Christian theology the Kingdom of God is considered both to have come with the incarnation of Jesus and is active in the present, but the Kingdom is also yet to come in fulness when Jesus returns in glory – this is summed up in the phrase 'the now and the not yet'. We live in these between times. Think of some examples from the Gospels that reflect each of the following themes. You might want to refer to Appendix 3.

God's Kingdom now

God's Kingdom to come

Parables in the synoptic Gospels

Jesus made extensive use of **parables** in his teaching.

John Drane tells us that Jesus' parables are essentially to teach us about God's Kingdom. They teach about:

- **the character of the King** - God's love for the undeserving (lost sheep, father with two sons)
- **our response to the King** - Repentance of younger son; prayers of the tax collector; the son who didn't want to work in the vineyard but then does (Matt 21:28-31)
- **the community of the King** - forgiving and merciful. Parable of debt-forgiven person who yet enforces debt on another (Matt 18:21-35); the role model of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)
- **the kingdom to come** - often by depicting Jesus returning as the heavenly, supernatural son of man – parable of corn and weeds (Matt 13:24-30), parable of sheep and goats (Matt 25:31-46), parable of great feast (Luke 14:15-24).

These simple stories, grounded in the everyday world of the listeners, were rich in meaning and often disturbing; subverting cultural norms. For example, Jesus made a despised Samaritan the hero of his story of loving your neighbour. John Drane says this "The parables of Jesus are more like works of art than discourses on religion and like all art their characters and situations have a correspondingly universal quality that can be understood by anyone, for they deal with the basic condition of what it means to be human."

In Ignatian spirituality the reader is encouraged to engage with the parable imaginatively: to be in the story or in the crowd hearing the story – to conjure the sights, sounds, thoughts and feelings of being present in it; to notice where their attention becomes focused and explore what God might be wanting to reveal to them through it. It is a practice of reading scripture with an expectation that it is the living word of God and God speaks to us through it.

Choose a parable and read it in the imaginative and prayer way described above.

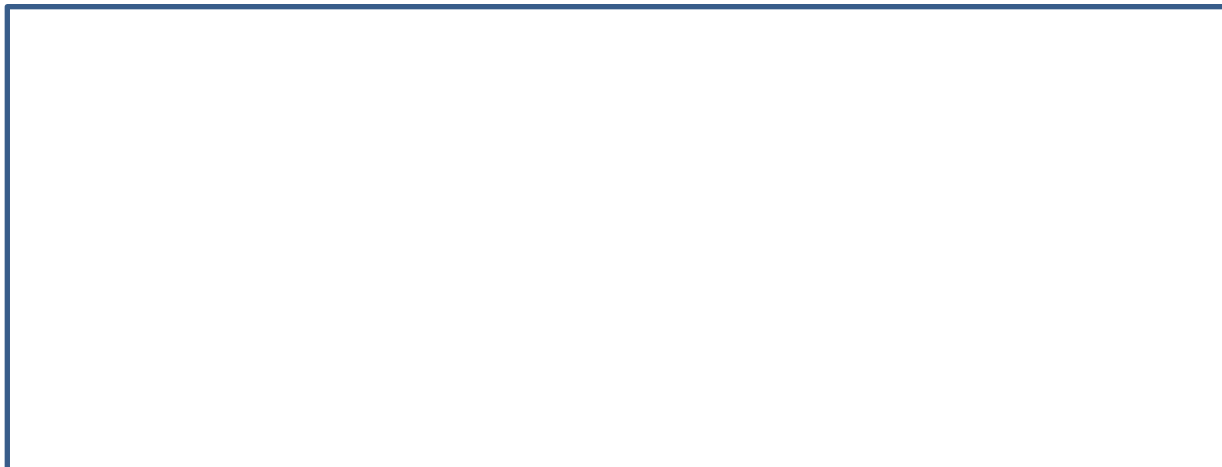


The coming Kingdom

You might want to listen to the following pieces of music on YouTube:

- Lo he comes with clouds descending
- I can only imagine

What ideas do you have about the coming Kingdom of God? You might want to describe them in the box below:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for a student to write their ideas about the coming Kingdom of God.

Read

Ezekiel 37:1-14

or

1 Corinthians 15:35-57

What do these passages suggest to you about the coming kingdom?

Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 5 Christ will come again

Aims: To describe and explore Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God
To think about the nature of the kingdom to come

Opening Prayer 5 mins

Reflection on the preparation 15 mins

The Kingdom of God in the present 30 mins

Note down on a flipchart some ideas from the 2 questions below:

1. What are the characteristics of the Kingdom of God?
2. What are the signs of the Kingdom of God in the world today?

Consider the idea that 'the Church has been established as a foretaste, an outpost, a witness to the Kingdom of God' – Jesus uses the imagery of light, salt, yeast to illustrate this.

What do you think about this?

Think of some examples of the church embodying the Kingdom well.

Looking at what you have recorded on the flipchart

How can you church grow in this calling to witness to the Kingdom of God?

BREAK

Kingdom of God to come 30 mins

Take some time to imagine the Kingdom of God that is to come

What thoughts, feelings and images arise?

What do you find comforting and what do you find perplexing or disturbing?

Group task

If each group takes a couple of the following passages and thinks about the questions below:

Revelation 7: 9-17

Luke 14: 15-24

Isaiah 35

Isaiah 2:1-5

Ezekiel 37:1-14

1 Corinthians 15:35-57

- What do these passages suggest about the Kingdom to come?
- What imagery is being used and what can we infer about the reality of the Kingdom to come?

When the groups come back to together have a conversation about the thoughts and feelings that emerged from the groups.

Living in the 'now and the not yet'

20 mins

Our understanding of the Kingdom of God shapes how we live out our faith.

Christians throughout history have placed a greater emphasis on the 'Kingdom that has come' or the 'Kingdom yet to come'.

- What might an emphasis on the 'Kingdom that has come' look like?
- What might an emphasis on the 'Kingdom to come' look like?
- What are the strengths and limitations on these approaches?
- What does living both in the 'now and the not yet' mean for you?

Closing worship

10 mins

The Lord's Prayer has been central to the prayers and worship of Christians for 2000 years. Daily we pray:

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever
Amen.

Spend some time thinking about those words and what it is you are praying for.

Then join together in praying the Lord's Prayer.

Look ahead: next preparation

5 mins

In the next session we are going to be thinking about the Holy Spirit.

In preparation, half the group needs to investigate the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament and half the New Testament – decide who will be in which group.

Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 6 We Believe in the Holy Spirit Preparation

Take some time to think about what worries you in life and why you worry.

Jot these thoughts down if you find it helpful.



Read the following extract from Tom Wright's book *Following Jesus*:

Do you know what the most frequent commandment in the Bible turns out to be?

Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. Fear not. Don't be afraid...

This surprising command bursts in upon a world in which we eat, sleep and breathe fear. We emerge from the warmth of the womb into the cold cosmos, and we're afraid of being alone, of being unloved, of being abandoned...

And these are just the big ones. There are dozens of lesser fears which reinforce and feed on each other...Behind them all looms the fear of death...

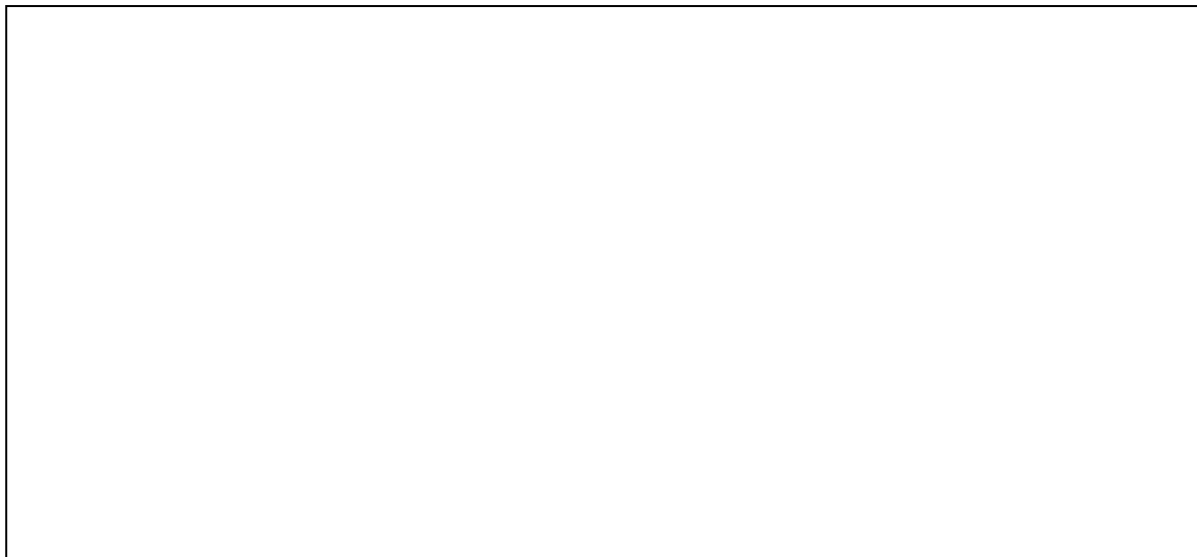
So you see why this command, 'Don't be afraid,' is one of the hardest of all to keep...

And the resurrection of Jesus issues the surprising command: don't be afraid; because the God who made the world is the God who raised Jesus from the dead, and calls you now to follow him...Believing in this God means believing that it is going to be all right; and this belief is, ultimately incompatible with fear. As John says in his letter, perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4.18). And the resurrection is the revelation of perfect love, God's perfect love for us, his human creatures. That's why, though we may at any stage in our lives grasp the truth that God raised Jesus from the dead, it takes us all our life long to let that belief soak through and permeate the rest of our thinking, feeling and worrying lives.' (3)

N T Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*, SPCK, 1994

Reflect on:

- What do we – as individuals and communities - need to help us receive the hope of the Resurrection with our innermost being?
- What role do you think the Holy Spirit plays in this process?



The Holy Spirit in scripture

Half the group needs to investigate the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament and half the New Testament.

Look up the Bible references listed and jot down some information on:

- the role of the Spirit,
- the images used for the Spirit
- the implied relationship with God.

Group 1: The Old Testament

The most usual Hebrew word for Spirit is *ruach*. However, *ruach* has a variety of meanings and associations. This makes it difficult for us to translate *ruach* with just one English word.

As you look up these references see if you can detect the wide range of ideas linked to the “spirit” or *ruach*.

Genesis 1:2, 2:7, 41:38-9

Job 26:12-13

Exodus 14:21, 35:31

Isaiah 61:1

Deut. 34:9

Ezekiel 37:9-10

Judges 14:6

Zechariah 7:12

1 Samuel 10:6

 Group 2: The New Testament

Matthew 1:18, 10:20

1Corinthians 12:4-6

John 3:8 4:24, 14:26, 20:22

2 Thessalonians 2:13

Romans 8:9,26

Luke 4:18

Ephesians 4:4-6

Mark 1:10,12

Galatians 4:6

Acts 2:4, 9:17

Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 6 We Believe in the Holy Spirit

Aim: To examine aspects of our belief in God as Holy Spirit and to reflect on the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Opening Prayer	5 mins
Reflection on the preparation	15 mins
.	
The Spirit of God	10 mins

‘Mention of the Holy Spirit summons up much confusion.’

Philip Yancey, *Reaching For the Invisible God*, Zondervan, 2000.

Philip Yancey goes on to name some of the problems in case you couldn’t think of any for yourself! Similarly, a report by the Doctrine Commission for the Church of England called *We Believe in the Holy Spirit* suggests

‘...all instructed Christian believers and certainly all theological thinkers have heard that there is a Holy Spirit, but many Christian people have not paid much attention to the Spirit in their thinking and praying. Whitsun (or Pentecost) as a festival does not attract many more worshippers than does an ordinary Sunday . . .(2)

We Believe in the Holy Spirit, Church House Publishing, 1993

It is against this background of relative neglect that there have been the many dramatic charismatic revivals of the twentieth century which some might say have further clouded the issue. (It is estimated that there are now 560 million Pentecostal / Charismatic Christians in the world – who draw their inspiration from a single revival which began in 1908!)

What do you think? As a group discuss your responses to the above quotes.

What problems or difficulties do you think surround this area of our faith?

If there is neglect of the Holy Spirit, what evidence would you cite and what causes could you suggest? Is it like chasing the wind – who or what is the Holy Spirit?

The witness of the Bible	40 mins
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Let us begin our ‘pursuit’ of the Holy Spirit by examining the various words, pictures and actions attributed to the Spirit in the Bible.

Group task

Divide into your two research groups (Old and New Testament). Prepare a *short* presentation for the other group feeding back information on:

- words and images used for the Spirit
- whether the images and action of the Spirit are male, female or inanimate
- the implied relationship with God
- the work or action of the Spirit

At the end of the presentations, draw out any points of continuity or discontinuity between the picture of the Spirit in the two Testaments.

- How do the writers of the New Testament develop ideas and images present in the Old Testament?
- What is unique about their understanding or experience of the Holy Spirit?
- Overall is the Holy Spirit presented as a “he”, “she”, or an “it”?

BREAK

The witness of the Church

15 mins

The importance of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the early church is seen clearly in the New Testament but the exact nature of the Spirit remains elusive. “God is Spirit”, declared Jesus (John 4:24), a concept that would have almost certainly been familiar to the first Christians. They identified their experience of the Holy Spirit with the activity of God recorded in the Old Testament but, equally, they seemed aware that something new was taking place.

Theologians of the following centuries were hesitant to speak openly of the Spirit as “God” and as late as 380 CE there was confusion as to whether to treat the Holy Spirit as an activity, as a creator, or as God. Towards the end of the fourth century, however, the full divinity of the Holy Spirit was worked out in terms of His distinctive role and relation to the Father and Son.

Our belief in the Holy Spirit speaks of a God who is at work personally in the lives of believers, the Church and the world.

The Christian tradition has generally understood the work of the Holy Spirit to encompass three areas:

Revelation - the making known of God to humanity

Sanctification - the transforming of humanity into God-likeness

Empowerment – endowing the church with the gifts of the Spirit

Discerning the Spirit

15 mins

Individually, begin to reflect on how the Holy Spirit works in your life and church. (5 minutes)

You might find it helpful to focus on one of the three areas listed above.

How would you describe how the Spirit works in your life?

What do you feel enables you to be more open to the Spirit of God?

Come back as a whole group and share some of your reflections. (10 minutes)

Closing Worship

10 mins

Focus: contemplation of the Holy Spirit by using appropriate music, candles, pictures or verses.

Look ahead: next preparation

5 mins

Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 7 The witness of John Preparation

We looked at the Synoptic Gospels of Mathew, Mark and Luke a few weeks ago with their emphasis on the Kingdom of God, we also considered their use of parables. We will now turn our minds to the Gospel of John. This account of the life of Jesus has a different feel to the other Gospels. One of its features is the 'I am' saying of Jesus. These recall Moses' meeting with God, the one who revealed himself as 'I am' (Exodus 3:14). It emphasises the identity of Jesus as divine.

Feeding on the Word

Over the coming week you are encouraged to focus on one of the 'I am' sayings of Jesus. You might want to try different ones in the weeks ahead but for this week, at the start of each day, spend at least two minutes reciting this saying slowly

'I am the resurrection and the life'

Leave pauses between, chew over the words in your mind and allow space for the saying to speak to you.

During the day let it come back into your mind prompted by whatever you are doing.

St Anthony, a fourth century hermit, likens this to living more like a camel than a horse. He wrote

'A camel needs only a little food; it keeps it within until it returns to the stable. It lets the food come up again and ruminates on it until the food enters the camel's bones and flesh. The horse, however eats all the time and soon loses what it has eaten. Let us not be like a horse, continually reciting the words of God without obeying them. Let us rather resemble the camel, reciting the word of God and retaining it within us until we have lived it'.

Write in this box a couple of things that this phrase says to you.

The Gospel of John

Look through the Gospel of John and note the stories within it. What ones are found in the other Gospels and which ones are unique. Think about a passage that only appears in John's Gospel – why do you think he might have included it? Note down your thoughts below:



David Ford writes in the introduction to his commentary:

*'of all the Gospels, John is most concerned with the individual, both in encounters with Jesus and in his teaching. The Good Shepherd calls each by name. Because Jesus is risen and is present as God is present, the event of reading about Jesus can also be the event of meeting him – one to one. What this means is that you yourself are in his presence, loved by him as was the author of the Gospel, and invited deeper, broader, higher, and forever into an abundance of meaning, life, and love.'*¹

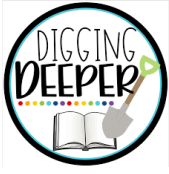
Ford identifies that the key theme in the narrative is 'who Jesus is'. The signs John records and the 'I am' statements he includes all underline Jesus identity as the 'Word made flesh'. John's Gospel also gives the fullest attention to the Holy Spirit, passages we looked at last week.

Further reading

Have a look at the other 'I am' statements – which one means the most to you today?

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| John 6: 48 | 'I am the bread of life' |
| John 8: 12 | 'I am the light of the world' |
| John 10: 7 | 'I am the gate for the sheep' |
| John 10: 11 | 'I am the good shepherd' |
| John 14: 6 | 'I am the way, the truth and the life' |
| John 15: 5 | 'I am the vine, you are the branches' |

¹ Ford DF (2021) **The Gospel of John: a theological commentary** Baker Academic, Grand Rapids



Digging deeper into the Bible

In Term One we looked at ways to approach reading the bible and we will now take this a little further. Some methods of understanding the Bible are below:

Style of writing or 'literary genre': Recognising the type of literature such as history, poetry, story, letters, apocalyptic will inform how we might interpret it.

Language study: The Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Most of us will rely on the endeavours of others to get at the 'best translation'. These are ancient languages and so there is a degree of debate on how they should be rendered into English.

Manuscript (or Textual) Analysis: Sections of scripture were copied out by hand and distributed to communities of faith. Textual analysis attempts to establish the earliest versions which are considered to be the most authentic version of the original text.

Contextual Analysis: This approach seeks to understand the historical, social and cultural setting into which text was written. This enables the interpretation of the piece through the lens of its original author and listeners.

Redaction Analysis or Criticism: The Gospel writers are more like editors of others' stories and material. Our best hypothesis is that both Matthew and Luke used Mark as one of their sources their variations help us to see their theological emphasis. There is also a theory that an independent source for some of the synoptics exists which is called "Q" (from the German word 'Quelle' for source) by the scholars.

John uses stories differently from Matthew, Mark and Luke, essentially as a basis for teaching. Stories may have been recounted in the early church in particular settings such as worship or teaching. They were not written down in the form we have until 30+ years after they took place and even then most people could not read and were still dependent on hearing, not reading, the Word. This remained so for the vast majority of Christian disciples over the past 2,000 years.

Finally the editors also put something of themselves into the finished product, just as a newspaper editor may change an emphasis here or there in a report – this process is called **redaction**.

Narrative Criticism or Analysis: tries to see what the narrator is seeking to express and also what the hearers may have understood – and how it speaks to us now – especially since we bring our own pre-understandings of the text to it.

And there is more! **Social scientific approaches** use social science and anthropology to understand the texts.. **Rhetorical Criticism** looks for the way in which the author has written or arranged the material in order to persuade the reader based on rhetorical methods of speaking to persuade in

public in the ancient world. There are also **'ideological' approaches** which understand the texts to be written from particular ideological standpoints which marginalise some readers – for instance the poor and women.

Left brain vs right brain

Most of the above is using our ability to learn information, analyse and do reasoned thinking which we now know is processed through the left side of our brain. The right side of our brain draws on all the senses, has ability to visualise and imagine and be powered by music and poetry. Down the ages the Church has recognised this 'right-sided opening up' to the Bible in paintings and stained glass (and now films and video clips); mystery plays; sensual worship; slow reading and repetition of bible texts; imagining bible scenes, music. So on this course we attempt to introduce you to learning with the right side of your brain.

Standing in others' shoes: We use our imagination to enter into a bible incident from a range of perspectives. We can imagine ourselves as different characters within the story, as the first hearers or someone today who has no faith experience.

Engaging our feelings: recognising and naming the emotions that arise as we engage with the Bible passage and then exploring these in prayer – what might these emotions be revealing to us?

Imaginative Picturing: helps us reflect on ourselves usually in the setting of a bible incident e.g. at the foot of the cross, in the upper room.

Meditative or Contemplative Reflection: Meditative means using a bible passage as a starting point and letting your thoughts flow – preachers often prepare like this. To contemplate, however, is to try to keep the mind focused usually on a particular word or phrase.

The variety of approaches means that we can misuse the Bible if we only use one or two of these methods – we can find a text to justify almost any action, belief or attitude – so we must beware of

- ❑ taking a verse out of context – known as 'proof-texting'
- ❑ reading back into the Bible things from our own culture
- ❑ using the bible to blame people today, e.g. the Jews, other races
- ❑ refusing to listen to other or broader understandings of the text

Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 7 The witness of John

Aims: To describe and examine a wide range of approaches to NT study

To use 'right-brain' approaches on some texts of St. John's gospel

Opening Prayer 5 mins

Reflection on the preparation 15 mins

Exploring St John's Gospel 30 mins

*'... written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah,
the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life'*

John 20:31.

Hans Ruedi Weber (who for many years led Bible studies for the World Council of Churches) says John's Gospel invites prayer and meditation rather than intellectual analysis. It is a vision of Jesus rather than a story or explanation of him.

Group task

Break into three groups

In your groups prepare a 5 minute presentation around the 3 tasks outlines below.

Group I: Declaring the Message – John 1:1-18

This well-known opening to John's Gospel seems unlike the rest of the Gospels and could be an attempt to attract those immersed in Greek philosophy. Lesslie Newbigin in his book *'Proper Confidence'* makes the following comment on this passage (pp4-5)

The writer of the Fourth Gospel begins by introducing the word logos [the Word], a word familiar to readers in the world of the Eastern Mediterranean, whether Greek or Hebrew.

For the former, it referred to the ultimate impersonal entity which was at the heart of all coherence in the cosmos. An Indian analogy would be the word dharma. For the latter it referred to the living, personal Lord by which he had created the cosmos and continues to sustain it. Here contact is made with the reader. It is a familiar word, and we know roughly

what it means. Immediately however the writer uses words which threaten to break off all contact: "The Word became flesh." The logos is identified with a man named Jesus whose story the writer is about to tell.

The reader now has two possibilities. He can shut the book. The writer is apparently talking nonsense. There is no way within the thought-world of either a Greek or a Jew in which the logos could be identified with a particular human being....As long as the accepted patterns of Greek and Jewish thought continue in place, this writing makes no possible sense.

The other possibility is to read on, to listen to those who tell the story...

Your task is to present a contemporary version of this passage to show what Jesus Christ has to offer our 21st century world.

Group 2: Getting into other's shoes – John 4:1-26.

Jesus meets the Samaritan Woman at the well. The context tells us:-

- True Jews would consider Samaritans as heretics and unclean. They hate each other.
- A woman and a man do not meet up alone unless it is for some dishonourable purpose.
- A woman coming alone at noon in the full heat of the day to draw water, meant that she was outcast from other women and probably her many marriages and liaisons were the subject of local gossip.

Your task is to get familiar with the story so that you can retell the story – telling the gist of the story, not the exact text. Imagine that you are telling the story to help **three groups of people, who would be upset by it**, to learn from it. Try to see why they might be upset:-

Jesus' close disciples

Other Samaritan women

Temple priests

Begin the retelling by asking different group members to get into the shoes of these groups of people.

Group 3: Imaging Holy Spirit

Use **one** of the following sets of passages:

Jn.3:3-8;

Jn.4:14 & 7:37-39;

Jn.16:7-15. (John is often seen as providing the most coherent teaching about the Holy Spirit).

Tease out what Jesus' teaching means for his hearers and for us, discuss how the Spirit might be welcomed, think about how people might struggle.

Then on flip chart paper, create a few several simplified cartoons to show some of these welcomes/struggles. Include speech bubbles and think bubbles. These don't have to be works of art, the idea is that they capture an essence of how the Spirit comes.

BREAK

Presentations

20 mins

Imaginative thinking John 20:19-23

20 mins

Someone from the group can lead this form of reflection based around the exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola ².

- Encourage everyone to settle into a comfortable position
- Read the passage slowly
- Encourage the group to take some deep breaths and relax, then imagine themselves in the room, its sights and smells. The feelings they might experience at the beginning of the passage and then through the unfolding story.
- Read the passage again
- Leave 5-8 minutes of silence
- Gently bring them back together with a word of prayer

After this exercise, share in 2's and 3's particularly reflecting on 'how this experience felt'.

Final prayer

² Ignatius of Loyola (1495-1556) was founder of the Society of Jesus or Jesuits. He emphasized the use of the imagination and the senses to experience scripture in order to moved the Christian towards more Christ-like standards.

Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 8 The growth of the early church Preparation

An overview of the New Testament

The New Testament has a number of different types of writing that can be summarised as:

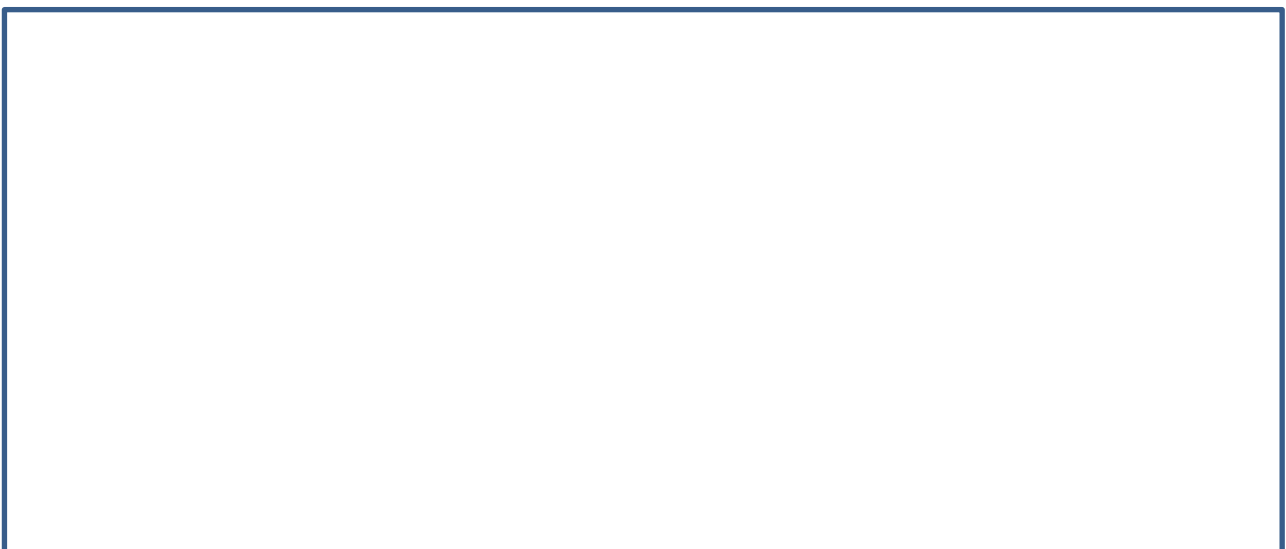
- the **earliest writings** – the Epistles, letters written to churches in the diaspora
- the **Gospels** – stories from the life of Jesus
- The **Acts of the Apostles** – an account of the growth in the early church
- **Revelation** – a mystical vision revealed to St John

These accounts were written to particular people, in particular places, at a particular time and for a particular purpose. Reading the Epistles is like listening to one half of a telephone conversation in which we have to assume what has been said at the other end of the line. But these books have shaped Christian theology and doctrine and continue to do so. As we interpret New Testament literature we can reflect on what is particular to the original readers and what is general for all disciples – we may come to different conclusions on this!

This week we will turn our attention to the Book of Acts which tells us something of the people, culture and issues faced by the early church and the emergence of Christian doctrines.

Flick through the book of Acts and notice some of the stories, people and places mentioned.

Come up with your own summary of some of the significant events in the growing Christian Church and note them below.



Bible Project – watch the Overview of Acts video

Read Acts 2

Take some time to reflect on the events recorded in this passage.

What are the words, phrases or thoughts that emerge for you?

What are the key messages here for the church today?



When we hear the term 'early church', it is easy to assume there was one example of 'being' church. But this is not so. Corinth... Philippi ... Smyrna ... Laodicea ... all were different places with their own distinct way of being church. Throughout New Testament times the church was as mixed a bag as the church is today.

There are two issues for us in using the New Testament as the source of Christian doctrine. The first is the nature of the New Testament itself: it's simply not written as a single entity with the express purpose of developing theology. It's a collection of writings, some of them, like Luke's Gospel, written to make good that which is lacking in previous attempts (cp. Luke 1:1 -4 cp. Acts 1:1 – 4). And many of them coming from or even written into, very different contexts and expressing very different encounters with the Risen Christ.

The second issue is that of language and culture. The two are inextricably bound together: language shapes our culture and our culture shapes our language –if we translate something into another language, we can change everything.

An example of this is the word 'talent'. What does it mean? Britain's got it – but what is it? In our culture it means a skill, preferably a marketable skill. But in the King James Version (KJV) it meant a large ingot of silver (cp. Ex. 25:39 and Matt. 25:15). And this is where the English word comes from, the KJV translation (or, in reality, transliteration – a spelling out of a word from a language with a different script into one's own language's script). The Greek *talanton* is simply a large denomination of currency. But successive preachers have made this parable about using our skills, our gifts, for the Lord, that talent has come to mean just that.

Unity and Diversity in the New Testament

Professor James Dunn, in his book of this title (SCM 1977 and reprinted), observes:
"...when we ask ... what both unifies and marks out the distinctiveness of first-century Christianity, the unifying strand narrows again and again to Christ alone. As soon as we move beyond it, as soon as we begin to attempt to fill it out in word or practice, diversity quickly becomes as prominent as unity. And the more we attempt to add to it, the more disagreement and controversy we find ourselves caught up in" (p. 371f.)

In the early church there were several huge divides in the immediate context for the first believers:

- Were they Jews or Gentiles?
- If Jews, were they coming from the more conservative or liberal traditions (Pharisees or Sadducees)?
- If they were Gentiles, were they coming from the western traditions of Greek and Roman philosophy or the Eastern traditions of mystery religions and syncretism?
- Were they slaves or free
- Roman or Greek
- Men or women

Given this complexity we can hardly be surprised at the diversity of the New Testament, and so we should handle it with great care in using it to form or illustrate Christian doctrine.

Dunn lists some common characteristics of NT Christianity:

- a common 'offer' of forgiveness, salvation and the Spirit.
- Monotheism
- a shared tradition about Jesus
- the Jewish Scriptures with Christianity seen as the fulfilment of Israel
- baptism in the name of Jesus
- a common meal to remember him
- a personal experience of the Holy Spirit
- love of neighbour as evidence of loving God
- an expectation of the imminent parousia (Second Coming)

But he repeats the one unifying strand was Christ crucified and risen.

In short, Charismatic, Catholic, Conservative Evangelical, Liberal, Fresh Expressions can all be found in the pages of the New Testament.

Language

The New Testament was written in a form of Greek known as "Common Greek", a simplified version of Greek as different from the language of Plato and Aristotle as modern English is from that of Shakespeare. This Common Greek was the day-to-day language of the Roman Empire. So as soon as we translate the Bible into our language, we begin the task not only of translation, but of interpretation. This in turn means that we begin to make theological and cultural assumptions about the text, and to import those assumptions into the text, no matter how carefully we try not to do so.

Furthermore, the Greek of the New Testament was not the language of Jesus and his first disciples – the Greek is already a translation, in both language and culture! Jesus and his disciples spoke Aramaic. This was the imperial language of the Assyrians who dominated the Near East from about 700–320 B.C.E.

Aramaic is found in the Bible, where portions of Ezra and Daniel are in Aramaic, and a few words of it survive in the NT. The writing on the wall at Belshazzar's Feast was in Aramaic. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, the remains of the library of a Jewish sect from around the turn of the Era, are many compositions in Aramaic. These new texts also provide the best evidence for Palestinian Aramaic of the sort used by Jesus and his disciples.

Since the Jews spoke Aramaic, and knowledge of Hebrew was no longer widespread, the practice arose in the synagogue of providing the reading of the sacred Hebrew scriptures with an Aramaic translation or paraphrase, a "Targum". In the course of time a whole array of targums for the Law and other parts of the Bible were composed. More than translations, they incorporated much of traditional Jewish scriptural interpretation.

Although Jesus spoke Aramaic, the Gospels are in Greek, and only rarely quote actual Aramaic words. Look up these references and you will find the sum total of Jesus' own language in our New Testament.

<u>Reference</u>	<u>Aramaic words</u>	<u>English translation</u>
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Mark 5:41		
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Mark 7:34		
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Mark 14:36		
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Romans 8:15		
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Galatians 4:6		
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1Corinthians		
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16:22 (<i>You'll need a KJV to see the Aramaic!</i>)*		
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And a Hebrew word at Mark 7:11

* The original word was almost certainly two words in Paul's original (only one ancient text has it as one word, which would be possible in Aramaic). But which two words? Moving the third 'a' from the first word to the second (maran atha) changes the meaning from a future to a past tense: both are true, but very different. Assuming this lies behind Rev.22:20, almost certainly a future tense is intended, making this a prayer, not a statement of fact.

Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 8 The growth of the early church

Aim: To explore the way the Good News about Jesus was translated in the days of the Apostles and those who followed them

To see what we may have lost and what we may have gained

To consider how this affects the life and mission of ourselves and our church today

Prayer 5 mins

Reflection on the preparation 15 mins

Exploring Acts 30 mins

- What do we know about the author of Acts and what was his purpose in writing?
- Have a flick through Acts and list some of the stories in it
- Which ones stand out for you and why?

Stephen Travis tells us in *'Starting with the New Testament'* that Acts divides into 6 sections:

1:1-6:7	The earliest Church in Jerusalem
6:8-9:31	Church grows in Samaria and beyond
9:32-12:24	First outreach to Gentiles in Palestine and Syria
12:25-16:5	Paul's missionary journeys to Cyprus and Asia Minor
16:6-19:20	Paul takes the good news into Europe
19:21-28:31	Paul's final journey to Rome

In pairs, find out what you can about some of these early missionaries:

Peter	2:1-8, 14-17
Stephen	7:51-56, 6:1-6
Philip	8:4-5, 8:26-32, 38-40
Saul	8:3, 9:3-8, and 19-22
Lydia	16:12-15 and 40 (founding of the Church in Philippi).

Each pair gives a brief report on their character.

In summary, it is significant that:

1. as yet nearly all missionaries are Jews
2. the growth of ministry and mission does not always happen as planned
3. there were differences among Jews – Greek-speaking, native and (heretical) Samaritan Jews

4. storm clouds were brewing over the admission of Gentiles into the Church which we now explore further

BREAK

Growth of the church

30 mins

Group task

Group 1 – Read Acts 10

Explore this story first from the perspective of Peter and then Cornelius
What might be their experience, feelings and understanding before, during and after their encounter?

Group 2 – Read Acts 15:1-12

Explore this account from the perspective of the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians.

For the Jewish Christians you might want to note:

Genesis 17:9-14, Joshua 5:2-9, Matthew 5:17-20

For the Gentile Christians you might want to note:

Deuteronomy 10:12-18, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Matthew 12:1-7, Galatians 3:1-5, 5:12

Plenary

The groups can feed back what they have discovered.

Relevance to us today

20 mins

What are some of the issues of difference the church is facing today?

In what ways are these events or 'decision making' similar or dissimilar to the way the mission and movements of the Church are portrayed in Acts?

Closing Prayers

5 mins

Lord Jesus, who prayed that we might all be one,
we pray to you for the unity of Christians,
according to your will,
according to your means.
May your Spirit enable us
to experience the suffering caused by division,
to see our sin

and to hope beyond all hope.

Amen.

Written by the Chemin Neuf Community

Look ahead: next preparation

5 mins

Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 9 Paul – A Living Gospel Preparation

From Saul to Paul

Saul was from a Jewish family living in Tarsus in present day South-East Turkey. His family were involved in the business of making tents, likely for the Roman Army. Tarsus was a Greek-speaking city but culturally more Eastern. Saul was a Roman citizen presumably inherited from his father who could have acquired citizenship or have it conferred upon him for services to the Roman Empire. He was educated under the Rabbi Gamaliel in Jerusalem and was a Pharisee.

Read Acts 9: 1-22

Spend some time reflecting on this story

Saul became known as Paul which is derived from the Latin for small. He may simply have adapted his name to a more Roman one for his mission to Gentiles, it could have been a nickname or he simply used different names depending on context.

After Paul's conversion he spent time with disciples in Antioch and Jerusalem before being sent out among the Jewish diaspora throughout the Roman Empire. Paul travelled widely and seemed to initially focus on preaching to the local Jews in each place he came to and then came to establish churches in these places comprised of both Jewish and Gentile followers. Paul would revisit churches he began and kept in touch with them through his letters. Paul's visits and letters were often dealing with problems that arose in these complex and young churches, not all of his letters survive so we have a snap-shot of some of the issues that these communities were dealing with.

Paul and his letters

Please read Appendix 4 from 'Starting with the New Testament' pages 230 - 231.

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians

Bible Project – watch the 1 Corinthians overview video

Paul visiting

We come to the Bible not just as individuals but as members of our local churches. If Paul were to visit your church what things would he find to write about? – to rejoice in and to challenge.

To rejoice in...

To challenge...



You could read Appendix 5 – ‘Conflict in Corinth’ on pages 232-233.

Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 9 Paul – A Living Gospel

Aims: To describe St Paul's mission to the Christian community in Corinth, to discern his essential pastoral and teaching ministry and to apply it to our contemporary context
To review 'what the Bible is to us' and to share the gospel

Opening prayer 5 mins

Reflection on the preparation 10 mins

Paul and the Corinthian Church 40 mins

You may be aware that both 'Good News' and 'Jerusalem' Bibles give headings to help us read.
This division of 1 Corinthians draws from them:

1: 1– 9	Introduction and blessings
1: 10–16	Divisions in the Church
1: 17– 2:16	True wisdom of crucified Christ and false wisdom
3: 1 – 17	Shared ministry
3: 18– 4:21	Servants, not self important
5: 1–13, 6: 12–20	Immorality in the Church
6: 1–11	Lawsuits against fellow Christians
7: 1– 40	Marriage, abstinence and living as God called you
8: 1–13	Eating food offered to idols and weaker brethren
9: 1–27	Paul's rights and duties as an apostle
10: 1–11	Warning and lessons from Israel's history
11: 2–16	Women's behaviour at services (see also 14: 33-35)
11: 17–34	The Lord's Supper – ethos and form
12: 1–31	Gifts from the Holy Spirit and the body analogy
13: 1–13	Hymn of love
14: 1–40	Regulating gifts of the Spirit
15: 1–58	The resurrection of the dead
16: 1–24	Collection for fellow Christians and greetings

Group task

Look at your list of things to rejoice in or be challenged by from the group's preparation and then this list from 1 Corinthians – choose a few things that are touched on in both lists. Then divide into groups to focus on one of these each

- Explore what Paul may be teaching us and what other Christian insights might be saying about this issue.
- Prepare to share your findings with the whole group.

BREAK

Re-interpreting Bible teaching

35 mins

We all assume that some parts of the Bible are not to be taken as authoritative for our personal and church life: especially in the OT, we don't sacrifice animals, we wear clothes of more than one fabric, and we don't involve a priest if we find mildew in our homes. In the NT we don't make women wear hats in church, and we are generally quite relaxed about divorcees remarrying. And from Paul we nowadays mostly look differently at the following texts (taken from the 'Good News' version unless stated otherwise).

Take some time to read these examples through individually.

7: 21 'Were you a slave when God called you. Well never mind ... remain in the same condition as you were when you were called.'

The abolition of slavery – yet to be completed – is now a fundamental Christian action. Of course the 'seed' of the abolition of slavery (as well as the emancipation of women) may be found in verses like Galatians 3:27-28.

7: 1 'A man does well not to marry' or in the Jerusalem Bible 'it is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman.'

For all to do well and not to marry or touch would end the human race. Some people think Paul seems to expect an imminent end or second-coming so in such a situation it may be best not to marry (see 7: 29), but there may be other personal reasons for his stance here.

11: 6 & 9 'It is a shameful thing for a woman to shave her head or cut her hair (long hair on a man is a disgrace 11:14) for a woman was created for man's sake.'

This is clearly about the social meaning of how women wore their hair in Paul's day – but many would say today that it is none of his business as a man anyway!

14: 34-35 **'Women should keep quiet in the meetings.** They are not allowed to speak, as the Jewish Law says, they must not be in charge. If they want to find out about something they should ask their husbands at home'. See similarly, 1 Timothy 2: 10-11 and wives submitting to husbands. (1 Peter 3:6, Ephesians 5: 21-33, Colossians 3: 18).

Things have changed particularly in the Christian West! – but is there a way of still making sense of these texts as 'the Word of the Lord'?

6: 9 **'People who are immoral or worship idols or are adulterers or homosexual perverts ... steal, greedy, drunkards, slander.'** The Jerusalem Bible translation is 'sodomites' who were inhospitable rapists. The NRSV uses 'male prostitutes and sodomites.'

- How might we approach interpreting Paul's writings in the church today?
- What are the pitfalls?
- How does the Bible as a whole contribute to Christian discernment?

What guides our interpreting of the Bible?

In the examples above what part is played in interpreting by these:

- Textual Analysis & translation
- Source, Form and Redaction criticism (or analysis)
- Contextual Analysis
- Cultural change of values and norms (e.g. availability of contraception)
- Economic change e.g. Women making a livelihood for themselves
- Paul's blind spots
- Our blind spots
- Theological Balance between law, gospel and freedom - what is essential and what not?

How do you see the Bible now?

10 mins

What is the bible like for you?

Below are a suggested images – which ones are helpful? Can you come up with a better one?

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| ➤ A Map | ➤ A Mural painting |
| ➤ A Tool Box | ➤ A Drinking Fountain |
| ➤ A Mirror | ➤ A Highway Code |
| ➤ A Recipe Book | ➤ A Musical Score |
| ➤ A Compass | ➤ An Interrogator |

Final prayer

Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 10 Faith, the church and the world Preparation

We come to our final session on the Journey in Faith Course and will try to pull together some of the threads of our learning. But first we will do some thinking about the church.

The doctrine (what we believe about something) of the church is known as ecclesiology; a term that comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*. An *ekklesia* in ancient Greece was an assembly of citizens of a particular political state the word is derived from two 'ek' meaning 'out from' and 'kaleo' meaning 'to call'; in short, an assembly of people called out from and called out to.

Read a few of the following passages and think about what they say about the church.

- Acts 2:42-47
- Ephesians 2:11-22
- Ephesians 4:1-16
- Colossians 3:12-17
- 1 Peter 2:4-10

Note your thoughts below

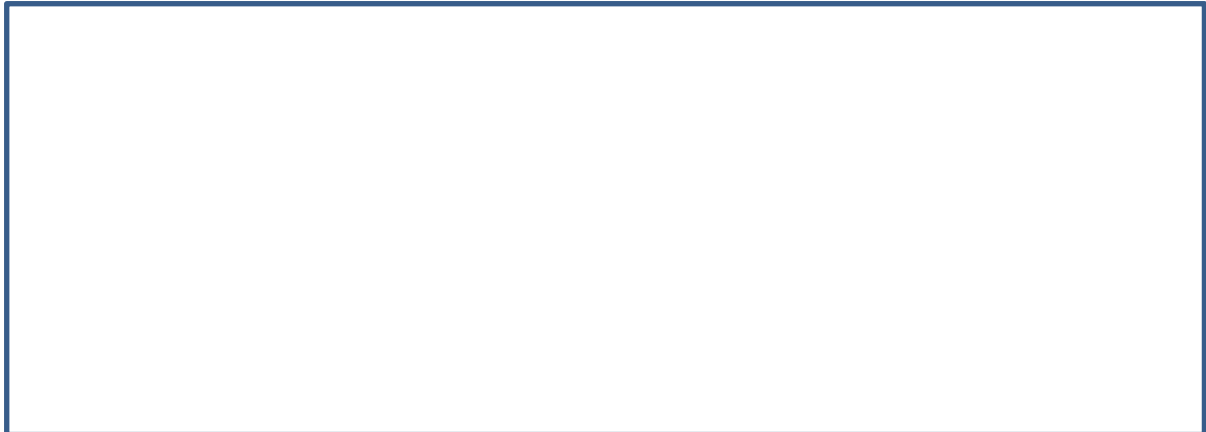
According to Alister McGrath the consensus ecclesiology in the first five centuries of church history would include the following elements:

1. The church is a spiritual society, which replaces Israel as the people of God in the world.

2. All Christians are made one in Christ, despite their different origins and backgrounds.
3. The church is the repository of true Christian teaching.
4. The church gathers the faithful throughout the world together, in order to enable them to grow in faith and holiness.³

Is there anything missing for you?

What would your essential elements of church be?



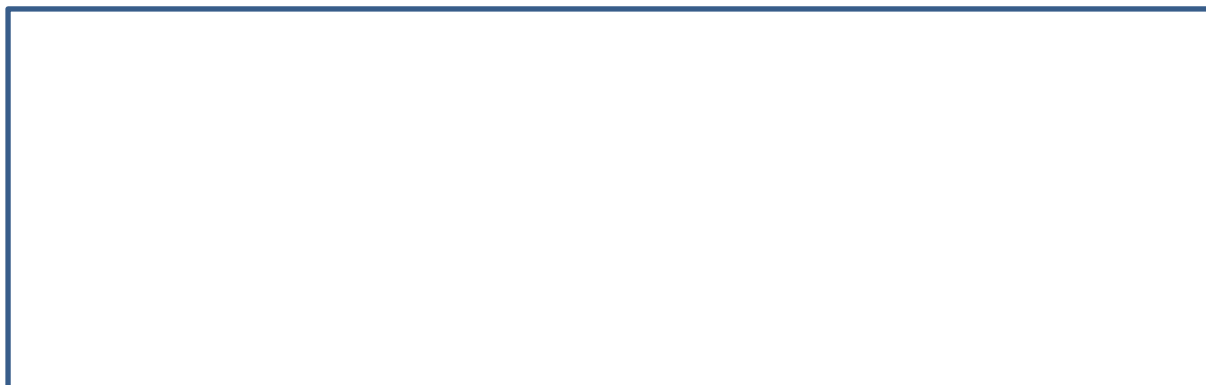
More recent ecclesiology resists any division between what is secular and what is sacred. God being present in the world as much as in the church. St Ignatius of Antioch declared 'wherever Christ is; there is also the catholic church'

The sacramental life of the church

A sacrament is understood to be 'a visible sign of an invisible grace'. The two sacraments recognised by the Anglican Church are:

- The Eucharist – otherwise known as the Mass, the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion.
- Baptism

What do these sacraments mean for you?



³ McGrath A (2001) **Christian Theology: an introduction** Blackwell Publishing Oxford

What role does the Eucharist take in your church?

What is your experience of the Eucharist?

Gathered and sent

Returning the Greek word *ekklesia*. There is a sense from its meaning of the church being a place of gathering but also a place to be sent from. Gathering for worship, to pray, to live as a community of mutual discipleship where faith is grown and gifts released. A place from where the faithful are sent to live out faith in the world.

Read Matthew 5: 13-16

What does this say to you?



The creeds

The orthodoxy (right belief) of the church is held in the Creeds. Look at the Creeds in Appendix 6. Some might be less familiar to you.

Has your understanding of these creeds changed over the course of Journey in Faith?

Module Three: The Development of Christian Doctrine

Session 10 Faith, the church and the world

Aims: To understand what it means to be a disciple
To reflect on the church as gathered and sent

Opening prayer

Jesus, when our assumptions are challenged or our narratives overturned,
help us to stay with the discomfort and dig deeper in search of better understandings.

When our emotions are running high, help us to breathe and
may that breath make a space in which we can listen – even if we don't agree. Amen.

(from the Corrymeela Community – Epiphany reflections Jan 2022)

Reflection on the preparation

15 mins

Marks of disciples

15 mins

As Christians we are called to be disciples – followers of Jesus who are continually seeking to know him more, imitate him more and help others to know him more.

Together form a list on a flipchart of the key elements that might be marks of a Christian disciple today. See if you can summarise them into just 7 marks.

The cost of discipleship

10 mins

Read together: Mark 8:31-38

“Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous

and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

After your reflections on these passages would you add anything to your marks of discipleship?

BREAK

Beloved, gathered and sent

20 mins

The Roman Catholic writer Henri Nouwen⁴ observed from his reflection on Luke 6:12-20 a spiritual dynamic at work.



It begins in silence – our daily devotional practices that drawn us to the heart of God and enable us to simply be the ‘Beloved’. That this is the ground of our being.

As we grow in our experience as the ‘beloved’ of God we are drawn into community. Nouwen speaks of the worshipping community being where ‘silence meets silence’. A community where all find their security as the ‘beloved’ and are free love and serve others in the community of faith – a place of mutual discipleship. From this place, Nouwen claims, we are equipped and released for ministry in, with and to the world.

- Take some time to ponder this idea
- What thoughts emerge for you?

Good endings

10 mins

As we come to end of the Journey in Faith Course we will take some time to think about what this has meant to us.

Take time to think about:

- What are they key blessings you have received?
- What are the key challenges you have faced?

⁴ Nouwen H (with Christianson MJ, Laird RJ) (2011) **Spiritual Direction** SPCK

Each person to receive 3 small bits of paper

Light a candle in the middle

What have been your glimpses of glory?

Write down one blessing you have received

When all have finished take it in turns to share your one blessing

Place them by the candle

Say together – **Father God, thank you**

What has troubled you?

Write down the thing that has challenged you most

You are invited to share your challenge unless it is something too personal

Place them by the candle

Say together – **Lord Jesus, grant us peace**

What are you hoping for?

Write down one hope or dream that has emerged

You are invited to share your hopes for the future

Place them by the candle

Say together – **Holy Spirit, pour out your blessing**

Amen

Appendix 1

Holy Trinity – Fr A J Thamburaj
(India 1939-)



Green is the colour of creativity and fertility. Red is the colour of activity. Blue is the colour of the sea and sky, symbols of mystery and eternity. Yellow [saffron] is an auspicious and joyful colour in Indian custom.

The upraised hand [*abaya mudra*] is a symbol of protection in Indian art and dance. It represents the Father. Its message is 'Fear not'. The fish denotes the ever-watching eye of God, for the eyelids of the fish never close.

The downward hand [*varada mudra*] represents Christ. This gesture is common in Indian sculpture and dance. God is said to point his devotees to hide under the arch of his foot for refuge. The red wound reminds us that the risen Lord bears the redemptive marks of the crucifixion.

The red hand symbolizes the purifying fire, the Holy Spirit. The spiral line indicates the wind, connecting all three Persons in unity. Fire and wind are power.



William Blake
Originally published/produced in circa
1787-1818

Fr John Battista Gulianni
USA



The Perichoresis (the divine
dance)

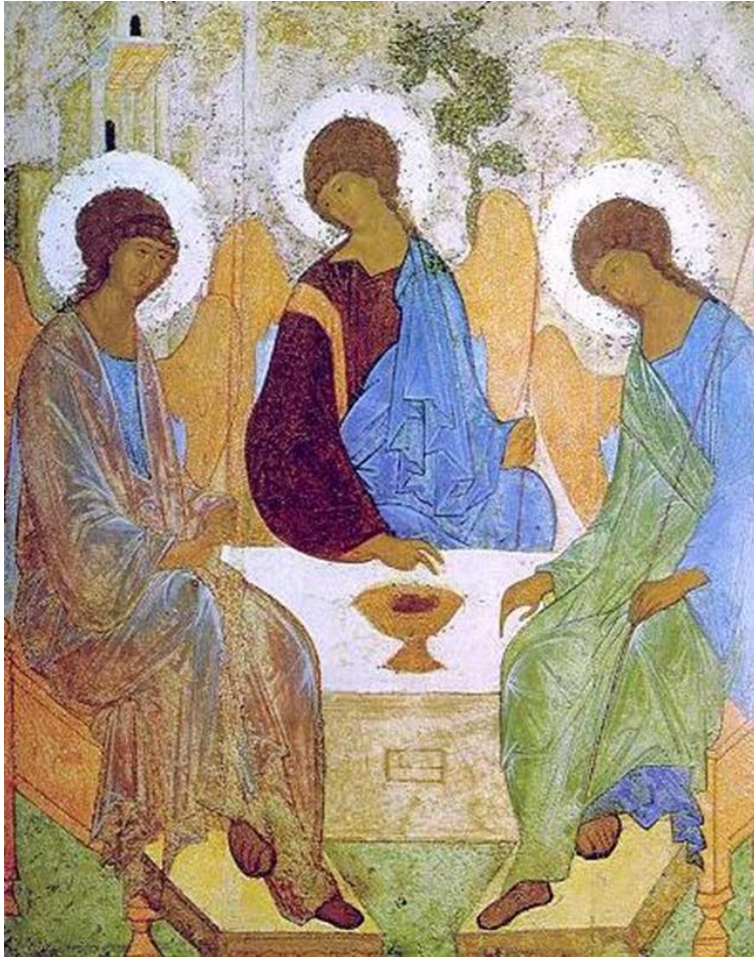


Celtic Knot Trinity

Appendix 2

Rublev Icon

The Holy Trinity' by Andrey Rublev was painted in the early 15th century for the Trinity monastery of St. Sergey, Russia. It is now in Moscow's Tretyakov Gallery.



The three faces are identical, they wear blue garments - the colour divinity but each wears something that speaks of their own identity.

The Spirit

A green robe represents new life, with some newly unfurled leaves against the sky.

The Spirit touches the table - earthing the divine life of God. "Lord, You are holy indeed, the fountain of all holiness. Let Your Spirit come to make all things holy"

Reflect on that touch and its meaning for the life of the world.

Behind the figure is a mountain, the places where people often encountered God -places where heaven and earth seem to touch.

Moses met God on mountains. Jesus was transfigured whilst in prayer on a mountain.

Reflect on your own "mountain top" experiences, those times when you have felt very close to God - when you have felt transfigured and filled with the Spirit.

Elijah could not find God in the earthquake, wind or fire but in the silence on the mountain the voice of God was carried deep into his being.

When have you been aware of the presence of this dynamic stillness which is the Spirit within you?

The Spirit inclines - drawing our gaze to the central figure - representing Christ.

The Christ

The figure wears a brown garment that speaks of the earth of His humanity.

The gold stripe for kingship.

Reflect on the form of kingship being represented here...

The Christ figure rests two fingers on the table - laying onto it His divine and His human nature. He points to a cup filled with wine.
What does this represent?

Behind the figure is a tree. This could be the oak tree at Mamre under which the three angelic visitors rested. The hospitality of Abraham and Sarah was rewarded in the gift of a son.
What does this tell us of the importance of hospitality?

The tree may also represent the Cross the tree on which the Son died. The tree of death which becomes the tree of life—lost to humanity by the disobedience of Adam and Eve but restored to us by the obedience of Jesus.

Reflect on the paradox of the Cross:

- the place where death and life confront each other -
- where death gives way to resurrection and eternal life.

It may also be the tree of life in Revelation bearing twelve kinds of fruit one for each month of the year with the leaves of this tree for the healing of the nations.
What is the promise here - waiting to be fulfilled?

The Christ figure in turn inclines towards the figure on the left - and we are drawn to gaze there too.

The Father

A figure at rest within Itself.

The blue garment is almost hidden by a shimmering, ethereal robe for the One who is Creator who cannot be seen by His human creatures.

Both hands clasp the staff - all authority in heaven and on earth belong to the Father.

What kind of authority do you find in the figure in the icon?

Behind the figure is a house the dwelling place of God.

"In my Father's House are many mansions - I go to prepare a place for you..."

What is the promise for you in these words of Jesus?

"Those who love Me will keep My word and My Father will love them - and we will come to them and make our home with them".

What is Jesus promising here?

Where are you in this icon?

The Father's gaze is inclined to the space between the figures—to you perhaps.

What is the invitation here?

The cup on the edge of the table offered.

How would it feel to sit at the table?

Appendix 3

From Chapter 6 of *Introducing the New Testament* by John Drane

WHAT IS GOD'S KINGDOM?

The Kingdom of God is the major theme of Jesus' teaching in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. This concept, expressed in various ways, had been a central part of Jewish religious aspirations for generations. At the time of Jesus, it was popularly anticipated as a time when the promises of the Hebrew scriptures concerning the place of Israel in God's plan would be fulfilled in a dramatic way: the hated Romans would once and for all be driven out of their land, and the people would enjoy a new period of political and religious freedom, and self-determination.

It is no wonder, then, that when Jesus emerged as a travelling prophet after his baptism and the temptations, and declared that 'the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand' (Mark 1:15), people of all kinds showed great interest in what he had to say. This was what they were waiting for: a new kingdom of God that would finally crush the old kingdom of Rome. Moreover, they fully expected that they, the Jewish people, would have a prominent part in this coming kingdom under the leadership of their long-awaited Messiah.

From the very beginning of Israelite history, **God** had always been regarded as '**king**' of the **people** (Psalms 96:10; 99:1; 146:10). The Hebrew Bible declared that the whole world belonged to God, because God made it – and Israel as a nation belonged to God because God had rescued its ancestors from slavery in Egypt and led them to a new land. When they wanted to appoint Saul as their own king a century or two later, some people opposed the move on the grounds that God was the only true king the nation should ever have (1 Samuel 8:1 – 18). Subsequently, when David became king in Jerusalem, the two ideas were brought together: David and his successors were the rightful rulers of the nation, because God had chosen them (2 Samuel 7:1 – 17). Their duty was to do God's will, so that the kingdom would reflect the standards of God's law. In reality, things were rarely that simple. As one king succeeded another, it was painfully obvious that many of them were interested only in power and self-fulfilment, and the earlier ideals gradually disappeared.

They certainly disappeared as practical politics, though they never quite vanished altogether, for they were transformed into a hope for the future; that at some time God would step in to put things right and establish a kingdom of justice and righteousness. The prophet Zechariah was only one of many who fervently looked for that time to come, a day on which 'the Lord will become king over all the earth' (Zechariah 14:9). By the time of Jesus, there was a widespread expectation that the arrival of the Messiah would herald the coming of this Kingdom.

The kingdom of God

But what did Jesus mean in speaking of the 'kingdom of God'? Today, the notion of 'kingdom' most obviously denotes a state or territory that, if not actually ruled by a king, is nevertheless a political entity of some kind. In the ancient world, things would have been no different, and there can be no doubt that it would have been perfectly understandable for

Jesus' contemporaries to conclude that he was announcing the establishment of a new state which, in contrast to the countries around, would somehow be ruled by God in person.

That idea is so obviously contrary to what Jesus taught about the kingdom of God that, right from the beginning, it is clear that he must have been using the phrase in some other way. If Jesus was talking about a new state, then he must have seen himself as the agent of a new political dynasty, in effect a Zealot. Yet both his words and his actions seemed to deny that. So what was Jesus really talking about? Some Christians have concluded that, in spite of all the indications to the contrary, Jesus must have been mainly concerned with starting a society that was to be ruled by God, distinct from those ruled by ordinary mortals.

Many theologians of the Middle Ages, for example, followed St Augustine in identifying the kingdom of which Jesus spoke with the organized society they knew in the church. Throughout the days of Christendom, the concept that the church was a legitimate successor to the Roman empire, with a political mandate to expand its own empire, motivated Western exploration of other parts of the world, and played its part in the emergence of colonialism. Even today, it is not difficult to find Christian leaders who will speak as if 'the kingdom' is just another word for 'the church', while many more are prepared to talk of it as if it is a kind of political manifesto. Here, we will suggest that Jesus' use of the term 'the kingdom of God' cannot be limited to any of these things, but is in fact more comprehensive than all of them. A good definition of it is '**God's way of doing things**'.

It begins from those values and standards that most adequately reflect God's own character, though as Jesus expounds the significance of that, he inevitably provides insights into how all this might be applied in practical terms to different life situations. That means that we can expect to find models for how discipleship might impact politics, economics, or other tangible social realities. But these things do not exhaust the meaning of 'God's kingdom', which is both wider and deeper than that: wider because it is a way of being that was to be **applied to the whole of life, both private and public**, and deeper because it would **address not only material but also spiritual realities**, giving those who committed themselves to it a fresh understanding of true freedom and justice, and the renewed experience of God's presence in their lives.

A new way of being

. . . we are justified in supposing that Jesus was talking about what might be called 'the kingship of God', rather than 'God's kingdom'. 'Kingship' would be about God's style, the way that God operates, and the example that God sets to others. This helps to explain why Jesus was concerned more than anything else about the quality of human life, and the nature of meaningful relationships, rejecting attitudes of power and control in favour of love, acceptance and mutual service. For him, these qualities were to characterize the life of his disciples because he perceived them as central to the person of God.

This helps to explain some of the apparently more difficult things that Jesus said. For example, he told the Pharisees, 'The kingdom of God does not come in such a way as to be seen.... because the kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17: 20, 21). On another occasion he told his disciples, 'whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it' (Mark 10:15). It would have been nonsensical to speak of a political territory existing

in the lives of individual people: there is no sense in which a person could 'receive' a state, nor could it be 'within them'. But Jesus was saying that from the moment God is recognized as sovereign in someone's life, then the 'kingdom of God' has really arrived. He could say this kingdom was already 'among' his hearers, because he himself was there, and he was completely committed to exploring and putting into practice the values and standards that God represented.

In a similar way, Jesus compared 'entering the kingdom' to 'entering into life' (Mark 9:43 – 47), (Matthew 25: 34 – 46), (Mark 10: 17 – 23).

The well-known story of the son who ran away from home also emphasized the fact that to be a member of the kingdom is to share in God's family life and to experience God as a loving parent (Luke 15: 11 – 32).

At the same time, it would be wrong to understand the kingdom exclusively in terms of an individual relationship between people and God, for there are many statements in the gospels which show that Jesus regarded the kingdom of God not only as the inward rule of God in the lives of his followers but also as some kind of tangible reality. For example, he spoke of people who would 'come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God' (Luke 13:29). At the last supper Jesus told the disciples, 'from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes' (Luke 22:18). Matthew records him saying that his followers would 'inherit the kingdom prepared... from the foundation of the world'. (Matthew 25:34).

Jesus seems, therefore, to have understood this idea of God's kingdom in at least two ways; **on the one hand, as God's guidance in the lives of those who would be disciples, and on the other hand, as something that God would somehow display to the world at large.**

Jesus was also quite convinced that God would act decisively and directly, not just in the lives of individuals, but also in the public affairs of nations and empires (Mark 13).

(John Drane)

Appendix 4

from Chapter 6 of 'Starting with the New Testament' by Stephen Travis (Lion Publishing)

'My love to all of you in Christ Jesus': Paul's letters

'I wish I could be with you during the present difficulties. For the moment, that is impossible. But I haven't stopped thinking about you. And I am writing my advice in the hope that it may help you until I am able to be with you again . . . '

You may at some time have begun a letter rather like that. One of the reasons why we write letters is to say to our friends what we would say to them if we could be with them.

The first Christians wrote letters for the same reason. After nearly two thousand years, parts of the Apostle Paul's letters are as real and as relevant as when they were first written – to Christians in Turkey, Greece and Rome. And these letters and others by Christian leaders are found after Acts in the New Testament.

Paul was an amazing man by any yardstick. Brought up as a devout Jew, he became a teacher of the Jewish Law and persecuted the followers of Jesus until his dramatic meeting with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. The story is told in Acts 9, and must have taken place between AD 32 and 35 – that is, within about three years of Jesus' resurrection. From then on he became a fearless preacher of his new-found faith.

Many details of his missionary work are not recorded. The missionary journeys recorded in Acts 13 – 28 cover the period from about AD 46 to about AD 62. In those years of extensive travels, he covered at least 15,000 kilometres. Often he went hungry and thirsty. He faced danger from bandits. He was imprisoned and flogged by people who hated his message or regarded him as a danger to the state. He was shipwrecked three or four times.

But he started up churches in many of the key cities of Turkey and Greece. As one of the great thinkers of the early church, he enabled new Christians to work out the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection and to relate their faith to their everyday life. He showed how the life and message of a Palestinian⁵ preacher could leap over barriers of race and culture into the cosmopolitan world of Greece and Rome.

Paul wrote letters to Christians in churches throughout the Roman Empire. The New Testament preserves Paul's letters to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians, and to individual church leaders: Timothy, Titus and Philemon.

Paul's letters⁶ were mostly written to churches, which he had founded, at places like Corinth, Thessalonica and Philippi. Two of them – the letters to Rome and Colossae – offered teaching

⁵ Editors note: actually Judea was only called Palestine after 70CE – Jesus was a Judean or Jewish preacher.

⁶ Editor's note: It's important to note that Stephen Travis's views here about which letters Paul wrote are not shared by all New Testament scholars – many dispute his authorship of Ephesians, for instance. Each student of the NT needs to make up their own mind.

and guidance to churches which other people had started. The short letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon are addressed to individual church leaders.

Reading Paul's letters

When you start reading Paul's letters you realise that they are like other letters in several important ways. Most obviously they are only one end of the correspondence, or conversation, between Paul and a particular church. You are reading someone else's mail, and some of it is explosive stuff!

Sometimes he makes clear that he is responding to an actual letter which the church has written to him (see 1 Corinthians). But we can only guess at what their letter said by reading between the lines of Paul's reply. This can be fun, though sometimes frustrating!

But we can be sure that he didn't write just to pass the time of day. Mostly he wrote to churches because they needed correcting in some way. This is not surprising, because they had all become Christians so recently.

Sometimes he wrote to a church which had misunderstood the essential gospel of Christ. For example, he wrote Galatians because people in the churches in the Roman province of Galatia (in Turkey) believed they could be followers of Jesus only by obeying the whole Jewish Law. On the contrary, Paul insisted, Jesus has won freedom for us by his death and resurrection. We become his people simply by receiving new life from him as a gift.

Jews expressed their relationship with God by keeping the Law. This included the Ten Commandments, which God gave to Moses, as well as other regulations about circumcision and food preparation. Some Jewish Christians thought Gentile Christians could not be truly acceptable to God unless they observed all these regulations.

Sometimes Paul wrote to Christians who were in danger of confusing the truth about Christ with popular ideas from the surrounding world. The church at Colossae – the Colossians – got a letter from him showing how Christ reveals all that we need to know of God.

At other times he wrote to correct distorted ideas about Christian behaviour. The church at Corinth, for instance, was full of people who, in the name of 'Christian liberty', claimed that any kind of behaviour was acceptable to God. So in his second letter to the Corinthians Paul argued that our relationship with Jesus means that we should reflect his character in our lives.

Whenever we read a New Testament letter we must do a little reading between the lines, asking *why* the situation may have made the writer want to stress these particular truths. This may sound difficult, but a bit of imagination, and discussion among friends, can make it very rewarding.

Reading the New Testament letters today

Even though the New Testament letters are nearly two thousand years old, some parts of them are easy to understand and to relate to our own lives. For instance when we read the famous passage about love in 1 Corinthians 13, our difficulty is not in understanding what it means. The main problem lies in living up to its demand.

BOTHERSOME READING

Most people are bothered by those passages in Scripture, which they cannot understand; but as for me, I always noticed that the passages in Scripture, which trouble me most are those I do understand. Mark Twain

But other parts of the letters cannot be related so readily to our own lives. We now live in very different circumstances. Some letters, for example, give guidance about how Christian slaves and slave-owners ought to behave. Such teaching was necessary in a society where slavery was normal and was not going to be abolished in a hurry.

But what do these instructions mean in societies, which have at last learnt from the Christian message that slavery degrades humanity? . . .

Once we have seen what basic principles may be suggested by the New Testament, we can go on to use our God-given minds to work out how the principles might be applied in a particular situation. The New Testament is not like a map, giving detailed instructions for every situation we might meet. It is like a compass to point us in the right direction.

Appendix 5

‘Conflict in Corinth’ by Walter Hollenweger

from pages 8 –11 told from the perspective of a manager (a slave) of the local Corinthian Bank⁷

I watched Erastus leave the court of the villa where the Christian meeting took place and saw him return carrying a scroll under his arm. As he had greeted me so warmly at the beginning of the meeting, I was encouraged to ask him what this was all about. ‘Well, you see,’ he said, ‘Christians are basically different from other religious societies in Corinth. The Christians do not hold separate religious services for slaves and freemen, which would make it awkward for the better educated slaves who would not know to which group they really belonged.’ He mentioned this on purpose as he knew that I was one of these. I asked, ‘But does this mixture of cultures and social status not create a number of financial and psychological problems?’ ‘It certainly does,’ he replied, ‘as you can see for yourself in this meeting. And what you have heard is not the only controversy in the Christian community. You surely know that I as Chairman of the Department of Public Works in Corinth have to attend many banquets and receptions, festivities where the meat which is served comes from the temples here in Corinth, and which has been offered ceremonially to idols. You are certainly aware that I would have to resign from my job if I did not take part in these banquets. However, I am of the opinion that for a Christian everything is allowed, including attending business banquets and political dinners where we prepare important contracts and political compromises.

Tertius interrupted Erastus. ‘It is not only the meat, which has been offered to the idols that Chloe protests about. She says she knows that the Corinthian courtesans go to these banquets – business and political courtesans.’

‘Prostitutes who are used to win certain contracts you mean?’ I asked. From my work in the bank I knew that such things went on.

‘No comment.’ Erastus said. He added, ‘One is expected to drink a toast with these courtesans but otherwise one has no further obligations.’ The topic was obviously embarrassing for him, but he mentioned in passing, ‘You must not take too seriously the criticisms which Chloe throws at us. This somewhat exalted women’s lib apostle has no family to help her feel important and wanted, only her followers, the foreign dock workers and slaves, to boost her ego’

This was obviously a sign to end the conversation. Erastus now went forward with the scroll and rolled it out. A Christian stood on either side of him holding a torch. Gaius introduced him. ‘Just as Paul wrote a letter to the Romans while he was here in Corinth – you surely remember how he worked day and night – so he has written a long reply to us from Ephesus. For many Sundays we have already read parts of his reply, and we come today, so it seems to me, to one of the most important and instructive passages. Please read, Erastus.’

⁷ A longer version of this text can be found at: <http://www.warc.ch/miu/rw004/holl.html> (accessed 28/6/05)

The Meeting of God's Citizens

The two torch-bearers drew nearer to Erastus and there was absolute silence in the courtyard. Erastus began, 'For Christ is like a single body with its many limbs and organs, which, many as they are, together make up one body. For indeed we were all brought into the one body by baptism in the one Spirit, whether we are Jews' – and here he looked at Crispus – 'or Greeks' – he stopped as if he wanted to say, 'As I am' – 'whether slaves' – and when he uttered this word Chloe's people and the dock workers threw their hands in the air and shouted in a mighty chorus, 'Hallelujah, Kyrious Jesus!' Then the shout took the form of a fugue or a hymn. 'Halle -, halle-, halleluia! Jesus is Lord! Halle-, halle-, halleluia! Jesus is Lord!' And finally everybody, not only the slaves, joined in the shout, 'Jesus is Lord!'

'You are right,' Erastus continued, 'but listen to how he goes on: whether slaves or free men' – and now there was a hush, for the Christians born as free men or those who had been given freedom by their slave-masters stood in superior silence – 'we have been immersed into one Holy Spirit.' 'Amen, halleluia,' the meeting responded.

But now Chloe stood up again. 'And the women – has he forgotten the women?'

Erastus looked at his manuscript. 'I do not find that he mentions the women.'

Another woman, Phoebe from the port of Cenchreae, rose to her feet. She spoke softly and slowly. 'It is not necessary to mention women. We are here. We take part in the service. We are immersed into one Holy Spirit. Nobody can deny that.' Some of the men around me sighed deeply. But they did not speak.

Erastus continued, 'A body is not one single organ, but many. Suppose the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it belongs to the body nonetheless. Suppose the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it still belongs to the body. If the body were all eye, how could it hear? If the body were all ear, how could it smell? But, in fact, God appointed each limb and organ to its own place in the body as he chose. If each organ had the same function, how could the body function as a whole? That is why there are many different organs, but one body'.

'The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I do not need you,' nor the head to the feet, 'I do not need you.' Quite the contrary: those organs of the body, which seem to be weaker than others are indispensable' – and here I noted how one of the dock workers stopped chewing and spat out the grape which he had just put into his mouth – 'and those which we regard as less honourable are treated with special honour. To our unseemly parts is given a more than ordinary respect. The respectable parts do not need it.'

'Amen,' shouted the slave who had just spat out the grape. 'If that be true then Erastus had better give the money he donated toward the paving of the main street in Corinth to us, the slaves, for the respectable ones do not need it, but we, the weaker ones, we could make good use of it.' Erastus stopped. It hurt him that his political life, in which, as he had told me, compromises were necessary, was discussed in church.

Appendix 6

Three Creeds

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is,
seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.
He has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Athanasian Creed (this version from the Book of Common Prayer 1662)

Whosoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholick faith.
Which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish
everlastingly. And the Catholick Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in
Unity; Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of
the Father, another of the Son: and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father,
of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal. Such as
the Father is, so is the Son: and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreate, the Son
uncreate: and the Holy Ghost uncreate. The Father incomprehensible, the Son
incomprehensible: and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal:
and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals: but one eternal. As also there
are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated: but one uncreated and one
incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty: and the Holy Ghost
almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties: but one Almighty. So the Father is God, the
Son is God: and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods: but one God. So
likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord: and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords: but
one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity: to acknowledge every Person by
himself to be God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the Catholick Religion: to say there be
three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made of none: neither created, nor begotten. The Son
is of the Father alone: not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and
the Son: neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. So there is one Father, not
three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons: one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this
Trinity none is afore, or after other: none is greater, or less than another; But the whole three
Persons are co-eternal together: and co-equal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid: the Unity in
Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved: must thus
think of the Trinity. Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation: that he also believe
rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is that we believe and
confess: that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the Substance of
the Father, begotten before the worlds: and Man, of the Substance of his Mother, born in the
world; Perfect God, and Perfect Man: of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting; Equal

to the Father, as touching his Godhead: and inferior to the Father, as touching his Manhood. Who although he be God and Man: yet he is not two, but one Christ; One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh: but by taking of the Manhood into God; One altogether, not by confusion of Substance: but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man: so God and Man is one Christ. Who suffered for our salvation: descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty: from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies: and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting: and they that have done evil into everlasting fire. This is the Catholick Faith: which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.

Appendix 7 Reflections on Abba from Joachim Jeremias and R.T. France

(iii) *The significance of 'Abbā as an address to God*

The complete novelty and uniqueness of 'Abbā as an address to God in the prayers of Jesus shows that it expresses the heart of Jesus' relationship to God. He spoke to God as a child to its father: confidently and securely, and yet at the same time reverently and obediently.

At this point it is necessary to issue a warning against two possible misunderstandings. First, the fact that 'abbā was originally a child's exclamatory word has occasionally led to the mistaken assumption that Jesus adopted the language of a tiny child when he addressed God as 'Father'; even I myself believed this earlier. However, the discovery that even in the period before the New Testament, grown-up sons and daughters addressed their fathers as 'abbā, stands in the way of any such limitation. Secondly, the fact that the address 'Abbā expresses a consciousness of sonship should not mislead us into ascribing to Jesus himself in detail the 'Son of God' christology, e.g. the idea of pre-existence, which developed very early in the primitive church. This over-interpretation of the address 'Abbā is prohibited by the everyday sound of the word.

Jesus regarded 'Abbā as a sacred word. When he instructs the disciples to 'Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven' (Matt. 23:9),¹ he certainly does not mean to prohibit them from addressing their physical fathers as 'father'. He is thinking, rather, of the custom of addressing distinguished people, especially older men, as 'abbā. The disciples are not to do this, because that would be a misuse of the word. He wanted to reserve the honour of the name 'father' for God alone. This prohibition shows the degree to which Jesus felt that the address 'Abbā should be revered.

'Abbā as a form of address to God expresses the ultimate mystery of the mission of Jesus. He was conscious of being authorized to communicate God's revelation, because God had made himself known to him as Father (Matt. 11:27 par.).

All this confronts us with a fact of fundamental importance. *We do not have a single example* of God being addressed as 'Abbā in Judaism, but Jesus *always* addressed God in this way in his prayers. The only exception is the cry from the cross (Mark 15:34 par. Matt. 27:46), and the reason for that is its character as a quotation.

There is a linguistic explanation for the striking silence of the Jewish prayer literature. In origin, 'abbā is a babbling sound, so it is not inflected and takes no suffix. 'When a child experiences the taste of wheat (i.e. when it is weaned), it learns to say 'abbā and 'immā (i.e. these are the first sounds that it rattles).'² Originally an exclamatory form, 'abbā had gained considerable ground in Palestinian Aramaic even before the New Testament period. It suppressed the 'Imperial Aramaic' and biblical-Hebraic form of address 'ābī all along the line, and even took its place in statements; in addition, it took the place of the emphatic 'ābā and largely established itself as an expression for 'his father' and 'our father'.³ By the time of Jesus, 'abbā had long had a wider use than in the talk of small children. Even grown-up children, sons as well as daughters, now addressed their father as 'abbā.⁴ The story of Hanin ha-Nehba (see above, pp. 65f.), which is set in pre-Christian times, is an example of the way in which older, respected people other than fathers might be addressed as 'abbā. A newly-discovered Jewish-Christian source⁵ says that it is a peculiarity of the

Hebrew language that 'son' can designate a true and upright slave and 'father' the lord and master.¹ The Midrash confirms this: 'as the disciples are called sons, so is the master called father'.² In the house of R. Gamaliel II (c. AD 90), even the slave Ṭabi was called 'abbā Ṭabi'.³

If we keep in mind this setting for 'abbā, it will be clear why Palestinian Judaism does not use 'abbā as a form of address to God. 'abbā was a children's word, used in everyday talk, an expression of courtesy. It would have seemed disrespectful, indeed unthinkable, to the sensibilities of Jesus' contemporaries to address God with this familiar word.⁴

Jesus dared to use 'Abbā as a form of address to God. This 'Abbā is the *ipsissima vox Jesu*.

Study Extract taken from: Joachim Jeremias

Theology of the New Testament Vol. 1 (London SCM 1975)

36 There is general agreement that to address God as 'Father' was both Jesus' normal practice in prayer (the only exception in the gospel tradition is Mk. 15:34; see the comments there) and was distinctive of him, not a matter of general Jewish piety at the time.¹³ Here we have, uniquely in the gospels, the Aramaic term Ἀββᾶ (an emphatic vocative)¹⁴ recorded as well as its Greek equivalent.¹⁵ The much-discussed contention of J. Jeremias that an address to God as Ἀββᾶ is unparalleled in Jewish literature, and marks a unique sense of intimacy with God, remains valid, even if the issue has been clouded by the frequent assertion by preachers that this familiar term equates to the English 'Daddy'. J. Barr's argument that 'Abba is not Daddy'¹⁶ is well taken, in that there is nothing childish about the special relationship implied (it was also used, for example, by disciples addressing their rabbi), but that was not Jeremias's point. The term conveys the respectful intimacy of a son in a patriarchal family. And in that sense Jesus' use of this form of address to God is striking and unparalleled,¹⁷ until it was taken over from him by his followers: Paul introduces Ἀββᾶ as the sign of an amazing and hitherto inadmissible relationship of the individual believer with God (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

* "all things are possible to you"

Jesus' appeal to his Father is based on the twin assumptions that on the one hand πάντα δυνατό σοι, but on the other hand God has a will which is to be accepted rather than altered by prayer. It is the blending of these two convictions which gives all prayer its mysterious dynamic, and frustrates any 'quick-fix' approach. The reader who remembers 11:22-25 will be aware that all the conditions for effective prayer have been met, so that Jesus' deliverance *is* possible.¹⁸ But it is not for us, or even for Jesus as God's Son, to assume that the God who 'can' answer every request will necessarily be willing to do so. Prayer, so understood, consists not in changing God's mind but in finding our own alignment with God's will. Where our desire is not in line with God's purpose, it is the former which must give way: οὐ τί ἐγὼ θέλω ἀλλὰ τί σύ.¹⁹ If that is

Glossary

Atonement	literally, at-one-ment, generally used in the context of “theories of Atonement”, meaning a study of the efficacy of Christ’s death in the salvation of the humanity
Christology	Study of the person and work of Christ
Constitutive	Similar and sometimes identical to the ‘objective’ theories, this word tends to replace the word ‘objective’ in contemporary discussions of the death of Christ as being somewhat subtler and more flexible. These are theories which assert that Christ achieves something for us which makes salvation possible
Expiation	in Christological terms meaning that Christ’s death removes the cause of offence to God i.e. our sin. (See propitiation)
Existentialist	A school of thought made famous by e.g. Jean Paul Sartre in the 1940s in which the world is meaningless and each person stands alone and is solely responsible for their own actions, by which they make their own character, define and create their own existence. Leading Christian existentialists are Paul Tillich and John MacQuarrie
Forensic	theories of the atonement which draw their imagery from the Roman Law Courts, as opposed, e.g. to the market place (see redemption)
Gnostic	from the Greek word for Knowledge [gnosis] – a sub Christian heresy that melded some [often fanciful] teachings about Jesus with Persian dualism and perhaps Jewish imagery or, more often, anti-Semitism e.g. Marcion [died c. 160 CE thought YHWH was the Devil and all OT was demonic – even the bits in the NT so he cut them out [and was left with enough NT to write on the back of a £5 note I imagine..!]
Incarnation	literally the ‘en-flesh-ment’ of God the Son, the pre-existent (i.e. existing before the first Christmas or even before the Creation) second person of the eternal Trinity
Logos	Greek word meaning “word, thought, guiding principle” from which we get the suffix “-ology”. At heart of John’s theology
Objective	theories of the Atonement which assert that the Cross of Christ has worked a real difference in either or both of God and humanity e.g. have meant that God has stopped being angry and that humanity has stopped being guilty or sinful. This is now generally rather dated language, but can still be useful.
Illustrative	Similar and sometimes identical to the ‘subjective’ theories, this word tends to replace the word ‘subjective’ in contemporary discussions of the death of Christ as being somewhat subtler and more flexible. These are theories which assert that Christ/the Cross reveals something which is eternally true of the nature of God, and this revelation is redemptive in nature
Post-modern	(see structuralism as well). Broadly, human thought from the European Enlightenment (c.mid 18 th c.) until the late 20 th century, based upon the science of observations e.g. Newton’s Laws, is seen as “Modern”. A typical

outlook might be “scientifically proven” – there are still absolute truths, but they are scientific, not religious or philosophical. Post-modernity is based rather on post-Einsteinian science and structuralist linguistic and social theories and would deny there is any truth. This is the world we live in (although some of us remain children of the Enlightenment/modern world!)

Propitiation In Christological terms that Christ’s death appeases the anger of God the Father concerning our sins, by offering an acceptable sacrifice

Redemption The language of the slave markets – to buy back from slavery at a market price

Representative Theories of atonement which seek to make sense of the biblical imagery of substitution without a (penal) substitutionary approach (see below). They emphasize that Christ represented Israel/humanity/creation before God and draw allusions from contemporary life (e.g. the German Theologian, Wolfhart Pannenberg, speaks of the soldier’s representative death on behalf of his nation/community)

Salvation from the Latin for healing, pointing towards wholeness, but having come to take on the flavour of “to save” meaning rescue, these are the two poles of meaning for this word.

Structuralism foundation stone of post-modernism. Insistence on ‘arbitrary nature of linguistic signs’, that language is ‘whimsical and capricious’ (Derrida) ensuing impossibility of fixed meanings for any text. Baudrillard argued modern society trapped by artificial sign systems which meant nothing and merely perpetuated the belief systems of those who created them (usually oppressive powers) – hence the imperative to ‘**de-construct**’ texts and free our thought.

Subjective atonement theories that assert that the death of Christ has only an inspirational effect, nothing is changed beyond ourselves, but our aspirations are higher – the example of the Cross inspires love and devotion in humanity. This is now generally rather dated language, but can still be useful.

Substitutionary Theories of atonement which stress that Christ died instead of us. Usually understood as ‘penal substitutionary’ i.e. that Christ took the punishment for our sins, and in so doing turned aside the just wrath of God against sinful humanity. A form of an objective theory of the atonement, but one which suffers these days, at least in its penal substitutionary form, from seeming unjust.

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