

# An Outline of the Faith

Introducing Christian Doctrine

A Lay-Training Course  
of the Episcopal Church in the Philippines

St. Andrew's Theological Seminary  
Quezon City, Manila



## Preface

This course is an introduction to Christian doctrine, that is, Christian teaching about the nature of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and about the Church, its ministry and sacraments and other matters central to our faith, particularly as understood in the Anglican tradition. It enables participants to study the Creeds and refers to the Catechism, the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion and other historic documents of importance to Anglicanism. Its introductory chapter looks briefly at the nature of the one called to believe – the human being – from biblical, philosophical, historical and psychological perspectives.

This material constitutes a one-semester course and has been produced at St. Andrew's Seminary in the hope that it may be of value in lay-training within the Episcopal Church in the Philippines, and perhaps for others – even clergy wanting a refresher course! It lays no claim to be other than an introduction to an important and complex subject, but some of the chapters are substantial and may be best spread over two sessions. The course teacher would do well to introduce the topics imaginatively rather than simply reading through the material presented here. Questions are included, usually at the end of each chapter for group reflection and discussion.

I am most grateful to my colleague Fr. Guillermo Juan for kindly reading a draft of this coursebook and making a number of helpful suggestions as to how it might be improved, most of which I have acted on. He must not be blamed for the deficiencies that remain!

Our prayer is that participants in these lay-training courses will grow in knowledge, faith and in practical usefulness in God's service.

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April 2010*



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## What is Man?

We think it obvious that a human is a mammal that stands on two feet and has the best developed brain of all animals. Yet the nature of man has been a subject of debate for millennia. Let us investigate.

### Humans have a Body

The philosopher C.E.M. Joad once said:

Man is nothing but  
Fat enough for seven bars of soap  
Iron enough for one medium-sized nail  
Sugar enough for seven cups of tea  
Lime enough to whitewash one chicken coop  
Phosphorous enough to tip 2,200 matches  
Magnesium enough for one dose of salts  
Potash enough to explode one toy crane  
Sulphur enough to rid one dog of fleas

Clearly he is saying we consist of just a body made of chemicals. But the human body itself is not a static entity. Anatomist J.Z. Young tells us:

Whereas the molecules of many proteins and other soft parts of the body are replaced every few hours or days, some molecules of the bones, tendons, and hair may remain for months or years. Nevertheless, in the end they all change, and it cannot be emphasized too strongly that what continues is not any particular body but an organization of processes, a way of acting, of living.<sup>1</sup>

So which is the real 'me'?! Furthermore, if I am purely a material body, my behavior is entirely determined by the properties of the chemicals within me. Experimental psychologist B.F. Skinner thought he could demonstrate this by showing that animal and human behavior can be shaped by the use of rewards and punishments (isn't that how we discipline children?). He believed this approach could be used on a large scale to shape the future of mankind and bring in a utopia. According to what value system should mankind be thus manipulated? Skinner thought it should be that of survival. But would it not be just the survival of the fittest? Anyway, as Christian psychologist Malcolm Jeeves pertinently remarks, it is surely wrong to conclude that humans are nothing but stimulus response machines, for how can one so explain all human achievement in the fields of art, literature, religion and science?<sup>2</sup>

Even if humans were purely material, each has a personality or mind. Sigmund Freud thought the human mind consisted of three parts: the *id*, the *ego* and the *superego*.

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<sup>1</sup> *An Introduction to the Study of Man*, (Oxford: University Press, 1974), p.117.

<sup>2</sup> *Psychology and Christianity: the view both ways* (Leicester: IVF, 1976), p.62.

- The *id* being the subconscious mind which discharges man's animal drives, energy and tension; it works according to the 'pleasure principle'.
- The *superego* being the voice of parents, teachers and society speaking through conscience; it sets us ideals to aim for and behavior to avoid. (Freud maintained God was an illusion.)
- The *ego* being the conscious mind, holding the balance between the *id* and the *superego*; it works according to the 'reality principle' devising action that is acceptable amidst the challenges of the day-to-day world.

Freud's model of the human mind has been very influential, but it is only a model and has been the subject of much criticism.

One point is very obvious even to non-Christians - that human nature is clearly *flawed*. In every human society there is conflict and corruption. Left to himself man might be described as, to use the phrase of existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, just 'a useless passion'.

### **Has Man a Soul?**

Is there a part of us that is *non-material*? Several of the ancient Greek philosophers taught this. Plato viewed the body as a prison of the soul from which only death could liberate it; matter he believed to be evil. He saw the soul as consisting of three parts: the rational, the spirited (higher emotions, such as courage), and the appetitive (lower desires), likening it to a charioteer driving one disciplined and one unruly horse! He also believed the soul pre-existed the body and, after death, would enter another body (the 'transmigration of souls'). His pupil Aristotle, however, believed the body to be a pleasant home for the soul, to which it was tightly bound till death; then only the rational part or the mind survived. He did not accept the pre-existence of the soul, nor its migration into other bodies.

### **The Christian View of Man**

The Bible's teaching about our human make-up is rather closer to Aristotle than Plato. It depicts man as a psychosomatic whole, the body being part of his essential nature. He received life from God (Gen.2:7), is made in God's 'image', and is to rule and care for God's lesser creatures (Gen.1:26, 2:15). In the New Testament a human is generally seen as bipartite, consisting of body and soul (Mt.10:28) or body and spirit (1 Cor.7:34, Jas.2:26) for 'soul' and 'spirit' can be used interchangeably (Lk.1:46-7). Sometimes the spirit seems to be viewed as the highest part of soul (presumably in 1 Thess.5:23, Heb.4:12), the part that communes with God's spirit (Rom.8:16).

Generally in the Old Testament there is little concept of a meaningful life after the death of the human body. All that remains is a person's 'shade' which goes down to Sheol, the Pit, to join those of others already dead in a feeble, ghostly existence, a prospect to be avoided as long as possible (Ps.88). When, towards the end of the Old Testament, a firm belief in a significant afterlife developed, this envisaged the resurrection of the body (Is.26:19, Dan.12:2-3). In the New Testament St. Paul, like all Pharisees, embraces this view, now mightily reinforced by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but he emphasizes the resurrected body will not consist of flesh and blood but will be a 'spiritual' body (1 Cor.15:42-55). He is speaking about those who,

committed to Christ, share in his victory over death (vv.55-7). Such a body surely ensures recognition in the next life.

The Early Church Fathers maintained this viewpoint but sought to reconcile it with their Greek philosophical heritage, particularly from Plato. In the pre-Nicene period (before 325) Origen believed the soul pre-existed the body and defects in the body at birth were punishment for sins in its previous life. But here he was on his own. In general the Post-Nicene Fathers viewed the soul as a person's *true self*, immortal but not pre-existent. They also continued to affirm the resurrection of the body (hence the statements of our creeds).

What is meant by the 'image' of God in humans? The Fathers offered a range of suggestions: that humans alone in the animal kingdom resemble God's form, or have the gift of free will or reason, have a special dignity or are capable of full communion with God.<sup>3</sup> How aptly does our ECP Catechism answer the question 'What does it mean to be created in the image of God?'

It means that we are free to make choices: to love, to create, to reason, and to live in harmony with creation and with God.

It goes on to say that we lost that harmony by making wrong choices, rebelling against God and putting ourselves in his place. Article 9 of our Articles of Religion speaks of 'original sin', the tendency to sin, which affects all humans, inherited from Adam's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. Article 10 goes on to say this has so corrupted human nature that, unaided by God, we are no longer able to obey him fully. Whether today we believe this tendency to sin came from Adam or from the struggle for survival in the process of evolution its reality is blatantly obvious. Present-day manifestations include family breakdowns, political corruption, genocide and computer viruses.

### **Man is Made for Community and for God**

It is obvious that humans are made for communal living. We have been set in families and depend on one another for satisfying so many of our needs. But to live together satisfactorily we need God's transforming power (2 Cor.5:17). This transformation is an ongoing process. Having accepted our bodies may be likened to machines, needing the right 'fuel' to run efficiently, J.I. Packer turns his attention to the human soul:

As rational persons, we were made to bear God's moral image – that is, our souls were made to 'run' on the practice of worship, law-keeping, truthfulness, honesty, discipline, self-control, and service to God and our fellows. If we abandon these practices, not only do we incur guilt before God; we also progressively destroy our own souls. Conscience atrophies, the sense of shame dries up, one's capacity for truthfulness, loyalty, and honesty is eaten away, one's character disintegrates. One not only becomes desperately miserable; one is steadily being de-humanised. This is one aspect of spiritual death. Richard Baxter was right to formulate the alternatives as 'A Saint – or a Brute': that, ultimately, is the only choice, and everyone, sooner or later, consciously or unconsciously opts for one or the other.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp.423-6.

<sup>4</sup> *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1973), pp.102-3.

In prison before his death at the hands of the Nazis Dietrich Bonhöffer declared that modern man has 'come of age' and appears no longer to need God or the Church. How could he say that after witnessing the savage inhumanity of two World Wars? John Macquarrie aptly comments, 'Insistence on one's autonomy is more typically the mark of adolescence than of maturity'.<sup>5</sup>

*Now please go back to the beginning of this chapter and work through it section by section. Which insights about human nature do you find particularly valuable? Are there any you wish to reject? Why?*

Related Material: ECP Catechism 'Human Nature', 'Sin and Redemption'  
Articles of Religion 9-16

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<sup>5</sup> *Principles of Theology* (London: SCM, 1966), p.73

## The Creeds

*The Nicene Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture.*

(Article 8, Articles of Religion, ECP)

### Introductory

If from the start repentance and faith were necessary before a person could be baptized, probably that person made a public profession of faith. Timothy clearly did (1 Tim.6:12), and perhaps Rom.10:9-10 is a baptismal profession. Soon, deriving perhaps from Mt.28:19, this confession took the form of a threefold declaration of faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The *Apostolic Tradition*, a document that may record here the practice of the church in Rome in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century, shows that, at that time, candidates had to answer "I believe" to creedal questions:

*Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born from the Holy Spirit from the Virgin Mary....?*

*Do you believe in the Holy Spirit and the holy Church and the resurrection of the flesh?*

This document speaks of a three-year period of instruction for catechumens,<sup>6</sup> though the diligent could be fast-tracked. Catechetical training in the West became known as *traditio symboli*, 'handing over the creed'.

Our word 'creed' in fact is from the Latin *credo*, "I believe". By the 4<sup>th</sup> century there were baptismal creeds in all major churches. Creeds which came from councils of the Church began "We believe". The original form of Article 8 refers to *three* creeds: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the 'Creed of St. Athanasius'. Let us look at each of them in turn:

### The Apostles' Creed

This is an enlarged form of the baptismal creed of the church in Rome. c.AD 390 Ambrose is the first to mention it was known as the 'Apostles' Creed' and he tells the legend that it was jointly composed by the apostles. The phrase 'he descended to the dead' is a modern restatement of what was originally 'he descended *into hell*', a clause added to the creed c.400; this and 'the communion of saints' are phrases distinctive to this creed. The present form of the creed is probably from Spain or Gaul in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. This creed is used only in the Western Church at Morning and Evening Prayer and baptisms; it is not known by the Orthodox churches.

It consists of three sections, each concerned with a Person of the Trinity. First:

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

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<sup>6</sup> Candidates for baptism.

What great truths are taught here! It is stated that God is our Father, that he is all-powerful, and that he created heaven and earth. Christian belief is that he made it out of nothing. Whilst those who drew up the creed undoubtedly believed in the six-day creation of Genesis 1, the creed does not state God's method of creating. This leaves open the possibility of accepting, in our scientific age, that the universe came into being with a 'big bang', the sound of which is still detectable today by sensitive scientific instruments, and that life on earth evolved from simple life forms to complex ones and eventually to humans, over a very long period of time.

The main part of the Apostles' Creed is devoted to a statement about Jesus, who he is, what he has done and will do:

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.  
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.  
He 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,  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.*

This is a very valuable summary of what Christians, believe about Jesus.

First his nature: he is the **Messiah**, for 'Christ' is simply the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew 'Messiah' (both meaning 'anointed one'), fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament that God would send a deliverer to his people (Is.9:2, 6-7, 11:1-5 etc, cf. 1 Sam.15:1, 16:13). Then he is **God's Son** (Mk.1:11, Rom.1:4). To us Christians he is also our **Lord** or Master. His very conception and birth mark him out as different from others, for he was conceived when Mary was only betrothed to Joseph, not married, and during that period Jewish tradition insisted that a couple must live apart and not engage in intercourse. The conception came through the power of the Holy Spirit (Mt.1:20, Lk.1:35), and therefore the child was born to a virgin. There was a Jewish slander about Jesus current in the early centuries of the church that Jesus was born not of a *parthenos* (Greek for 'virgin') but of *Pantheros* ('Panther'), a soldier! On the contrary, Christians declared that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Is.7:14. This caused controversy with the Jews who pointed out that 'virgin' occurs in that passage only in the famous Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint, whilst the original Hebrew has a more general word meaning 'young woman'. But in Isaiah 7 God, through Isaiah, offers king Ahaz a *sign* that he will deliver him from two belligerent enemies. If this child to be called Immanuel will be born merely of a 'young woman', not a 'virgin', what is special about that? It is no longer a sign.

Then the creed summarizes the momentous events of Jesus' life on earth and subsequently. Somewhat surprisingly it jumps straight from Jesus' miraculous birth to his horrifying death. Why is there no reference to his teaching and healing? Because, it seems, the focus here is on our salvation. When St. Paul states the Christian Good News he similarly makes no mention of Jesus' noble ethics and astonishing miracles but simply declares 'that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures' and then appeared to many people (1 Cor.15:3-8). His death for

our sins fulfils most notably the prophecy of Isaiah 53; his resurrection fulfils Psalm 16: 8-11, quoted by the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:25-8).

After speaking of his crucifixion and burial, this creed says that Jesus descended to the underworld. 1 Peter 3:19-20, 4:6 tell of this visit to the imprisoned spirits of sinners drowned in the flood in the time of Noah. It gives us hope that our all-just God will in some way enable the Gospel to be announced to *all* who have died without hearing of Christ. The creed then goes on to speak of Jesus' ascension into heaven (Ac.2:1-11), where he is given the place of greatest honor, the seat at the right of the Father (Col.3:1, Heb.12:2). If the universe is a moral one, justice must ultimately be done to all and so Scripture says there will be a final judgment of all humans, and God has entrusted this judgment to his Son (Ac.17:31, 2 Cor.5:10 etc). A reference to this concludes this section of this creed.

The third section begins with a confession of faith in the Holy Spirit:

*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 divinity of the Holy Spirit is not stated here but the fact that this confession is parallel to the creed's earlier confessions of faith in God the Father and Son, suggests that, like them, he is divine (cf. Mt.28:20, 2 Cor.13:13). When the Apostles' Creed was being formulated there had been no controversy over the status of the Holy Spirit, so nothing more than this simple statement of faith in him was thought necessary.

It is followed by a reference to a number of other important Christian beliefs. First, the society to which all Christians belong, the Church: it is holy (meaning originally 'set apart', then 'pure') because it consists of those who have been spiritually brought to life, purified, transformed as a result of their response to the Gospel message and baptism in water (cf. Jn.3:5, 2 Cor.5:17, Eph.5:25-6 etc); and it is catholic ('worldwide') for we do not just belong to our local congregation but to a great body of believers spread throughout the world. The word 'church' is actually from the Greek *kuriakos* meaning 'belonging to the Lord'.

We Christians who belong to the Lord Jesus are rightly called 'saints' (cf. Rom.1:7, 1 Cor.1:2 etc); the Greek word is *hagioi* which means 'holy ones', those set apart for Christ's service. This term should not be reserved for martyrs, or those canonized by a pope. And we are part of a communion or fellowship of all Christians in this world and the next.

By committing our lives to God through Jesus Christ we have already embarked on eternal life, which has the rich significance of being in a relationship with God and Christ (Jn.17:3), not just of living for ever. For the next life, as we saw in chapter 1 of this manual, we Christians can expect a 'spiritual body' (1 Cor.15:44), which will surely allow us to be recognized by others but not be bound by the limitations of matter. Shall we enter this on the Last Day when Christ

returns (1 Thess.4:16-17, 1 Cor.15:51-4) or when we die (Phil.1:23)? We shall have to wait to find out, but can trust that God has the best in store for us.

## Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed is the one with which we are most familiar for we say or sing it in the eucharist Sunday by Sunday. Its name comes from the Council of Nicea (in Asia Minor<sup>7</sup>), a council of bishops summoned by the first Christian Roman emperor Constantine in 325. Scholars today think the creed was perhaps based on the baptismal creed of the Church of Jerusalem, amplified at this council to exclude the heresy<sup>8</sup> of Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria who denied the divinity of Christ. So it states emphatically Jesus Christ is:

*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.*

Arius said Jesus was part of creation and to call him ‘God’ was only to confer on him an honorary title. In rejecting this, the creed states that Jesus has been from all eternity uniquely begotten of the Father (as a child from a parent) and is part of the same divine being or substance as the Father. In the debate at the Council of Nicea Constantine himself put forward the Greek term *homoousios* (meaning ‘of the same substance’), and who would wish to quarrel with the emperor! The few present who did not accept it were exiled. Yet some of the bishops who signed the creed still disliked this term as it seemed to them to obliterate the distinction between the persons of the Godhead. And so, after the council and particularly after the death of Constantine in 337, Arianism raised its head again and was not permanently renounced by the Church until the Nicene Creed was reaffirmed at the next ecumenical council at Constantinople in 381.

The other clauses about Christ are substantially the same as those of the Apostles’ Creed, only they are developed a little further. As in the earlier creed, Christ’s death is located in history by being attributed to **Pontius Pilate**. Our gospels make it clear that the real cause of Jesus’ death was the hostility of the Jewish leaders, but as Judea was then part of the Roman Empire, the supreme Roman officer in the land had to give his permission for the death penalty to be carried out. That unfortunate man was Pilate, known from sources outside the New Testament to have been Procurator of Judea during the period AD 26-36. He had already antagonized the Jews by his ham-fisted handling of several previous matters, and a further protest from them this time might mean his removal from office (Jn.19:12). He clearly knew Jesus was innocent yet he was prepared to sacrifice justice for his own position. In consequence, down the ages, our creeds have declared him guilty of the world’s most terrible crime. But we also affirm that Jesus rose again ‘on the third day’, ascended into heaven, and that, after returning to earth as judge, ‘his kingdom will have no end’.

The creed actually issued by the Council of Nicea, like the Apostles’ Creed, merely confessed faith in the Holy Spirit in one simple clause. However, in subsequent decades the divinity of the Holy Spirit was challenged and so at the Council of Constantinople this bare clause was supplemented to affirm his divinity in words with which we are familiar:

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<sup>7</sup> Modern-day Turkey.

<sup>8</sup> False teaching.

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father.  
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.  
He has spoken through the prophets.*

In the Garden of Eden God is said to have ‘breathed into (Adam’s) nostrils the breath of life’ (Gen.2:7). In the Old Testament one Hebrew word *ruach* can be translated ‘breath’, ‘wind’ or ‘spirit’ (Ezek.37:9). And so the Spirit is the breath of God, a life-giving power. In the New Testament, it is the Spirit that comes down at Pentecost, empowering the Church for action, and subsequently comes upon each new member at baptism (Ac.1:8, 2:4, 38-9), making them spiritually alive. The Spirit is said to ‘proceed’ *from the Father* (Jn.15:26, cf.14:16, 26), but because Jesus is also closely connected in these verses with the sending of the Spirit, the Western Church later added ‘and from the Son’ (Latin *filioque*) to their Latin version of the Nicene Creed, saying then that the Holy Spirit ‘proceeds from the Father *and the Son*’. This addition appears to have taken place shortly after the Council of Toledo in Spain in 589. The Eastern Church reacted furiously to the Western Church’s unilateral change to the official wording of an ecumenical creed, and objected that the innovation violated the principle that the Father is the source of all being in the Trinity. Greek theologians have subsequently suggested the compromise of saying the Spirit proceeded from the Father ‘*through the Son*’. But Western theologians stood their ground and, despite excommunication by the Orthodox in 1054, have retained the *filioque* clause to this day.<sup>9</sup> But the ECP has surreptitiously removed the offending phrase from its BCP!

The divinity of the Holy Spirit is affirmed in the Nicene Creed by the words ‘with the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified’.<sup>10</sup> If saying the Holy Spirit ‘proceeded’ from the Father is referring to the outpouring of the Spirit on the Church at Pentecost, the Creed goes on to affirm that it was the *same* divine Spirit that had inspired the great prophets of the Old Testament.

The last three statements of the Nicene Creed again augment those of the Apostles’ Creed:

*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.*

First, all four ‘marks’ of the Church are stated. She is not only ‘holy’ and ‘catholic’ but also ‘one’ – both a warning against forming schisms which divide the Church, and also (for us if not for the compilers of the creed) a reminder that those in different denominations are still servants of Christ, in God’s care and upheld by his Spirit. She is also ‘apostolic’, holding to the doctrines and practices of the apostles themselves – or *should* be.

Baptism is stated as the decisive moment for Christians when, having renounced ‘the world, the flesh and the devil’, their sins are forgiven. Thereafter Christians must work to extend God’s kingdom in this world, but also look forward to the next where his will is to be perfectly done.

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<sup>9</sup> The phrase ‘through the Son’ might imply subordinationism in the Godhead, i.e. that the Son is less than the Father.

<sup>10</sup> Without using *homoousios*, though certain theologians *were* prepared to apply this term to the Holy Spirit.

## **Athanasian Creed**

The original form of Article 8 included also a creed attributed to St Athanasius, metropolitan bishop of Alexandria (328-73), unwavering defender of Nicene orthodoxy against Arianism. Whilst, like Athanasius, this creed staunchly upholds orthodox doctrine, clearly it was not written by him for he wrote in Greek but it was written in Latin. Indeed it appears to have been written in southern Gaul in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century.

It consists of two major sections: the first affirms in laborious style the doctrine of the Trinity, the second states the doctrine of the Incarnation. They are placed within a framework which asserts that it is necessary for salvation to believe the Catholic faith in the terms it sets forth.

The 1662 BCP of the Church of England stipulates the Athanasian Creed is to be substituted for the Apostles' Creed at Morning Prayer on major festivals, Trinity Sunday, and certain saints' days (thirteen occasions in all), though in practice today it is very rarely used on any of these occasions. Its use as a creed is peculiar to Anglicanism as it was previously treated in the Western Church as a canticle, but it is cumbersome and has been omitted altogether from many modern English Prayer Books including that of the ECP.

## **Value of Creeds**

Creeds are valuable as:

- tests of Christian orthodoxy, and
- summaries of the faith.

They are based on Scripture and help to keep us on the right track today.

*Do you think creeds valuable? How often do you think they should be used?*

*If the creeds are tests of Christian orthodoxy, which 'churches' in the Philippines are shown by them to be defective in their faith?*

Related Material: ECP Catechism 'The Creeds'  
Articles of Religion 8

## God the Father

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

### Why Believe in God?

All races, it appears, believe in or have believed in invisible spirit powers. Often this takes the form of belief in spirits inhabiting objects of nature: trees, rock and rivers. This is known as **animism** (from Lat. *animus* ‘spirit’, ‘soul’, ‘mind’). Worship of the whole of nature is **pantheism** (from Gk. *pan* ‘everything’ + *theos* ‘God’). In some cultures there is also belief in the presence of ancestor spirits (‘anitos’ in the Philippines). In the ancient Greco-Roman world all such spirits came to be known as ‘demons’. Of higher status generally were the gods, some of whom had been originally outstanding human beings. The sun, moon and planets have also sometimes been worshipped as gods who determine the fortunes of people on earth. Sometimes even animals have been worshipped. Belief in many gods is **polytheism** (Gk. *polloi* ‘many’ + *theos*). Belief in just one supreme God, **monotheism** (Gk. *monos* ‘sole’ + *theos*), is shared by the three great religions born in the Middle East: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Each has a holy book disclosing God’s nature and his will for mankind.

Monotheism is surely more sensible than polytheism for with several gods there is always the possibility that, like humans, they might disagree and fight! Christianity asserted its dominance over polytheism in the ancient world by the attractiveness of its message, the power of its exorcisms and healings, and the lives of many of its adherents clearly changed by Christ for the better.

In the Middle Ages and indeed in our modern era Christian theologians have felt the need to give reasons for belief in the one, true God. Let us look at some of the arguments used.

#### (1) From the Being of God

Commissioned by God to speak to Israel, who were enslaved in Egypt, and say that God cared about their plight and would deliver them, Moses asked for God’s name and received the reply, “I am who I am” (Ex.3:14). He was told to say to the Israelites, “I Am has sent me to you,” adding that he was ‘Yahweh’,<sup>11</sup> the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

More than 2,000 years later Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury (1093-1109), theologian and philosopher, set down in chs. 2-4 of his book *Proslogion*, what is now known as the ‘Ontological Argument’, an argument from the nature of God. It runs:

God is a being than which no greater can be conceived.

If he exists only in the mind and not in reality, clearly he is not such a being.

Therefore he must exist in reality.

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<sup>11</sup> The name ‘Yahweh’ in Hebrew is similar to ‘he is’. In most English versions of the Old Testament the term ‘the Lord’ is used in place of ‘Yahweh’ reflecting the Jewish view that the name of God is too sacred to be pronounced.

This argument has the strange ability to feel at the same time both convincing and unconvincing! The truth is, however, that what is conceived in the mind, no matter how great, does not have to exist in reality. We can conceive ideas of many amazing things, including flying pink elephants, but this does not make them exist in reality – except perhaps as wonders of today’s film industry! Anselm had his critics even in his own day.

## (2) From the Existence and Design of the World

We look at two different arguments here. First, from the idea of causality.<sup>12</sup> Everything in this world is caused by someone or something else: every building has its builder, every painting its painter, every machine its designer; and so the world, great as it is, must have its creator – God. The greatest problem for this argument is the child’s question, “Then who made God?” We reply of course, “He’s so great that he’s *always existed*.” But that is a statement of faith not a proof.

The second argument, from design in nature, was put forward in classic form by William Paley (1743-1805): if I were walking across a deserted heath and were to stumble across an old fashioned watch, picked it up and examined its complex arrangement of wheels, cogs, axles and springs, I could not imagine it had just happened by accident, I would deduce it had been designed. From the watch I deduce the existence of the watchmaker. And so with the world, its evident beauty and intricate design declares it to be the product of a brilliant mind – God’s. Over 200 years after Paley this argument still continues to impress many.

## (3) From Conscience

We should like to do freely what we want but we find within us a voice that condemns certain of our actions and urges us to do others. In the words of Cardinal Newman:

If, as is the case, we feel responsibility, are ashamed, are frightened, at transgressing the voice of conscience, this implies that there is One to whom we are responsible, before whom we are ashamed, whose claims upon us we fear...<sup>13</sup>

The philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) spoke of a ‘categorical imperative’ which confronts us, telling us what to do as we live our lives, and he declared that two things convinced him of the existence of God, ‘the starry heavens above me, and the moral law within me.’ It is true that conscience can be conditioned by training and even suppressed by persistent disregard, but it can also reawaken. One of the Communist Khmer Rouge, who meted out most cruel treatment, inflicting genocide on their own people in Cambodia in the 1970s,<sup>14</sup> was converted in jail and, when subsequently put on trial for his share of the crimes, asked that he be given the severest possible sentence.

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<sup>12</sup> This and linked arguments were elaborated by Thomas Aquinas (c.1225-74) in his great *Summa Theologica* pt.1, qn.2, art.3 (for further details see McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, pp.160-2) but I take this simple restatement of it from John Stott, *Your Confirmation* (1991), p.51.

<sup>13</sup> *A Grammar of Assent*, quoted John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p.27.

<sup>14</sup> Don Cormack in his horrifying account in *Killing Fields, Living Fields* (Crowborough: MARC, 1997), p.182, says 2-3 million out of a total population of 7 million perished.

#### (4) From Spiritual Experiences and Answered Prayers

There have been countless claimed experiences of God throughout history. To focus on Judeo-Christian history, Israel believed in its one God, Yahweh, because of his self-disclosure to the Patriarchs, Moses, the prophets and other privileged individuals, his gift to them as a nation of unparalleled noble laws (Deut.4:7-14), his deliverance of them from slavery in Egypt (Deut.4:32-5), and their later experiences of his mercy (Is.43:14-18 etc).

The New Testament records the experiences of those who were with Jesus of Nazareth, whom they came to recognize as the unique revelation of the unseen God (Jn.1:1-18, 1 Jn.1:1-3 etc).

Subsequent history right up to the present has witnessed answers to countless prayers for strength, healing, wisdom, guidance and so forth. Christian missionaries, in particular, having travelled to many strange and dangerous places with little security beyond faith in God, have testified time and again of his unfailing support. The stories of James Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission (1865), and Sadhu Sundar Singh, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian convert from a Hindu/Sikh background, must rank among the most impressive. (*See what information you can find out about them.*)

Personal encounters with God and answered prayers are most poignant to those who have experienced them, but can also impress others by their consequences. The China Inland Mission, for instance, was able at one time to sustain nearly 800 missionaries in China by faith, i.e. without the protection of British gunships or any guaranteed income from home.

*Have you experienced God's presence or impressive answers to prayer at any time? If so please share them with others in your training group.* Faced with skeptics who wished to dismiss answered prayers as 'coincidences' William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury (1942-4), once said, "When I pray, coincidences happen; when I don't they don't!" *Do you agree?*

#### The Problem of Suffering

If some of the above matters convincingly point to the reality of the unseen God, the many facets of suffering in our world are seen by some to be pointing in the opposite direction. To the question, 'How are atheists produced?' Bernard Shaw replied:

In probably nine cases out of ten, what happens is something like this. A beloved wife or husband or child or sweetheart is gnawed to death by cancer, stultified by epilepsy, struck dumb and helpless by apoplexy, or strangled by croup or diphtheria; and the looker-on, after praying vainly to God to refrain from such horrible and wanton cruelty, indignantly repudiates faith in the divine monster, and becomes not merely indifferent and sceptical, but fiercely and actively hostile to religion.<sup>15</sup>

Not all react so strongly, but nevertheless have to struggle to hold on to their faith. Some sickness is clearly caused by human foolishness (e.g. lung cancer through smoking, heart attacks through eating excessive amounts of fried foods), some results from stress, some comes from contagion, but other sickness appears 'out of the blue'.

Many of life's troubles can be traced to human greed, aggression and sheer laziness. These infest daily life and show their public face in politics. Some soldiers returning home from the

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in *We Believe in God: A Report by the Doctrine Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing, 1987), p.17.

world wars, where they witnessed comrades wounded and indeed blown apart, have declared, “I lost my faith in God!” Really they should have said, “I lost my faith in *man!*”

Then there is suffering through natural disasters: earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons, floods, droughts and fires. Humans have had a hand in some of it. Illegal logging has caused devastating mud slides; foolhardy youths are sometime responsible for lighting wild fires. But many other disasters come upon human communities unforeseen and unprovoked. How can a God of love have allowed them? Well, it seems the geological processes and atmospheric conditions which have made this planet such a beautiful and fertile place to live in have also some disadvantages. According to ‘plate tectonics’ in geology the surface of the earth is made up of a number of independent solid plates covering a molten interior. When the plates clash there are earthquakes, and if this happens at sea, tsunamis; earthquake zones are also often associated with ranges of high mountains, such as the Andes. The system by which God chose to make this earth also has its ‘shadow side’; but would not any system? The fact is that our planet is clearly more favorable for the development of life than unfavorable or else the world’s population would not continue to increase.

The book of Job clearly expresses the fact that suffering can come to good people who in no way deserve it, but it also encourages us to continue to trust the sovereign Lord, for he will bring all things right in the end. John Stott has some wise words for us:

Ultimately, we accept God’s existence by faith rather than by proof because, being infinite, and beyond the reach of our finite minds, God can only be known by his revelation and not by our reason.<sup>16</sup>

And so let us turn to the famous wager of Blaise Pascal (1623-62), a challenge to all who doubt:

Either there is a God or there is not. I urge you to wager on God’s existence. If you win, you win all; if you lose, you lose nothing.<sup>17</sup> You may lack faith, so follow the behavior of those who believe. Then God will give you faith. (*Pensées*, 233, my summary)

## **What is God Like?**

What does the Bible reveal about God’s nature? Let us focus on just his main qualities:

### **(1) Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent**

He is all-powerful, all-wise, and present everywhere. As Creator of this world his power is obviously immense. Modern astronomy speaks of a universe of mind-boggling proportions: our nearest star, the sun, is a mere 150 million kilometers away. Our next nearest star, Alpha Centauri, is some 4.25 light years away – i.e. light from it, travelling at c.300,000 km per second takes nearly four years and three months to reach us! The universe itself is estimated to be some 156 billion light years in diameter – and expanding! The consensus of astronomers is that all the matter of the universe is travelling outwards from the initial explosion of a mighty atom some 13.7 billion years ago. Perhaps we rest easier just exclaiming with the psalmist, unaware of these statistics: ‘The heavens declare the glory of God, the vault of heaven proclaims his handiwork’ (Ps.19:1). Inanimate objects like rocks and snowflakes have crystalline structures, and everywhere in the plant and animal kingdoms purposive design reveals God’s wisdom. Some writers of the Old Testament felt that Sheol, the place of departed spirits (shades) was outside his

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<sup>16</sup> John Stott, *Your Confirmation*, p.51.

<sup>17</sup> If God’s there he will richly reward you; if he’s not no-one is there to punish you.

domain (Ps.88:4-5), but others realized that his presence reached even there (Ps.139). It's only our moods that sometimes lead us to feel God is absent.

## (2) Just and Holy

God's just will is evident in the laws he gave to Israel: the Ten Commandments, the *lex talionis* ('law of retaliation'),<sup>18</sup> and much else. He was not unpredictable like pagan gods, and David could say, 'He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake' (Ps.23:3). His just desires make themselves known through our consciences and, in the world of cause and effect in which we live, evil finds general condemnation and is often punished (cf. Gal.6:7-9). Kings no less than paupers, are subject to his condemnation and punishment.<sup>19</sup> In our modern era evil leaders such as Hitler and Idi Amin were ultimately defeated in battle, dictator Marcos was forced out by 'people power', racist apartheid in South Africa was peacefully overthrown,<sup>20</sup> and atheistic Communism collapsed in Eastern Europe and Russia, and has been liberalized in China. These are all signs that we live in a *moral* universe. We await similar developments against those unjust regimes that remain.

Scripture stresses that God is 'holy', 'set apart' from sin (Is.6:1-8, Hab.1:13). He hates the sin but loves the sinners and repeatedly calls them to repent and find forgiveness (Is.1:16-17, Jer.18:11 etc), but sadly, if they persist in sin he allows them to meet their due consequences. One of the saddest scenes in the Old Testament is Ezekiel's vision of God departing from sinful Jerusalem, leaving it exposed to the destruction of the Babylonian army (Ezek.10:18-19, 11:22-3).

## (3) Loving and Faithful

Because God loved Israel he heard their cries of pain as slaves in Egypt and sent Moses to deliver them (Ex.3:7-12, Deut.7:8). God promised he would be faithful to all who obeyed his commandments (Deut.7:9). In fact, despite Israel's repeated failures, along with punishment there was also repeated forgiveness. The prophetic career of Hosea in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC captured the tension between God's love and his holiness: though Israel is as faithless to God as a prostitute to her husband (Hos.1, 3), his injured love remains (11:8-9). God speaks to the exiles in Babylon with the tenderness of a Semitic shepherd (Is.40:1-2, 10-11); and to 'those who fear him' he displays the caring love of a father for his children (Ps.103:13). But it is supremely in the New Testament that we see Jesus drawing his disciples into the intimate personal relationship he himself has with his Father. This is evident when he teaches them to address God as 'Our Father' (Mt.6:9) or perhaps originally just 'Father' (Lk.11:2) reflecting the Aramaic word 'Abba' that Jesus himself used in prayer (Mk.14:36),<sup>21</sup> equivalent almost to 'Daddy'. The New Testament declares God's love is not just for Israel, but for *all* nations, and he offers them eternal life through Jesus (Jn.3:16). This truth is so dear to the apostle John that he goes on to declare

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<sup>18</sup> 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth' (Ex.21:23-5) which limits how much retaliation is acceptable for an injustice.

<sup>19</sup> So prophets condemned and warned of punishment to David (2 Sam.11-12), Ahab (1 Ki.21), and others.

<sup>20</sup> Largely due to the influence of Christians such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, supported by the non-racist Anglican Church over which he presided.

<sup>21</sup> This is all the more likely since the Holy Spirit led the early Christians to use the Abba form (Gal.4:6, Rom.8:15).

‘God is love’ and stresses that all Christians, embraced by this love, should therefore love one another (1 Jn.4:7-12, cf. Jn.13:34-5).

## **Knowing God**

St. John in fact declares that it is through loving others that we ourselves actually *know* God by participating in his nature (1 Jn.4:7-8). In our time Pakistani Muslim Bilquis Sheikh came to know God by daring to call him ‘Father’ in her prayers.<sup>22</sup> J.I. Packer in his classic *Knowing God*<sup>23</sup> advises:

How can we turn our knowledge *about* God into knowledge *of* God? The rule for doing this is demanding, but simple. It is that we turn each truth that we learn *about* God into matter for meditation *before* God, leading to prayer and praise *to* God.

Knowing God involves, first, listening to God’s word and receiving it as the Holy Spirit interprets it, in application to oneself; second, noting God’s nature and character, as His word and works reveal it; third, accepting His invitations, and doing what He commands; fourth, recognizing, and rejoicing in, the love that He has shown in thus approaching one and drawing one into this divine fellowship.

Does this appear complicated? Try reading carefully a passage of Scripture, reflecting on it for some minutes, and then speaking to God about its truths? It is good to do this at a regular time each day.<sup>24</sup>

*Which of the arguments for the existence of God are most meaningful to you? Has the problem of suffering ever shaken your faith?*

*What aspects of the nature of God do you find most encouraging?*

Related Material: ECP Catechism ‘God the Father’; Articles of Religion 1

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<sup>22</sup> And so she called her moving story *I Dared to Call Him Father* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1978).

<sup>23</sup> J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pp.18, 32.

<sup>24</sup> More guidance about this will be found in our SATS lay-training course ‘Christian Discipleship’.

## The Person of Christ

A Russian Communist dictionary is said to have described Jesus as ‘a mythical figure who never existed’. No serious historian today could maintain that position. On the contrary it can fairly be argued, not only that Jesus was a real person, but that he has been the most influential figure in the whole of human history. His life spanned the years c.6 BC - AD 30.

### Our Sources of Information

We are familiar with the four accounts of Jesus’ life in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, generally believed to date from c.AD 65–100 but possibly written some decades earlier.<sup>25</sup> In the last two centuries the historical value of the gospels has been strongly challenged, partly by those who, in the name of science, have wished to eliminate the supernatural elements (angels, demons, miracles etc), partly by ‘form critics’ who believe that the earliest period of oral transmission of the teachings of and stories about Jesus has radically changed this material.<sup>26</sup> More recently it has been recognized that history was very important to the gospel writers<sup>27</sup> and, as the teachings of the Jewish rabbis were memorized with great care by their disciples, so much care must have been taken to preserve accurately the words and works of Jesus.<sup>28</sup> Of course each gospel writer selected from and edited the material before him, and it is clear that the Fourth Gospel gives us a more reflective account of the life of Jesus, seeking to draw out the full implications of who he is. Nevertheless, we shall not go far wrong if we accept that in the gospels we have a substantially accurate account of what Jesus said and did.<sup>29</sup>

One further point is worth considering, particularly in the face of Muslim claims that Christians ‘have corrupted their Scriptures’, making out that Jesus was the Son of God when this could not have been so.<sup>30</sup> The actual gap between the life of Jesus and the earliest surviving copies of the gospels is far shorter than the gap between the lives of important ancient Roman writers and the earliest copies of their works. For instance, Julius Caesar tells of his military campaigns in Gaul (France) in his *Gallic War* written in the 50-58 BC. There are only nine or ten good manuscripts of this work and the earliest dates from 900 years after Caesar’s day. In contrast the gap between the writing of the gospels and the earliest complete manuscripts is some 300 years, and there is a fragment of St. John’s Gospel chapter 18 dating from c.AD 150. Moreover there are some 5,000 Greek manuscripts containing the New Testament in whole or in part. If we think we know about the activities of Julius Caesar, how much more should we be confident that we know about the life of Jesus Christ.<sup>31</sup> It is surely then much more likely that it is the Qur’an, written 600 years after Jesus was on earth, which contains inaccurate information

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<sup>25</sup> See J.A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1976).

<sup>26</sup> The pioneers of this approach were the Germans R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Eng. tr. Oxford: University Press, 1963 from German original 1921), and M. Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (Eng. tr. London: Nicholson, 1934 from 2<sup>nd</sup> edn of German original 1933).

<sup>27</sup> Lk.1:1-4, cf. 1 Jn.1:1-3.

<sup>28</sup> The classic statement of this was that of B. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript* (Uppsala: Gleerup, 1961).

<sup>29</sup> I.H. Marshall probes this matter in his *I Believe in the Historical Jesus* (London: Hodder, 1977).

<sup>30</sup> Qur’an, surah 5, vv.76-9 etc.

<sup>31</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents* 5<sup>th</sup> edn (London: IVP, 1959 (1972)), ch. 2. Such points have been publicized in recent times by the Alpha Course from Holy Trinity, Brompton, London.

about him rather than our gospels. That Jesus made ripples in Roman and Jewish history is evident from the references to his life by non-Christian writers from the 1<sup>st</sup> century of our era onwards.<sup>32</sup>

## Information about Jesus

What information about Jesus can we draw from the gospels? First, he appears very much a real human being. He eats and drinks, walks and sleeps, he shows love (Mk.10:21), sadness (Jn.11:32-6) and anger (Mk.11:15-17). He experiences temptation (Mt.4:1-11). As a child he is adventurous, yet curbs this and is obedient to his parents (Lk.2:41-51).

But there are aspects of Jesus' life that are *different* from those of other humans. His birth from a virgin through the agency of the Holy Spirit (Mt.1:20-3, Lk.1:35), is unique. After being empowered by the Holy Spirit at baptism (Mk.1:9-11) he begins a dynamic ministry of preaching, healing and exorcism. Receptive listeners find his teaching authoritative, unlike that of the scribes (Mt.7:28-9); yet to a less receptive audience he teaches fundamental spiritual truths through stories (parables), leaving his hearers to make their own interpretation. As a healer it seems clear he had no peer in the ancient world<sup>33</sup> (cf. Mk.7:37) and his power over the forces of nature was astonishing (Mk.4:41). He could see into peoples' hearts (Mk.2:8) and predict the future (Mk.13:1-2) but, above all, his resurrection two days after his crucifixion sets him apart from everyone else (Rom.1:4).

*So, who was (is) he?* His name 'Jesus' comes from the Hebrew and means literally 'Yahweh is salvation', pointing to his fundamental role as Savior. The title he repeatedly uses for himself is, however, the 'Son of Man'. There has been much debate about its significance. On the surface it is an unassuming and unprovocative title meaning merely 'man'<sup>34</sup> or even 'I', but it could also be a Messianic title for, in the last part of his earthly life, Jesus associates himself with the heavenly 'son of man' of Dan.7:13-14 when speaking of his second coming to judge the world (Mk.13:26, 14:62).<sup>35</sup> The phrase 'son of man' appears also in the Hebrew of Ps.80:17 where it seems to refer to a kingly agent of God.<sup>36</sup> Jesus does not choose to call himself 'Messiah' or 'Son of God' perhaps because the first might cause people to believe his role was political or military, and the second would invite the charge of blasphemy and terminate his ministry prematurely. Yet he will not deny he is the One the Old Testament prophecies pointed to as God's anointed leader<sup>37</sup> or indeed that he is divine (Mk.8:29-31 // Mt.16:15-21, Mk.14:61-2). His forgiving of sins not committed against himself was recognized as a claim to divinity (Mk2:5-7), and his riding on a donkey into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday was an explicit fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy of Zech.9:9.

In the Old Testament God reveals his special name 'I Am' (Ex.3:14), and in the Fourth Gospel Jesus claims it for himself, which leads those listening to attempt to stone him for blasphemy (Jn.8:58). Yet the title is further incorporated in a breathtaking series of claims: 'I am

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<sup>32</sup> For further details see F.F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (London: Hodder, 1974).

<sup>33</sup> See *my Healing in the Early Church* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), ch.1.

<sup>34</sup> It is used repeatedly with this meaning when God addresses the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek.2:1, 3:1 etc).

<sup>35</sup> The 'Similitudes' or parables of the Jewish book of Enoch (1<sup>st</sup> C BC) appear to be also echoing this use of the term in Dan.7:13.

<sup>36</sup> See commentaries.

<sup>37</sup> 'Messiah' means 'anointed one'.

the bread of life' (Jn.6:35), 'I am the light of the world' (8:12), 'I am the resurrection and the life' (11:25), 'I am the way, the truth and the life' (14:6) and so on. In addition we find the statements 'He who has seen me has seen the father' (14:9) and 'I and the father are one' (10:30). As C.S. Lewis has pointed out, someone who said such things was either mad (self-deceived), bad (a deceiver), or really the Son of God.<sup>38</sup> The gospel writers of course had no doubts about Jesus' identity and, in assembling their material, invite their readers (and hearers) to draw the conclusion that he is the divine Messiah (Mk.1:1, Jn.20:31), that through repentance and faith they may enter God's kingdom (Mk.1:15, Mt.13:44-5) and find eternal life (Jn.3:16).

## The Post-New Testament Church

Jesus' claim to divinity led him to be condemned to death (Mk.14:63-4), but his resurrection vindicated his claim (Jn.20:27-8, Rom.1:4). Christians then as now needed to accept he was both really human and yet divine. But there were those in the Early Church who found this a great problem and made various attempts to avoid it. **Docetists** (Gk. *doceo* 'I seem') said Christ was an ethereal figure who only *seemed* to have flesh (cf. 1 Jn.4:1-2)<sup>39</sup> thus denying his true humanity. On the other hand certain conservative Jews, dubbed **Ebionites** (Heb. 'poor ones' – doctrinally poor?) by orthodox Christians, declared Jesus was just a man, the natural son of Joseph and Mary, inspired by God at baptism. Not finding in him a divine Savior they closely clung to the Jewish law. In the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century a certain Theodotus, a cobbler who came to Rome from Byzantium (later Constantinople), likewise taught that Jesus was just a man adopted by God at baptism and empowered for his service by the Holy Spirit. He and his followers were known as **Adoptionist**<sup>40</sup> **Monarchians** (Gk. *monos archōn*, 'single ruler'). He was excommunicated by Victor (pope, 189-198). Another teaching current around the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century is known as **Modalist Monarchianism** because it taught that the one God existed in three successive modes: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This view was attributed to Noëtus and Praxeas in Rome and a little later to Sabellius 'the Libyan'. It is also known as 'Patripassianism' (Lat. *pater* 'father' + *passus* 'suffered') for saying in effect that the Father suffered on the cross in the person of the Son.

The greatest challenge to the divinity of Christ, however, was posed by **Arius**, a presbyter of the church at Alexandria in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century. We have already met him in chapter 2 of this manual, and far more details are given in the companion volume *Understanding the History of the Church*, so only a fairly brief explanation is necessary here: schooled in the philosophy of Plato Arius was convinced that God was One and therefore Jesus could not be divine for that would violate the unity of the Godhead. If Jesus was 'begotten' he could not have existed eternally. As the Father alone is wise, the Son cannot fully understand him; while the Father is unchangeable, the Son is susceptible to change and even sin.

Athanasius pointed out some key problems inherent in Arius' position:

1. It made nonsense of Church liturgical practices such as baptizing in the three-fold name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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<sup>38</sup> *Mere Christianity* (London: Fount, 1977), pp.51-2.

<sup>39</sup> This was particularly characteristic of certain Gnostic sects (who believed there was salvation through their secret knowledge) and probable derived from Platonism which taught that matter was evil – clearly not fit to be adopted by a divine Savior.

<sup>40</sup> Or 'dynamic' Monarchians, the Holy Spirit coming with power (Gk. *dunamis*) upon Jesus at his baptism.

2. It virtually reintroduced polytheism – worship of one God and two lesser ‘gods’.
3. It undermined the doctrine of redemption since only if the mediator was divine could he re-establish fellowship with God, imparting divine life to men.

The great council of bishops called by the emperor Constantine at Nicea in 325 strongly asserted the divinity of Christ as shown by the series of phrases in our Nicene Creed:

*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.*<sup>41</sup>

In the original Greek this last phrase contains the key word *homoousios* (lit. ‘of the same substance’ as the Father) put forward at the council by Constantine himself. But although this became the official doctrine of the Church, many bishops were unhappy with it, for it had been a term used of the Godhead by Sabellius and, particularly after Constantine’s death in 337, they openly opposed it, aided by Constantius II, the most influential of Constantine’s sons. Indeed, so successful was this ‘backlash’ that in 359 twin councils of Eastern and Western bishops declared Christ was merely ‘like’ God the Father. As Jerome wryly commented, ‘The whole world groaned and wondered to find itself Arian!’ However Athanasius, now Patriarch of Alexandria, despite being exiled no less than five times, held steadfastly to the Nicene formula. He persuaded some of his less extreme opponents to accept *homoousios* and, at the second ecumenical council of bishops, at Constantinople in 381, Nicene orthodoxy prevailed. From then on the divinity of Christ was no longer a matter of debate.

### **The Two Natures of Christ**

Even before Constantinople another major Christological<sup>42</sup> debate had begun in the Eastern Church where two major schools of theology had developed, one in Alexandria, the other in Antioch in Syria. While the Alexandrians stressed the divine nature of Christ almost to the exclusion of his human nature, the Antiochenes strongly asserted Christ’s human nature alongside his divine. Both positions could be distorted.

This happened first to the Alexandrian position. **Apollinaris**, bishop of Laodicea, a strong supporter of Nicene orthodoxy, reacted against the Antiochene position, declaring it implied that in Christ there were two sons: the Son of God and the son of Mary. Moreover if, in the incarnation, the divine Word were united to a changeable human nature, it might be corrupted. He therefore maintained that in Christ the divine Word (cf. Jn.1:1) simply replaced the human soul. This union did not affect the Word but it had a profound effect upon his flesh; it became ‘divine flesh’ which, when received in the eucharist, infused divinity into those who partook of it, bringing them salvation. The problem with this position was that it effectively destroyed Christ’s humanity; he became a docetic Christ. Further, in the words of Gregory of Nazianzus, ‘what is not assumed is not healed’, i.e. if Christ did not take full humanity, he could not save it. Apollinaris was condemned at the Council of Constantinople.

Next, it was the turn of the Antiochenes. **Nestorius**, a monk from Antioch and a fine preacher, became Patriarch of Constantinople in 428. Soon he made himself unpopular by

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<sup>41</sup> Substantially the same as the original creed though somewhat tidied up.

<sup>42</sup> Christology is the study of the person of Christ.

denouncing the use of the title ‘Theotokos’ (‘God-bearer’) for the Virgin Mary, allowing only ‘Christotokos’ (‘Christ-bearer’) instead. Then he became careless with the formula of his teacher Theodore of Mopsuestia that Christ had ‘two natures (Gk. *physeis*) in one person (Gk. *prosōpon*)’; sometimes he said Christ had two *prosōpa*, and stated that the link between them was ‘voluntary’. He was accused of separating the two natures of Christ, leaving God with two sons. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, bitterly attacked his views and at the third ecumenical council, at Ephesus in 431, Nestorius was condemned. He retired to his monastery at Antioch and later was banished to Upper Egypt.

A third twist in the debate came when **Eutyches**, head of a large monastery in Constantinople, maintained that Christ’s humanity (from the Virgin) and his divinity were fused into one in the incarnation. Christ actually *became* flesh rather than assuming flesh. Eutyches was accused of confusing the two natures of Christ and holding that the divine nature could suffer. Eventually, at the fourth ecumenical council, at Chalcedon in 451, Eutyches was condemned, the title Theotokos was vindicated, and it was declared that Christ was to be acknowledged:

in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction between the natures (*physeis*) being in no way abolished because of the union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature being preserved, and concurring into one Person (*prosōpon*) and one subsistence...

This formula is orthodox Christian teaching to this day, but it scarcely brought peace. The Egyptian Church, unhappy with its evident ‘two nature’ theology, went into permanent schism – and Nestorius in exile felt vindicated! Perhaps we may be pardoned if, leaving aside its intricacies, we content ourselves with asserting that Christ was both fully human and fully divine. Paradox though it may sound, the evidence of his life leads to no other satisfactory conclusion.

*What do you think to be the most important evidence for the divinity of Christ?  
Are any of the old errors about Christ recurring today?*

Related Material: ECP Catechism ‘God the Son’  
Articles of Religion 2-3

## The Work of Christ

What is being referred here as the ‘work’ of Christ? Surely not the carpentry of Jesus’ early life (Mk.6:3). We might expect it to be his great ministry of preaching, healing and exorcism that began after his baptism and period of temptation in the wilderness. But, important though that was, its culmination was greater still. As Jesus approached his last Passover on earth we hear him praying:

Now is my soul troubled, and what should I say – “Father, save me from this hour”? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name. (Jn.12:27-28a)

Jesus’ name means ‘Yahweh is salvation’ or in effect ‘Savior’, and the salvation of mankind lay focused in that ominous ‘hour’ that lay ahead, the prospect of which he wrestled with in the Garden of Gethsemane where he prayed, “Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; take this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done” (Mk.14:36). The human Christ shrank from the horror of the cross, but submitted to the Father’s will.

References to the cross, Christ’s death, or the shedding of his blood, are found in almost all of the New Testament. Each of the gospels devotes far greater space to the crucifixion story than to any other part of Christ’s life. Why? “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” declares John the Baptist (Jn.1:29). ‘Now I would remind you, brothers, in what terms I preached to the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved... that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,’ declares St. Paul (1 Cor.15.1-3).

### The Old Testament Background

Implicit in the conception of God’s absolute righteousness, which nothing impure or sinful can approach, is the need for a sacrificial system where animals die in place of sinful humans.<sup>43</sup> The prophets insisted however that, without repentance, sacrifices were useless (e.g. Is.1:10-17). Because the covenant established at Sinai (Ex.24:1-8) was rendered meaningless through Israel’s repeated faithlessness, a *new* covenant was prophesied which God would help his people to keep (Jer.31:31-4). Moreover, a faithful servant of the Lord would come and vicariously bear the sins of many (Is.53). In vain did Israel interpret this to be a picture of their own suffering, for their punishment was for their own misdeeds.

### The New Testament

Jesus spoke of giving his life as a ransom for many (Mk.10:45), and later, when instituting the eucharist, declared his shed blood established the new covenant (Mk.14:22-3, 1 Cor.11:25-6). The apostle Paul was the master exponent of the significance of Christ’s death. The cross is the focal point of his message (1 Cor.1:22-3, 15:1-4, Gal.6:14). He uses a series of different settings from life for interpreting its achievements:

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<sup>43</sup> As specified in the book Leviticus.

- From temple worship he takes the concept of *sacrifice* (Eph.5:2), in particular Christ as the lamb sacrificed at Passover (1 Cor.5:7).<sup>44</sup>
- From the slave market he takes the term *redemption* (Rom.3:24, Eph.1:7, Col.1:14), Christ's death being the price paid to release sinners from bondage.
- From the law courts comes his term *justification*, the declaration that a person is 'in the right', acquitted from the charge of wrongdoing. Both in Romans (Rom.4) and Galatians (Gal.3:6-9) he points to Abraham as the archetype of those justified by God's grace through faith in Christ's blood shed to pay their penalty (Rom.3:21-6, cf. Eph.2:8).
- From the sphere of human relationships he takes the concept of *reconciliation* with God through the price Jesus paid (2 Cor.5:18-21).

*Our Catechism refers to the New Covenant, redemption and Christ's reconciling work; the Articles of Religion use the terms 'reconcile', 'sacrifice' (both in Art. 2) and 'justification' (Art. 11). Look them up to see what light they shed on these matters.*

One further point remains to be considered: was Jesus' death necessary to appease God's anger or simply to purge away the sin (or guilt) of the world? The technical terms are 'propitiation' in the first case, and 'expiation' in the second. There has been much debate among New Testament scholars as to which is the correct translation for the Greek *hilastērion* in Rom.3:25 and *hilasmos* in 1 Jn.2:2, 4:10. The reaction against the translation 'propitiation' found in the King James' Version of the Bible and the 1662 Prayer Book is a 'gut reaction', like the little girl who protested, "I don't like God; he was so cruel to his son!". But a careful reading of the context of these passages shows that God's anger is not against his Son but against *sin*. Romans 1 and 2 speak of the wrath of God being provoked by the sin of the Gentile world and the Jewish race alike. In 1 Jn.2:1 John speaks of Jesus as the 'advocate', the one pleading with the Father for us sinners. Therefore it seems best to keep the traditional term 'propitiation'. Clearly God hates the sin but loves the sinner. The whole matter is carefully argued by John Stott in his book *The Cross of Christ*<sup>45</sup> where he insists that in the sacrifice of Jesus (through the mystery of the Trinity) God offered *himself*. This came out of his great **love** for mankind (Jn.3:16, Rom.5:8, 1 Jn.4:10).

## The Early Church

There was no attempt in the Early Church to thrash out one correct understanding of Christ's work of salvation as there had been of Christ's person. Instead there developed a number of different interpretations that stood side by side:

- First, it was clearly remembered that Jesus had died to pay the penalty for humanity's sin. In the second half of the second century **Justin Martyr** spoke of Jesus 'cleansing by his blood those who believe on him',<sup>46</sup> and again, 'As the blood of the Passover saved those who were in Egypt, so also the blood of Christ will deliver from death those who

<sup>44</sup> The author of the epistle to the Hebrews develops the sacrificial concept so powerfully, likening Christ to a Jewish high priest who enters the holiest shrine of the temple once a year on the Day of Atonement only he offering his own blood (Heb.9:11-14, 10:11-12).

<sup>45</sup> Leicester: IVP, 1986, pp.168-74.

<sup>46</sup> *I Apology* 32.7.

believe'.<sup>47</sup> In the next century **Origen** declared that sin needs propitiation and Christ stepped forward as 'a victim spotless and innocent propitiating the Father by his generous self-offering'<sup>48</sup> and elsewhere he applies Is.53 to Christ's passion. This interpretation is, according to J.N.D. Kelly, **Augustine's** 'central thought' about the cross.<sup>49</sup> To quote just one passage, he said 'Though without guilt, Christ took our punishment upon himself, destroying our guilt and putting an end to our punishment'.<sup>50</sup>

- **Irenaeus**, bishop of Lyons in southern Gaul in the late second century, developed his own distinctive emphasis based on St. Paul's teaching about Christ as the second Adam (1 Cor.15:45, Eph.1:10), saying that by his obedience to God Christ 'recapitulated' (meaning recovered all Adam lost by his disobedience) and inaugurated a new redeemed humanity. The cross was the culmination of this process for on it he was 'rectifying that disobedience which had occurred by reason of a tree, through the obedience which was upon the tree'.<sup>51</sup>
- **Athanasius**, that great champion of Nicea, indeed stresses the redemptive effect of Christ's death on the cross, but his distinctive contribution is to say repeatedly, 'The Word became man *so that we might be made God.*'<sup>52</sup> Elsewhere he explains that this deification is through a Christian's participation in the Holy Spirit.
- A favorite interpretation of the Fathers brings together the concepts that on the cross Christ triumphed over evil spirit powers (Col.2:15) and that he gave his life a ransom for many (Mk.10:45). To whom was the ransom paid? Many responded it was to the devil. Origen speaks of Christ giving his life to the devil in exchange for the souls of men (which had fallen under his power because of their sin) but his victory was short-lived for Christ soon rose from the dead. In the next century **Gregory of Nyssa** likened this to a fish being deceived by bait and being caught on a hook, and the following century Augustine likened it to a mouse being caught in a trap. Gregory of Nyssa's elder colleague **Gregory of Nazianzus**, however, thought the idea of God paying a ransom to the devil both shameful and wrong.

## Later Developments

Only in the 11<sup>th</sup> /12<sup>th</sup> centuries did the debate about the correct interpretation of the cross become fierce. In his *Why Did God Become Man?* **Anselm** (c.1033-1109) focused on God's need for satisfaction, adequate payment for man's sin. The importance of a crime, he said, is measured by the importance of the one against whom it is committed. Therefore man's sin against God is infinite. Man must pay but no ordinary human can do so; only the God-man can make satisfaction for sins.

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<sup>47</sup> *Dialogue* 111.3.

<sup>48</sup> *Homily in Numbers* 24.1.

<sup>49</sup> *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (London: A & C Black, 1968), p.392.

<sup>50</sup> *Against Faustus the Manichee* 11.4.

<sup>51</sup> *Against Heresies* 5.16.3. He is saying that Adam's disobedience in taking the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden was annulled by Jesus' obeying God and accepting crucifixion on a tree, the cross.

<sup>52</sup> E.g. *On the Incarnation* 54.3.

Anselm's younger contemporary **Abelard** (1079-1142) disagreed entirely. He said there were not two principles in God: love wanting to forgive and law demanding satisfaction but only love. The death of Christ shows how far the love of God will go. This love moves us to repent.

These two approaches have been called 'objective' and 'subjective' views respectively. Objective interpretations say that Christ's death on the cross changed or satisfied God in some way; subjective interpretations say the only change that takes place is in the sinner who, through contemplating the crucifixion of Christ, is led to turn away from his sinful life.

*Which of these two approaches is illustrated by Isaac Watts' famous hymn 'When I survey the wondrous cross'? Which is found in C.F. Alexander's 'There is a green hill'?*

From that time to the present there have been these two different understandings of the cross. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century **Calvin** pointed out that it is God's justice that needs satisfying (Rom.3:25-6). Reacting against this, the **Unitarians** saw Jesus' death merely as a noble example to follow. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Gustav Aulén in his book *Christus Victor*<sup>53</sup> reintroduced what he called the 'classic' view: that the cross is above all the supreme moment of victory of Christ over the powers of evil. But, on its own, this scarcely does justice to the major thrust of the New Testament on the subject of Christ's death.

## **The Relevance of the Resurrection**

We must not forget the rest of the Good News that the apostle Paul preached:

For I handed on to you as of first importance ... that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, *and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures*, and that he appeared (to many witnesses). (1 Cor.15:3-5)

There are a number of important consequences of Christ's resurrection from the dead:

- He is alive now and we can pray to him.
- His promise that we who believe in him will share his risen life (Jn.11:25-6) is validated.
- His claim to be the Messiah, the Son of God is vindicated (Mk.14:61-2, Rom.1:4).
- His sacrifice is not simply the sacrifice of an ordinary human martyr but of the Son of God and therefore effective for all mankind.

*Now please read back over this chapter and consider what you feel the most helpful insights into understanding the significance of the death of Christ.*

Related Material: ECP Catechism 'Sin and Redemption', 'The New Covenant'  
Articles of Religion 2, 11, 15, 31

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<sup>53</sup> Eng. tr. London: 1934.

## The Holy Spirit

At the baptism of Jesus all three Persons of the divine Godhead were present. An African looked long and hard at a picture depicting this scene and then, with a puzzled expression, said, “God the Father I know and Jesus I know but who is the Holy Bird?” So often, even in church circles, the Holy Spirit is the unknown Person of the Godhead. One can visualize God the Father on his heavenly throne, and Jesus Christ walking the roads of Palestine, but how can one visualize a spirit? Yet the Bible has much to say about the Holy Spirit, revealing his role as of vital importance for the individual Christian, the Church, and indeed the world.

### The Old Testament

The Spirit of God certainly features in the Old Testament. The one Hebrew word *ruach* may in different contexts be translated ‘breath’, ‘wind’ and ‘spirit’, and sometimes it is not easy to tell which is the right translation. In Gen.1:2 is it ‘the spirit of God’ or ‘a wind from God’ that moves on the face of the waters? But it does not really matter as, either way, it is the Creator God who is in action. Ezekiel 37 presents us with another example. In the Good News version *ruach* is translated ‘spirit’ in v.1, ‘breath’ in vv.5, 6 and 10, and ‘wind’ in v.9. Some other translations prefer ‘breath’ in v.9 but how that reduces the drama and intelligibility of the scene! Nevertheless, in many other passages the translators agree the right translation of *ruach* is ‘spirit’. Let us look at some of them.

The Spirit of God gives skill to Bezalel and Oholiab to engage in many kinds of creative craftwork (Ex.35:30-5). The Spirit gives Gideon courage (eventually) to fight and defeat the Midianites and Amalekites (Jud.6:34) and Samson superhuman strength to tear apart a lion with his bare hands (Jud.14:5-6). The Spirit rests upon David from the day that he was anointed king by Samuel (1 Sam.16:13) and is expected to rest upon the Messiah (Is.11:1) and on God’s special servant (Is.42:1, cf. 61:1). He<sup>54</sup> fills the prophets enabling them to speak his word (Mic. 3:8). In all these cases the Spirit comes on select individuals to enable them to perform some important task, but a time will come, says Joel, when there will be a general outpouring of God’s Spirit and men and women will prophesy, old men will dream dreams, young men see visions, and even slaves will be included (Joel 2:28-9, cf. Ezek.36:26-7).

Yet, after Malachi, the voice of prophecy among the Jews fell silent and, according to the rabbis, only ‘the daughter of a voice’ (a faint echo?) remained in Israel.

### The New Testament

In the New Testament the Spirit is closely associated with the birth (Lk.1:35) and baptism (Lk.3:22 etc) of Jesus. It is only after the latter and then a period of temptation in the wilderness that Jesus’ most powerful ministry of preaching, healing and exorcism begins.

In the life of the Church the Spirit is referred to as ‘the Spirit of Christ’ (Gal.4:6 etc) or even as ‘Christ’ (Rom.8:9-10, 2 Cor.3:17, Col.1:27). So it is reasonable to refer to the Spirit as ‘he’

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<sup>54</sup> The Hebrew word *ruach* is feminine but in the New Testament the Spirit is closely identified with the invisible Christ.

and in a number of instances<sup>55</sup> in fact, although the Greek word for spirit is of gender neuter (*pneuma*) the article that comes before it ('the', Gk. *ho*) is masculine. It is right then to view the Spirit as a Person; indeed he is said to have a mind (Rom.8:27), feelings (Eph.4:30) and a will (1 Cor.12:11).

What did he bring to Christ's followers?

- The very presence of the invisible Christ into the lives of those who with repentance and faith were baptized (Ac.2:38), or even independently of baptism (2:1-4, 9:17-18, 10:43-4).<sup>56</sup> This wonderful gift is said to be the 'pledge' of our eternal inheritance (2 Cor.1:22, Eph.1:14). The Greek word here for pledge, *arrabōn*, is used in modern Greek for an engagement ring.
- The same childlike attitude to God that Jesus himself had which could address God as 'Abba' - almost 'Daddy' (Mk.14:36, Rom.8:15, Gal.4:6).
- Power to witness for Christ (Ac.1:8).
- His 'fruit' – love, joy, peace, patience kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal.5:22-3). These are for *all* Christians.
- His 'gifts', natural and supernatural, distributed among church members for the common good (Rom.12:6-8, 1 Cor.12:4-11).
- Guidance into all truth (Jn.16:13).

The Spirit is at work also in the minds and consciences of people in the world, convicting them of sin, of what is right and of future judgment (Jn.16:7-11). This is a great encouragement to Christians involved in evangelism and missionary work.

### **The Holy Spirit's Place within the Godhead**

Quickly the Holy Spirit was included with God the Father and Jesus Christ in three-fold formulas: 'the Grace' (2 Cor.13:13) and the words of administration at baptism (Mt.28:19); but it was only after Christ had been declared to be 'of the same substance' as the Father at the Council of Nicea (325) that the Church felt the need to pronounce on the nature of the Holy Spirit. Between the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople (381) a party formed in the Eastern Church around Macedonius, a Semiarian bishop of Constantinople, who were known as 'Macedonians' or 'Pneumatomachi' ('Spirit-fighters') as they denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Thirty-six of them attended the Council of Constantinople but their standpoint was roundly condemned.

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<sup>55</sup> Jn.14:26, 15:26, 16:8, 13, 14.

<sup>56</sup> Though presumably in the first case the apostles and those with them had received baptism earlier from John the Baptist or Jesus himself, and in the other two cases baptism was administered straight afterwards.

The amplified Nicene Creed issued by the council declared the Holy Spirit was ‘the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is jointly worshipped and jointly glorified, who spoke through the prophets’. Although this does not actually state that the Holy Spirit is ‘of the same substance’ (*homoousios*) as the Father and the Son, in their writings individual Church Fathers (Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianus) were prepared to say he was. The creed’s formula does however acknowledge that it was the same Spirit who inspired the Old Testament prophets that had been given to the Church.

As mentioned in chapter 2 above, one small but significant change was later made in the Nicene Creed in the West. St. Augustine had spoken of the Spirit as ‘proceeding from the Father *and the Son*’, and someone was bold enough to add the extra word *filioque* (‘and from the Son’) to the Latin version of that Creed after the Council of Toledo in Spain (589); gradually it spread throughout the Western Church, being accepted by the papacy in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. But this addition drew a furious reaction from the Eastern (Byzantine) Church, which broke off relations with the West in 1054 partly in consequence. No-one had the right summarily to change the wording of an historic creed!

Combining Jn.15:26, 16:7 and Ac.2:33 it can be said that Jesus sent/poured out the Spirit which he had received from the Father. Orthodox theologians have expressed more sympathy for the formula: ‘proceeding from the Father *through* the Son’. In fact the ECP has unilaterally reverted to the original Nicene form – ‘who proceeds from the Father’!

## **The Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements**

Today the activity of the Holy Spirit is particularly emphasized in the Church by Pentecostals and charismatics. Both groups declare that ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit’, an experience like that of the apostles at the first Christian Pentecost, awaits *every* believer and is accompanied normally by the ‘gift of tongues’ (speaking in a language, known or unknown, that one has never learnt). Pentecostal churches are denominations with this perspective, e.g. the Assemblies of God. Charismatics (from the Gk *charisma*, ‘gift’ (of the Spirit) – Rom.12:6, 1 Cor.12:4) remain *within* the mainline Christian denominations. Like the Pentecostals they encourage the practice of tongues, prophecy, healing and other gifts mentioned in 1 Cor.12:4-11. Pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity are the most vigorous in the worldwide Church today.

The Pentecostal movement of our era is generally considered to have started when Charles Parham, founder of a Methodist Bible School in Topeka, Kansas, went away for a few days leaving his students to investigate what was the biblical evidence for ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit’. He returned to find them excited to have discovered it was ‘speaking in tongues as the Spirit gives utterance.’ After the laying on of hands one of the students began to speak in tongues; it was December 31<sup>st</sup> 1900. Soon others followed. In 1905 W.J. Seymour, a black student of Parham, established a center of the movement at 312 Azusa Street, Los Angeles where dramatic emotional manifestations took place and attracted people from many parts of the world. From there Pentecostalism soon reached Britain (1907), South Africa (1908), and Brazil (1910) from where it spread to other countries of South America and is now the dominant form of Protestantism there.

The second wave of Pentecostalism, known first as ‘Neo-Pentecostalism’ (later as the Charismatic Movement) worked within (and beyond) the mainline churches, Protestant, Catholic and ultimately Orthodox. Its start is generally held to be the baptism in the Spirit with tongues experienced by Dennis Bennett, the Episcopal Rector of Van Nuys in California, in 1959. When

he announced in church what had happened to him it aroused such opposition that he had to resign. He was eventually offered a bankrupt mission church in Seattle. A year later 85% of that congregation had been filled with the Spirit and the church had risen out of bankruptcy. The renewal spread to some other Episcopal churches and denominations, including in 1967 the Roman Catholic Church.

The Charismatic Movement spread to many countries, reaching the Philippines by the end of the 1960s. It has been particularly influential in the Roman Catholic Church, leading to the formation of El Shaddai, Couples for Christ, and other fellowships. Various independent Protestant fellowships have also been established including 'Jesus is Lord', led by Eddie Villanueva. Some ECP clergy went to Singapore, where the charismatic movement was influential from the 1970s but, returning home, they found themselves ill-at-ease and some formed independent churches.

### **How should we assess Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity?**

The New Testament speaks of 'the gift of the Spirit' or 'receiving the Spirit' as part of the initiation process (Acts 2:4, 38; 8:17...), and John the Baptist refers to Jesus' work as 'baptizing with the Holy Spirit and with fire' (Mt.3:11, Lk.3:16, cf. 1Cor.12:13). In Acts the receiving of the Spirit is clearly marked by something noticeable: tongues (2:4, 10:46), tongues and prophecy (19:6), unspecified though possibly tongues in the light of the previous passages (8:17-18), joy (8:39, 16:34). It would seem fair to conclude that, in the earliest Church, receiving the Spirit was an emotional experience that could not pass unnoticed. It seems that gradually this experience dropped out of the Church, particularly when most people were baptized as infants.

But if we readily accept the New Testament's teaching that a Christian should possess the *fruit* of the Spirit, should we not also consider its other teachings about the Holy Spirit? Might it not be that it is because of our lack of repentance, faith or expectation that we do not receive the full gift ('baptism') of the Holy Spirit (cf. Ac.2:38) and the gifts he is willing to give us? Perhaps we should ask him (Lk.11:13). But it is surely wrong to say that the gift of tongues is the necessary indication of the 'baptism' of the Spirit, for St Paul clearly indicates that *not all* received the gift of tongues (1 Cor.12:29-30) and he told the Corinthians not to exaggerate its importance (1 Cor.14).

*Please spend time reflecting on each of the three sections of this topic.*

*Should our church be taking the Bible's teaching about the Holy Spirit more seriously?*

*What do you think might be the most important points to consider?*

Related Material:

ECP Catechism 'The Holy Spirit'

Articles of Religion 5 (concerned only with the status of the Holy Spirit not his work)

## The Trinity

Belief in the Trinity is the distinctive Christian way of understanding God. Yet it has caused much misunderstanding. In mathematics  $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$  not  $1!$  But there are other types of unity. ‘Organic’ unity, for instance of a piece of fruit, is a unity made up of different parts: skin, flesh and seeds.

The earliest Christians inherited from Judaism monotheism, in contrast to other religions which were almost invariably polytheistic.<sup>57</sup> It took the extraordinary events of the life of Jesus to force them to a different understanding of the one God. Jesus taught with unique authority, displayed astonishing power in his miracles and exorcisms, lived a life of devoted care to those in need and, two days after brutal execution, rose from the dead. Doubting Thomas confronted with the risen Christ spontaneously exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!” (Jn.20:28). So many others were forced to the same conclusion.

Then the Church experienced the Holy Spirit in action. His presence in people’s lives produced the qualities of Jesus’ own character: love, joy, peace... (Gal.5:22-3); his gifts, particularly healing and prophecy, enabled Christians to continue Jesus’ powerful ministry. And so quite naturally St. Paul could say, ‘Now the Lord (Jesus) is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom’ (2 Cor.3:17, cf. Eph.3:16-17), and in Rom.8:9-10 he uses ‘Spirit’, ‘Spirit of God’, ‘Spirit of Christ’ and ‘Christ’ interchangeably for the divine presence indwelling Christians. It is clear then that, if Christ is divine, so is this ‘other Advocate’ from God (Jn.14:16) who took the place of his physical presence.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not actually stated in the New Testament but the building blocks for making it are there. In several passages the three persons of this Trinity are bracketed together, most notably:

- ‘The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all’ (‘The Grace’ – 2 Cor.13:13).
- Baptize new Christian converts ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ (from the ‘Great Commission’ – Mt.28:19).

As Richard A. Norris comments, ‘From the earliest times, then, a “trinitarian” way of talking sprang up as a means of explaining the character and structure of Christian existence.’<sup>58</sup>

### The Early Church

In the Early Church we see a number of attempts to formulate a satisfactory understanding of God:

**Irenaeus** of Lyons (late 2<sup>nd</sup> C) says that God had with him from all eternity his Word (Jesus) and his Wisdom (Spirit). The Son and the Spirit were his two ‘hands’ in creating and ruling the

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<sup>57</sup> Though interestingly the Hebrew word for ‘God’ *elohim* is plural – a hangover from earlier polytheism, or a hint of the Trinity – or both?

<sup>58</sup> *Understanding the Faith of the Church*, (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1979), p.90.

world. Whilst clearly he accepts the divinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, he does not discuss further the relations between them.

**Modalistic Monarchians** in Rome in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, who taught that the one God had appeared successively in three modes: Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier, were quickly recognized by the mainstream Church to have come to a wrong understanding of the Godhead. They were called derogatorily ‘Patripassians’ (Latin *pater* ‘father’ + *passus* ‘suffered’), i.e. those who believed the Father suffered in the guise of the Son.

**Tertullian** (c.160-230). His creative work on the Trinity, *Against Praxeas*, came from his Montanist days.<sup>59</sup> He invented the word ‘trinity’ for the Godhead and spoke of the three ‘persons’ of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in one divine ‘substance’, thus laying the foundation of Western trinitarian thought.

**Origen** (c.185-254) knew the Rule of Faith declared God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and believed they were *hypostaseis* (individuals). But he was also influenced by Platonism with its stress on the one, transcendent God, and said the Father alone is ‘God-in-himself’, while the Son is a ‘second God’. As God’s Word he is mediator between the Father and other beings. The Spirit is the highest of all things brought into being by the Father through the Son. But the Father transcends the Son and the Spirit as much, if not more, than they transcend the realm of other beings. Origen was therefore condemned for ‘subordinationism’, placing the Son and the Spirit on a lower level than the Father. Arius thought his views were a legitimate development from those of Origen. The church historian Eusebius of Caesarea, a great admirer of Origen, was among Arius’ supporters.

**Athanasius** (c.296-373) came to realize that the term *homoousios* (‘of the same substance’), which safeguarded the divinity of Christ, could also be applied to the Holy Spirit and thus safeguarded the unity of the Godhead.

No council of bishops was called to define the nature of the Godhead and the relations between the three divine Persons. It was left to the Cappadocian Fathers in the East (Basil of Caesarea (c.330-79), his friend Gregory of Nazianzus (c.329-90) and Basil’s younger brother Gregory of Nyssa (c.335-395)), and Augustine (354-430) in the West to attempt this task. The **Cappadocians** said that God exists in three individualities (*hypostaseis*) Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father is the source of the Trinity and from him the Son is ‘begotten’ and the Spirit ‘proceeds’.<sup>60</sup> They used the somewhat unfortunate analogy of Plato’s doctrine of universals and particulars, saying the Trinity was like the universal category ‘man’ (humanity), and the three divine persons were like three specific men within this category. As Arian critics chided, this looks like polytheism!

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<sup>59</sup> He believed Montanus and his prophetesses in Phrygia, Asia Minor, in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century were genuinely instruments of the Holy Spirit renewing the Church. The Church by and large rejected this ‘New Prophecy’ as fraudulent.

<sup>60</sup> One can see how this view jarred with Augustine’s that the Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son.

The 5<sup>th</sup> century Eastern doctrine of *perichōrēsis*, ‘mutual penetration’ – that all the divine persons completely penetrate each other and are involved in all each other’s activities – helps to correct this impression.

**Augustine**’s great work *Concerning the Trinity* (15 vol.) was written over the period 399-419. Its starting point is the one Godhead. There is one divine *essence* of the Trinity in which the three divine persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, share. We are incapable of understanding how the whole Trinity works so assign roles to each of the persons: the Father is creator, the Son redeemer, the Spirit sanctifier (Medieval theologians called this ‘appropriation’) but in fact all the three are involved in each other’s activity. Two of Augustine’s analogies are particularly memorable:

- The Father is the lover, the Son the loved, the Spirit the love binding them together.
- The Trinity is like the human mind consisting of memory, understanding and will.

But Augustine remained very humble, saying that he felt the concept of the divine persons was open to misunderstanding but was used that the truth ‘might not be left unspoken’.<sup>61</sup> And he closed his great work with a touching prayer: ‘O Lord, the one God, God the Trinity, whatever I have said in these books that is of Yours, may those who are Yours acknowledge; if anything of my own, may it be pardoned both by You and by those who are Yours’.<sup>62</sup>

### **A Prayed Reality**

For ourselves the divine Trinity changes from being an abstract doctrine to an experienced reality when we pray or worship. We pray *to* the Father,<sup>63</sup> *through* Jesus the Son,<sup>64</sup> *in* the Spirit.<sup>65</sup> Thus in our prayers and worship we are caught up into the life of the Trinity.

*Please go back through all these points and make a note of what is most helpful as we struggle with our finite minds to get some understanding of the nature of the Infinite.*

*Do you see any advantages of the doctrine of the Trinity over the teaching of Unitarians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Iglesia ni Cristo that there is no Trinity since Jesus was just a fine man inspired by God?*

*How would you answer the Muslim claim that Christians have corrupted their Scriptures when they say Jesus is God’s Son, rather than his messenger and Word, and worship Three (Trinity) (Qur’an, surah 4.171)? They appear to think Christians believe in the Trinity of Allah, Jesus and Mary!*

Related Material: ECP Catechism ‘The Creeds’ (last question)  
Articles of Religion 1

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<sup>61</sup> *Trinity* 5.9.10.

<sup>62</sup> *Trinity* 15.28.51.

<sup>63</sup> Mt.6:9, Lk.11:2.

<sup>64</sup> Through his blood (Heb.10:19-22) and in his name (Jn. 16:23-4).

<sup>65</sup> Rom.8:15-16.

## The Church

From the Holy Spirit the creeds move on to confessing faith in the Church. The word ‘church’ comes from the Greek *kuriakos* meaning ‘belonging to the Lord’, but this is not the word actually used for ‘church’ in the New Testament where instead we find *ekklēsia*, the word from which we get ‘ecclesiastical’. This word was used:

- in secular Greek for the assembly of the citizens of a city (Ac.19:39),
- in the official Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX), for the assembled people of Israel (Deut.9:10, 18:16, 2 Chron.30:23),
- and in the New Testament for both the worldwide Church (Mt.16:18, 1 Cor.12:28) and, more commonly, for local churches (e.g. 1 Thess.1:1).

*Ekklēsia* literally means ‘called out’. It seems then a very fitting word to designate those who have been called out from the world by God through Jesus Christ to be his new covenant people. The New Testament contains a number of important metaphors for the Church:

- the Flock of the Good Shepherd (Jn.10:11-16, cf. God with Israel, Ezek.34:11-16, Ps.23)
- the Branches of the Vine (Jn.15:1-11, cf. Israel as a vine, Ps.80:8-16, Is.5:1-7)
- the Body of Christ (1 Cor.12:12-31, Eph.4:15-16, Col.1:18)
- the Bride of Christ (Eph.5:22-23, Rev.19:7-8, cf. God with Israel, Hos.2)
- the Israel of God (= the New Israel, Gal.6:16)
- a Temple, a Priesthood etc (1 Pet.2:1-10)

*Please look up these verses and see, in each case, what important truths are being taught about the nature of the Church.*

How is the Church related to the **Kingdom of God**?

God’s kingdom is where God reigns and his will is perfectly done. Despite her weakness and imperfections, in the words of Richard A. Norris, the Church ‘is called out and called together to be a sign of what God is up to, to be an intimation within the present order of things of the destiny which God intends for humanity in Christ [in his kingdom].’<sup>66</sup> Richard Norris goes on to mention some of the Church’s duties:

- to proclaim the redemption of Christ (evangelism)
- to signify Christ in its worship
- to proclaim Christ by its devotion to justice and mercy in the affairs of the world

### Some Statements of the Church Fathers

Some refer to the Church as a ‘third race’ alongside the Jews and Greeks.

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<sup>66</sup> Richard A. Norris, *Understanding the Faith of the Church*, p.201.

**Irenaeus** of Lyons in Gaul in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century speaks of the Church as the unique sphere of the Holy Spirit: ‘Where the Church is there is the Spirit of God...’<sup>67</sup> (This should be obvious though, today, we tend to equate the Church with bureaucracy!). More often he speaks of the Church as the sole repository of truth because it received from the apostles and their disciples, and proclaims throughout the world, a common faith (which he summarizes).<sup>68</sup> The unbroken succession of bishops<sup>69</sup> and presbyters<sup>70</sup> in the great sees guarantees a faith identical with that of the apostles.

**Cyprian** of Carthage (now Tunisia, N Africa) in the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century declares concerning schismatics and their ‘baptism’: ‘Outside the Church there is no salvation’.<sup>71</sup> And, ‘He cannot have God as Father who has not the Church as mother.’<sup>72</sup> The unity of the Church is safeguarded by the episcopate, in which all bishops share as if it were a common property, and also by Christ’s saying to Peter, “You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church...” addressed to *one* man (Mt.16:18).<sup>73</sup>

**Augustine** in Hippo, in North Africa, in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century, in contention with the Donatist Church which had separated from the Catholic Church on the grounds that a Catholic bishop had handed over Scriptures to the pagan authorities during the persecution of Diocletian (303-5), declares that Cyprian, whom they claimed to follow, was even more strongly against schism than apostasy (falling away from the faith). He points to the parable of the Wheat and Tares (Mt.13:24-30) as justification for leaving the purging of sinners from the Church to Christ’s Second Coming.<sup>74</sup>

## The Medieval Church

The unity of the Church worldwide was always threatened by the language division between the Greek-speaking East and the Latin-speaking West, and to a lesser extent by rivalry between the great bishoprics of Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch. The mutual excommunication between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches in 1054, in part over the *filioque* clause,<sup>75</sup> hardened into a permanent breach after Crusaders from Western Europe sacked Constantinople 1204 and established a Latin Patriarch there.

In Church polity there is a marked difference between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches. Whilst in the West there developed the unassailable monarchy of the Bishop of Rome as successor to Peter the leader of the apostles, in the East, though the major churches have developed Patriarchates, all bishops have equal authority in their dioceses and cannot be

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<sup>67</sup> *Against Heresies* 3.24.1.

<sup>68</sup> *Against Heresies* 1.10.1-2.

<sup>69</sup> *A.H.* 3.3.1-3 (succession for the see of Rome enumerated).

<sup>70</sup> *A.H.* 3.2.2, 4.26.2 (no succession enumerated).

<sup>71</sup> *Epistle* 73.21.

<sup>72</sup> *Unity of the Church* 6.

<sup>73</sup> *Unity of the Church* 4.

<sup>74</sup> *Sermon* 88.22-3.

<sup>75</sup> See ch. 2 above on the Nicene Creed.

overruled. The Orthodox view the Roman Pontiff and their own Patriarchs as having a primacy of honor not authority.<sup>76</sup> Anglicans have a similar point of view.

## The Reformation

For a considerable while the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Reformers did not want to break with the Catholic Church but to reform it. Even after Luther's excommunication in 1521 various attempts were made at reconciliation. The Lutheran Augsburg Confession (1530) was conciliatory to the Roman position. But, though the Conference of Regensburg (1541) between of Catholic and Protestant theologians reached a consensus, neither the Pope nor Luther would ratify it. Thereafter the Council of Trent (1545-63) condemned the Protestants, and the latter accepted they were to be permanently separate bodies.

**Luther** (1483-1546) declared that the preaching of the Gospel is the key evidence of the existence of the Church: 'Where the word is, there is faith, and where faith is, there is the true Church.' The false church has just the outward appearance of Church. The visible Church contains wheat and tares. In his treatise *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520) Luther attacked the Roman Catholic division of the Church into the 'spiritual estate' (bishops, priests, monks and nuns) and the 'temporal estate' (laity) and declared, 'All Christians are truly the spiritual estate...consecrated priests through baptism,' thus affirming the 'priesthood of all believers' (1 Pet. 2:9, Rev.1:6). The only difference between Christians is, he said, their function (1 Cor.12:12ff). Among these functions is the professional ministry; certain Christians must be selected and set apart for that responsibility.

**Zwingli** (1484-1531) declared the true, holy, catholic Church consists of those enlightened by the Holy Spirit. This is an elect<sup>77</sup> body and not the same as the visible Church.

**Calvin** (1509-64) made a clear distinction between the visible Church and the invisible, the latter consisting of all the elect, living and dead. The visible Church includes many who are not elect, yet it is a useful expression of the invisible Church and, as long as we are in this world, we should belong to it. It is ordained to be our mother (here he follows Cyprian). There are two key elements in the true Church: the preaching of the pure Word and the right administration of the two sacraments of our Lord. True apostolicity derives not from the laying on of hands in ordination but from preaching the doctrine of the apostles.<sup>78</sup>

**Anglicanism:** Article 19 takes from Calvin the two key elements of what constitutes a church (the preaching of the pure word of God and the administration of the two sacraments instituted by Christ) but ignores his distinction between the visible and invisible churches. Article 20 allows the Church the right to decree rites and ceremonies (as against the Puritans who allowed only rites prescribed by Scripture), and to decide in disputes about the faith, so long as it orders nothing contrary to Scripture. It is to be a witness to and preserver of Scripture, not expounding one passage so that it is contrary to another, nor insisting on anything as necessary to salvation

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<sup>76</sup> Greater respect than the other bishops but no overriding authority - Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, new edn. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), p.27.

<sup>77</sup> Chosen by God.

<sup>78</sup> *Institutes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn 4.2.1-4.

which is not found in Scripture. From the Church of England's inception then in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, though she was consciously a reformed church, she was also a *via media* ('middle way') between Rome and Puritanism.

### **The Four 'Notes' of the Church**

The Nicene Creed declares faith in 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church'. These four adjectives are commonly known as the 'notes' of the Church.

#### **One**

The basic unity of the Church is centered on a common confession that Jesus Christ is Lord (God). It has to be admitted there has been no period of the Church's history free from dissensions, schisms and heresies. Regrettable as this is, unity does not mean total uniformity. It allows diversity of expression. John Macquarrie draws attention to the Roman Catholic Church's relationship with the 'Uniat' Orthodox Churches which acknowledge the authority of the Pope but are allowed to retain their own litanies, customs and languages, as a model for permitted diversity.<sup>79</sup>

Of the divisions within the worldwide Church Bernard Lohse writes, 'We dare not simply accept the scandalous division of Christianity, but neither may we deny the seriousness of the problem of truth for the sake of questionable compromise.'<sup>80</sup> The 1888 Lambeth Conference declared that, from an Anglican perspective, essential to the restoration of unity among the divided branches of the Church is acceptance of (1) The Holy Scriptures (Old and New Testaments), (2) The Apostles and Nicene Creeds, (3) The two sacraments ordained by Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, (4) The Historic Episcopate.<sup>81</sup>

Desire for progress towards unity brought about the great drawing together of churches in the 20<sup>th</sup> century known as the **Ecumenical Movement** (from Gk. *oikoumenē* 'the whole inhabited earth'). First there was the International Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910. Subsequently there developed the 'Faith and Order'<sup>82</sup> and 'Life and Work' movements which then merged in 1948 in Amsterdam to form the **World Council of Churches**. The International Missionary Council joined it at its third assembly in New Delhi in 1961. While laying no claim to be a 'para church',<sup>83</sup> the WCC encourages its member churches to consider seriously what divides them, and has the ultimate vision of one united church. In 1982 the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC produced the report *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) which has been widely accepted by its member churches.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed some important church unions, perhaps the most remarkable being the formation of the Church of South India in 1947 which brought together for the first time the episcopal Anglican Church and non-episcopal churches, and the Church of North India (1970) which brought Anglicans and non-episcopal churches including Baptists into its fold, allowing infant and believers' baptism to coexist. Both the CSI and the CNI have adopted an episcopal

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<sup>79</sup> *Principles of Christian Theology*, p.362.

<sup>80</sup> *A Short History of Christian Doctrine*, tr. F.E. Stoeffler (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), p. 242.

<sup>81</sup> Meaning, it seems, episcopal governance as found in the Church down the centuries, including in Anglicanism.

<sup>82</sup> In which Charles Henry Brent, formerly first bishop of the Episcopal Missionary Diocese of the Philippines, was a leading light.

<sup>83</sup> A 'super' church.

form of governance. In 1988 the Meissen Agreement brought the German non-episcopal Evangelische Kirche and the Anglican Communion to a high degree of cooperation, and the Porvoo Agreement (1992) brought the Episcopal Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches into full intercommunion with Anglicans. In the Philippines there were several important church mergers during the century and in 1963 the founding of the National Council of Churches of the Philippines to which both the ECP and the IFI belong.

The **Second Vatican Council** (1962-5) brought about a profound change in relations between the Roman Catholic Church and other churches. Formerly members of other churches were viewed as heretics who had no hope of salvation, but the Council's Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1964) spoke of members of other churches as 'separated brethren' and declared, 'All who have been justified by faith in Baptism are members of Christ's body, and have a right to be called Christian' though they lack the grace of unity Christ wished to bestow on his Church. Roman Catholics have subsequently taken part in very many interdenominational activities throughout the world. Two successive Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commissions (appointed 1966, 1982) produced a series of important reports on issues that divide Anglicans and Roman Catholics. In 1980 the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines and the ECP signed an 'Agreed Statement on Baptism' in which both agreed to accept each other's baptisms as valid.

## **Holy**

The Church seeks holiness through prayer, worship and Bible study. Too often church life has been corrupt and unholy, but let us remember that the root meaning of 'holy' is in fact 'set apart'; the Church is that society which, of its nature, is set apart for the service of God and that includes of course being involved in the world.

## **Catholic**

This always meant that the scope of the Church's mission is worldwide but, since the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, it has also taken on the sense of being 'authentic' as against schismatic or heretical. The great creeds, especially those of Nicea, and, for the Western Church, the Apostles' Creed, embody this catholicity. The Church arrived at its key formulations of doctrines through the deliberations of worldwide councils of bishops, most notably at Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451).

## **Apostolic**

The authentic Church continues the teaching and practice of the apostles, commissioned by Christ himself. An embodiment of this is the episcopate which has sought to preserve and promote these teachings. But it would not be right to deduce that all non-episcopal churches are therefore not true churches. Where the Bible (which contains the teachings of the apostles) is a church's primary authority, that church is in a real sense apostolic.

*From the above, what do you understand to be the principle tasks of the Church? Are we fulfilling them?*

*How important is church unity? What practical steps might we take in the Philippines to forward it?*

*How many united churches do we have in the Philippines already? If you can investigate their origin.*

Related Material:

ECP Catechism 'The Church'

Articles of Religion 19-20, 34

The Chicago Lambeth Quadrilateral 1886, 1888 (in 'Historical Documents of the Church')

## The Ministry of the Church

The followers of Jesus Christ formed the Church, but how was it to be organized? Jesus had, at the beginning of his own ministry, chosen twelve whom he called ‘apostles’<sup>84</sup> to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim his message (Mk.3:14). Why twelve? Presumably to show that his followers constituted the New (twelve tribes of) Israel (cf. Mt.19:28, Gal.6:16). And this same twelve, with the substitution of Matthias for the traitor Judas Iscariot (Ac.1:15-26), were at the center of the life of the earliest church in Jerusalem. They particularly, it seems, performed many miracles (Ac.2:43), testified to Jesus’ resurrection (4:33) and could call together the whole church when it was necessary (6:2). As in the days of Christ’s ministry Peter, James and John had constituted the inner core of the Twelve,<sup>85</sup> so in the earliest church an inner core of leaders formed consisting of Peter, John and James the brother of Jesus, who were known as the ‘pillars’ of the church (Gal.1:19, 2:9), this James having a position of prominence by virtue of his kinship to Jesus in whom he had come to believe (cf. 1 Cor.15:7).<sup>86</sup> By the time of the Jerusalem Council, c.AD 48, James was clearly head of the Jerusalem church (Ac.15:13-21) and even Peter was unwilling to cross him, though Paul was willing to if necessary (Gal.2:11-14). The whole dynamic of the Church changed with the stoning of James (c.AD 62),<sup>87</sup> the execution of Peter and Paul in Rome (c.AD 64),<sup>88</sup> and the Jewish War (66-70) which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem, the church having previously left the city for Pella in Peraea across the Jordan,<sup>89</sup> later perhaps moving to Syria. The worldwide Church then consisted of a network of newly-founded local churches with no overall leadership.

If the apostles held supreme authority in the earliest Church, they had learnt from Jesus that leadership involved service (Lk.22:24-7), so it seems at first they literally took on such roles as waiting at table during meals. Then a practical problem arose: the Christian community in Jerusalem, which held all things in common (Ac.2:44-5), consisted of two blocks: Aramaic-speaking Jews (mostly natives of Palestine) and Greek-speaking Jews (mainly from outside Palestine), and the latter complained their needy widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of goods from the common pool. The remedy was to choose seven godly men from the church to take over this distribution, leaving the apostles free to devote themselves to their primary work of preaching and prayer. Seven were chosen and, after prayer, the apostles commissioned them by the laying on of hands. The story is told in Acts 6:1-6. The Seven are not called ‘deacons’ (Gk. *diakonoi*) but their work is described as ‘service’ (Gk. *diakonia*). It seems they were deacons in embryo and, before long, officers actually called ‘deacon’ were appointed in other churches. We hear of them in Philippi (Phil.1:1), Ephesus (1 Tim.3:8-12), and the church in Rome restricted the number of its deacons to seven for centuries. So it was a practical need that led to the development of this new office in the church.

As the number of Christians grew and new churches were planted in many places the apostles could not possibly provide all the leadership and care needed. So the Church appears to have

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<sup>84</sup> From the Gk *apostellein* ‘to send’.

<sup>85</sup> They alone went with him on certain climactic occasions: Mk.5:37, 9:2, 14:33.

<sup>86</sup> James the son of Zebedee having already been executed – Ac.12:2.

<sup>87</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.23.

<sup>88</sup> Eusebius, *H.E.* 2.25.5-6.

<sup>89</sup> Eusebius, *H.E.* 3.5.3.

adopted an office from Judaism:<sup>90</sup> some of the older men being made the local leaders – ‘elders’ (the Gk. word here is *presbuteros*, ‘presbyter’, later shortened to ‘priest’). Since the ‘deacons’ had been scattered from Jerusalem by the persecution of the Church following the death of Stephen (Ac.8:1) clearly such presbyters were appointed to assist the apostles there (Ac.11:30, 15:2, 4, 6 etc). Paul subsequently appointed presbyters to lead the churches he had founded on his first missionary journey in Asia Minor (Ac.14:23), and later instructed Titus to do likewise in Crete (Tit.1:5). We can presume, as with the Seven, they were ordained for this task by the laying on of hands with prayer.<sup>91</sup> Their duties were to pastor and teach their flock (Ac. 20:28, 1 Tim.5:17).

Another office occasionally mentioned in the New Testament is ‘bishop’ (Gk. *episcopos* meaning ‘overseer’). Bishops and deacons lead the church at Philippi when Paul writes to it (Phil.1:1), and he tells Timothy in Ephesus (1 Tim.3:1-7) and Titus in Crete (1:6-9) the qualities necessary in someone who is to be a bishop. As all these locations are outside Palestine it would seem this office is derived from the Greco-Roman world. That in the New Testament ‘bishop’ and ‘presbyter’ (elder) refer to the same office is clear from Tit.1:5-7.<sup>92</sup> This was so elsewhere at least to the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, for *1 Clement* (c.AD 96, Rome) again equates these offices.<sup>93</sup> Then early in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century we first hear of a *three-fold* local ministry. C.AD 107, Ignatius of Antioch on his journey through Asia Minor to martyrdom in Rome urges representatives from churches along his route to support their bishop, presbyters and deacons. How strongly, for instance, he writes to the church at Smyrna!

Abjure all factions, for they are the beginning of evils. Follow your bishop, every one of you, as obediently as Jesus Christ followed the Father. Obey your presbyters too, as you would the apostles; give your deacons the same reverence that you would to a command from God. Make sure that no step affecting the church is ever taken by anyone without the bishop’s sanction. The sole eucharist you should consider valid is one that is celebrated by the bishop himself, or by some person authorized by him.<sup>94</sup>

It is likely that the presiding presbyter had simply been elevated to a senior rank, that of bishop, perhaps following the pattern of James in Jerusalem. Having one overseer provided a focus of unity for each church. This three-fold pattern of ministry has proved a stable one, spreading through the Church in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and continuing down the centuries in both the Eastern and Western churches to the present day. Protestant churches which have chosen other patterns of organization tend in contrast to be prone to splits and schisms. It is notable that various united churches formed in the last century have adopted episcopacy, e.g. the Churches of South and North India.

One of the foremost offices in the earliest church was that of ‘prophet’ (1 Cor.12:28, Eph.4:11-12). There was a charismatic gift of prophecy which the Holy Spirit might give to any member of a local church at a particular time (1 Cor.12:10; 14:1-3, 24-5) but there was also an order of prophets. In Acts we hear of Agabus (11:28, 21:10-11) and the four daughters of Philip the ‘deacon’ (21:8-9). Such people were revered no doubt, like the prophets of the Old

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<sup>90</sup> Where it was a *lay* office.

<sup>91</sup> Indeed in Ac.14:23 *cheirotonein*, the Gk. word translated ‘appoint’ might be translated ‘ordain by laying on of hands’.

<sup>92</sup> As in 1 Timothy: see 3:1-7 and 5:17.

<sup>93</sup> *1 Clem.* 42-44. The *Didache* (c.AD 100, Syria) too speaks only of the two offices of bishop and deacon.

<sup>94</sup> *To the Smyrneans* 8.

Testament, for being bearers of direct messages from God. The *Didache* reveals that c.AD 100 there were still itinerant prophets who travelled amongst the churches of Syria, but not all were genuine. Chs. 11 and 12 give some tests for distinguishing between true and false. For instance, no true prophet will, in the midst of delivering a message from God, call out for money or for food to eat there and then! Prophets continued in the Church for a while but their office was effectively discredited by the emergence in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century of a movement styling itself the ‘New Prophecy’ that gathered around Montanus and his prophetesses Priscilla and Maximilla in Phrygia, Asia Minor. They called for an ascetic lifestyle and martyrdom, spoke in ecstatic trance (similar it seems to the oracle at Delphi), and unsuccessfully predicted the imminent descent of the New Jerusalem. Thereafter, it appears, prophets were exceptional and often suspect figures, appearing sometimes at times of revival.<sup>95</sup> The regular role of ‘forth-telling’ God’s word to people fell to the preachers of the Church applying the Scriptural revelation to the situation of their times.

### **A Test of Authenticity**

The late 2<sup>nd</sup> century witnessed indeed many heretical movements. A range of Gnostic sects vied with Marcionites and Montanists and all competed with the mainline Church. How was one to distinguish true from false? In his great anti-heretical work *The Refutation and Overthrow of Falsely-Called Knowledge*<sup>96</sup> Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, declared that the genuine churches are the ones who can trace a succession of sound bishops from the apostles down to the present day - what we now call the ‘apostolic succession’. Rather than tediously listing names for many churches he saw it sufficient to list the leaders just of the church in Rome, founded, he says, by the apostles Peter and Paul.<sup>97</sup> As Clement is the third named ‘bishop’ the first few names are presumably those of presbyter-bishops, but this does not invalidate the principle he is setting down. But the purpose of this list, we must remember, was to distinguish true Christian communities which preserved sound apostolic doctrine from those proffering heretical teaching. It is scarcely fair then to use this test to discredit Protestant churches today that, whilst not adopting episcopal government, retain apostolic doctrine through making the Bible the source of their teaching.

### **Minor Orders**

A letter of Cornelius of Rome in AD 251 mentions, beside the regular three-fold ministry, the orders of subdeacon, acolyte, exorcist, reader and doorkeeper.<sup>98</sup> Subdeacons had eucharistic functions. In the Catholic Church in 1207 Pope Innocent III placed this office among the major orders of the church; later its functions were taken over by the deacon and in 1972 the office was abolished. From then on the only minor offices retained in the Roman Catholic Church have been lectors (readers), and acolytes; both are essentially lay offices. Exorcists were engaged in the Early Church’s widespread ministry of exorcism and the order persisted for some centuries. Gradually, however, their functions were taken over by the higher orders. In the Eastern Church, since the Trullian Council of 692, only lectors and cantors have continued, the other minor

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<sup>95</sup> E.g. the Anabaptist ‘Zwickau prophets’ in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>96</sup> Often referred to by the title of its Latin translation (the original was in Greek), *Against the Heresies*.

<sup>97</sup> *Against the Heresies* 3.3.1-3.

<sup>98</sup> Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.43.11.

offices have been merged into the subdiaconate, an ordained order. Doorkeeper was the lowest order having duties akin to those of a modern verger. In the Early Church they were responsible for excluding unauthorized people from attending the eucharist. Today, neither in Eastern nor Western Churches is it considered an order.

No survey of orders within the Church, both in the East and West, would be complete without an acknowledgment of the huge part played by monks, nuns and friars. By their three-fold vow of poverty, chastity and obedience they have expressed their total commitment to the service of Christ. Of course many have fallen short of the ideal they embody, but their sacrifice and achievements must not be underrated. Much of Europe and the Third World have been evangelized through their endeavors. But consideration of their particular orders and achievements lies outside this present course.<sup>99</sup>

### **The Emergence of Modern Lay Offices**

In Medieval Europe the gulf between clergy and laity was considerable. R.W. Southern writes:

The ideal church of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was a society of disciplined and organized clergy directing the thoughts and activities of an obedient and receptive laity – kings, magnates, and peasants alike.<sup>100</sup>

The truth was far from the ideal but few people apart from the clergy had more than elementary education and many were illiterate. Most secular rulers were unable to read Latin. This gave the clergy great advantages. It was the Reformation that stressed the ‘priesthood of *all* believers’ (1 Pet.2:9, Rev.1:6) and, printing the Scriptures in the vernacular,<sup>101</sup> encouraged people to learn to read their own languages. Schools proliferated. In England there was the added incentive of wanting to read the new English Prayer Book. Clergy were now viewed not as ‘Massing priests’ but as ‘ministers of word and sacrament’. Gradually lay ministries have developed. Within Anglicanism laity served as churchwardens and later as members of vestries.<sup>102</sup> From the 18<sup>th</sup> century Methodists have much valued their lay-preachers. Within the Church of England the office of lay-reader (often known today simply as ‘reader’), one licensed to conduct non-sacramental services, preach, and assist the priest in pastoral work, dates from 1866. Today the reader, when officiating, wears a blue scarf with cassock and surplice. Most dioceses also have a range of other lay offices such as pastoral assistant and, less frequently, evangelists. Training courses have been developed to prepare for these offices.

### **The Papacy**

The bishop is intended to be teacher and *pastor pastorum* (‘pastor of the pastors’) of his diocese. In Medieval Europe bishops lived like barons. The see<sup>103</sup> of Rome outranked all others in prestige because:

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<sup>99</sup> Some account of them is given in our lay-training course ‘Understanding the History of the Church’.

<sup>100</sup> *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 38.

<sup>101</sup> Local language.

<sup>102</sup> Church councils that met in the church vestry.

<sup>103</sup> Bishopric.

- it was the bishopric of the capital city of the Roman Empire, and
- the apostles Peter and Paul had been martyred and buried in Rome.

From the 3<sup>rd</sup> century we hear Bishops of Rome (popes) invoking the Petrine text Mt.16:18: ‘You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church’ to support their claim to supremacy over the rest of the Church. Of course there were fine popes like Gregory I who styled himself ‘servant of the servants of God’. But others displayed far less humility. In the time of Nicholas I (858-67) the ‘False Decretals’ appeared. These purported to be letters from early popes, canons from early councils asserting the authority of the pope, and a letter from the Emperor Constantine to Pope Silvester I in 315 declaring the Roman see supreme over all other sees and transferring to the papacy the imperial power in Rome, Italy and all the Western provinces. Not until the 16<sup>th</sup> century were these documents shown to be false; in the meantime they were the basis of inflated papal claims to temporal as well as spiritual authority particularly in Europe. And subsequently the claim to spiritual supremacy has developed yet further. At the First Vatican Council (1869-70) papal infallibility was defined in the following terms:

The Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra* (that is, when – fulfilling the office of Pastor and Teacher of all Christians – on his supreme Apostolical authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the Universal Church), through the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, is endowed with that infallibility, with which the Divine Redeemer has willed that his Church – in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals – should be equipped: And therefore, that such definitions of the Roman Pontiff of themselves – and not by virtue of the consent of the Church – are irreformable. If anyone shall presume (which God forbid!) to contradict this our definition; let him be anathema.<sup>104</sup>

In practice this infallibility has rarely been invoked but, when it has, as in defining the doctrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Pius XII, 1950), it has not inspired the confidence of other churches.

### **Eastern Orthodoxy**

Eastern Orthodoxy, while prepared to accord the see of Rome pre-eminence in honor because of its connection with the martyred apostles Peter and Paul, has consistently refused to accept the claims of Rome to overriding authority. Orthodoxy has worked to achieve national autocephalous (self-ruling) churches, presided over by a patriarch. The senior patriarch, that of Constantinople, styles himself the ‘Ecumenical Patriarch’.

Orthodox priests are normally married men, while the bishops are chosen from the ranks of the monks. Each bishop has supreme authority in his own diocese and may not be overruled by his patriarch, a standpoint close to our own. In recent years particularly there have been warm relations between Anglicanism and at least some of the Orthodox churches, but this was seriously checked when Anglican churches ordained women priests.

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<sup>104</sup> *Documents of the Christian Church* selected and ed. by H. Bettenson (Oxford: University Press, 1942), p. 382.

*What are the strengths of the Anglican three-fold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons? Are there weaknesses too?*

*What would you say to someone who wanted to know the difference between Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism?*

*Are more lay ministries needed in the ECP? If so, what form should they take?*

**Related Material:**

ECP Catechism 'The Ministry'

Articles of Religion 23, 26, 32, 36

## The Word and Sacraments

When the church meets together it must ‘do its thing’. In certain activities it ‘discovers and renews its identity.’<sup>105</sup> Most typically it assembles on the Lord’s Day and then, in a setting of openness to God and praise, the Scriptures are read and expounded. Sometimes there is an initiation activity, baptism; more frequently there is a ritual used in which bread and wine are taken with thanksgiving for the blessings of this world and most particularly for the redemption wrought by the Lord Jesus Christ. While baptism (and confirmation) relate to the entry into the Christian life, explains Macquarrie, ‘the eucharist is the sacrament which provides the structure and support for the growth of the Christian life in the process of sanctification.’<sup>106</sup> The word, he points out, has a conceptual character; it has to be heard and understood. The sacraments, however, impinge on the sight and other senses. The word and sacraments complement one another. Anglicanism seeks to hold the two in balance.<sup>107</sup>

### The Word

God revealed himself in fullness in the living Word, his Son Jesus (Jn.1:1-3, 14). This is recorded in the written word, the Old Testament containing prophecy and the New Testament showing its fulfillment. It is the product of men inspired by God (2 Tim.3:16, 2 Pet.1:20-21). This is then proclaimed by the spoken word of the preacher (Rom.10:14-15). The preachers need careful training in understanding the Scriptures and must relate them to the minds of their contemporaries, inspiring, comforting and challenging them. Our lay-training courses ‘Introducing the Bible’ and ‘Preach the Word’ explore these matters further.

### The Sacraments

In the words of our catechism, ‘Sacraments are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace’. The word ‘sacrament’ comes from *sacramentum* which means in classical Latin a ‘sacred pledge’. It was used for instance of the oath of loyalty of a Roman soldier. The Greek counterpart *mustērion* means a mystery that has been revealed. The first Church Father to apply ‘sacrament’ to baptism and the eucharist was Tertullian, but for centuries it was not restricted to these but could be used, for instance, of the teachings of the Lord’s Prayer, or of the great events of the Church’s calendar. In Medieval times the number of sacraments was fixed as seven: baptism, confirmation, the eucharist, penance, matrimony, ordination and extreme unction. At the Reformation a clear distinction was made between the two ‘dominical’<sup>108</sup> sacraments given to the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ and the other five which Article 25 describes as ‘grown partly of the corrupt following of the Apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures’. It would seem better then to call the latter ‘sacramental rites’ (as in the ECP Catechism), but they are of course, when rightly used, of enduring importance, relating as they do to different stages

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<sup>105</sup> Norris, *Understanding the Faith of the Church*, p. 207.

<sup>106</sup> *Principles*, p.418.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Article 19.

<sup>108</sup> From Lat. *dominus*, ‘lord’.

of Christian life. Let us look at them now. Baptism and the eucharist will be considered in the next chapter.

### Confirmation

It is evident that, by the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, baptism was no longer one simple rite but a complex of rites. Within these, in the Western Church, the laying on of hands after the candidate came up out of the water, was reserved for the bishop, and became increasingly seen as the moment when the candidate received the Holy Spirit.<sup>109</sup> Because the bishop was not as readily available as the local parish presbyters who performed the baptism a lapse in time developed between the administration of water baptism, which was seen to impart forgiveness and new birth, and what became known by the 5<sup>th</sup> century as ‘confirmation’ which sacramentally brought empowerment by the Spirit. At the Reformation the Church of England adopted the rule that confirmation should be administered to those who had reached the ‘years of discretion’ (around the age of 12-14), and a catechism was provided to instruct them in the basic teachings of the Christian faith. Admission to communion followed, the child now being able to appreciate the significance of what s/he was doing. St. Paul stresses the importance of understanding in 1 Cor.11:27-29. The modern move in this country of admitting children of any age to communion without instruction has surely lost something important.<sup>110</sup> In the Church of England, since the report of the House of Bishops *Admission to Communion in relation to Baptism and Confirmation* (1996), the traditional pattern remains the norm, but parishes may now, if they wish, apply to their diocesan bishop for permission to allow children aged about eight to become communicants after elementary instruction on the meaning of the sacrament. Whilst children are of course delighted to be treated like their elders in taking the sacrament, it is questionable how much they really appreciate what they are doing; moreover this practice has tended to reduce the number of those coming forward later for confirmation and thus receiving more substantial teaching about Christian faith and practice.<sup>111</sup>

### Penance

Jesus had forgiven sin not committed against himself, and thereby revealed his divinity (Mk.2:1-12), and he gave his disciples the right to forgive and retain sins (Mt.16:19, 18:18, Jn.20:23). Whilst it was quickly recognized that people continued to sin after becoming Christians, for most sins forgiveness could be received direct from God by personal confession (1 Jn.1:6-10), but there was also ‘mortal’ sin, so serious that it could not be removed just by prayer (1 Jn.5:16). By the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century three sins were generally treated as irremissible: adultery, murder and apostasy.<sup>112</sup> In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, though there were rigorists who kept to this, in other quarters of the Church this rule was relaxed and a penitential system introduced. The procedure involved the offender’s:

- a) being barred from receiving communion,
- b) performing a prescribed course of self-humiliation, and then

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<sup>109</sup> In imitation of Acts 8:17, 9:17, 19:6, cf. 2 Tim.1:6.

<sup>110</sup> The force of this point is not negated by the fact that in the Eastern Church give infants a taste of the eucharist immediately after their baptism. The Orthodox too are ignoring this important Pauline teaching.

<sup>111</sup> See ‘Resisting the Tide: Christian Initiation and Communion Reconsidered’ by Andrew Daunton-Fear in *Theology* July/August 1995, p. 279; *The Water and the Wine: A Contribution to the Debate on Children and Holy Communion*, by Roger Beckwith and Andrew Daunton-Fear (London: Latimer Trust, 2005), ch. 6.

<sup>112</sup> Apostasy was falling away from the faith and denying Christ, usually as a result of persecution.

c) receiving formal absolution and restoration by a bishop or presbyter.

At first only one such act of penance was allowed subsequent to baptism but that rule was later relaxed. By the Middle Ages penance played a major part in the life of the Western Church and embraced lesser sins as well. Because not all penances could be completed in this life it was believed that people's souls went to a fiery place called 'purgatory' where their sentences had to be completed before they were allowed to go on to heaven. A person's time in purgatory could be reduced in advance, it was taught, by going on certain pilgrimages, performing good works, and purchasing 'indulgences', certificates declaring part or all<sup>113</sup> of one's time there was remitted. After a person had died his or her soul's term in purgatory could be reduced by prayer, the celebration of Mass for that person, or again the purchase of indulgences. But purgatory and indulgences have no basis in Scripture.<sup>114</sup>

In Anglicanism, apart from private confession to God or to another Christian (Jas.5:16), a public general confession is provided in the liturgy (though not routinely used). There are also in the ECP BCP two forms of 'Reconciliation of a Penitent' in which the penitent person may confess sins to a priest and receive absolution. The penitent may then be assigned 'a psalm, prayer, or hymn to be said, or something to be done, as a sign of penitence and act of thanksgiving.'

### Matrimony

In sober tone Macquarrie says of marriage, 'It is one of the high moments in the life of the individual; it is the foundation of the family, the basic unit of human social life; it is the form that protects and controls the sexual instinct.'<sup>115</sup> In Eph.5:25-33 St. Paul models the relationship between husband and wife on that of Christ and the Church. Christ himself declared the marriage bond to be, in the intention of God, life-long (Mk.10:6-9). The ECP BCP finely states the purposes of Christian marriage in the following terms:

The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord.

For this the riches of God's grace are necessary. But marriage does not come to all, and those who desire it but cannot find the right marriage partner do well to use their freedom to achieve, in God's service, what would not be possible if they were bound by the commitments of marriage. Whilst Roman Catholicism has long insisted that its priests must be celibate, Eastern Orthodoxy strongly encourages those who would be parish clergy to marry (though bishops are chosen from the monks). Anglicanism steers a middle course; Article 32 stipulates:

Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, are not commanded by God's Law, either to vow the estate of single life, or to abstain from marriage: therefore it is lawful for them, as for all other Christian men, to marry at their own discretion, as they shall judge the same to serve better to godliness.

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<sup>113</sup> A *plenary* indulgence such as granted to those willing to serve as soldiers in a Crusade.

<sup>114</sup> Article 22 describes them as 'a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.' That 'pardons' means 'indulgences' is evident from the Latin version which uses the word *indulgentia*.

<sup>115</sup> *Principles*, p.427.

The importance of the last clause should not be forgotten!

### Ordination

Some of the history of ordination has been considered in chapter 9 of this course book; it remains now to mention one or two points relating to the present-day.

As the Church is the society where ‘the pure word of God is preached and the sacraments be duly administered’,<sup>116</sup> so ordination confers authority upon a man or woman to perform these tasks. In the ECP a Bible is presented to the newly ordained priest with the instruction, ‘Receive this Bible as a sign of the authority given you to preach the Word of God and to administer his holy Sacraments. Do not forget the trust committed to you as a priest of the Church of God.’ The prayer immediately before this asks that s/he may be made ‘a faithful pastor, a patient teacher, and a wise counselor’ for these are essential in the ministry of those called to be a ‘servant of the servants of God’<sup>117</sup>.

### Unction

Extreme Unction was anointing regularly given in the Western Church since the 9<sup>th</sup> century to those who were dying to ensure a ‘good death’. But such a practice is rightly called a ‘corrupt following of the apostles’ for this was not what was originally intended. In James 5:14-16 the sick are instructed to call the local presbyters (elders) to come and anoint them with olive oil accompanied by ‘the prayer of faith’, with the expectation that the sick will be raised up and, with sins forgiven, resume normal life. Anglicanism has, since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, been gradually returning to this important ministry. The ECP has liturgies providing for the anointing of the sick within the eucharist, and there is now a booklet available explaining the principles of this ministry.<sup>118</sup> It is to be hoped that this ministry will soon find a place in the regular life of all local churches. It is not necessary to use olive oil for that was simply the common oil of Mediterranean countries. In the Philippines one might use for instance corn or coconut oil.

*How do you feel about our present practice of admitting small children to communion before confirmation and without any training? How might the situation be improved?  
What is the purpose of confirmation these days? What training is desirable?  
Is the healing ministry being practiced in your parish? If not, do you think it might be beneficial?  
Are there any other points in the above material you would like to discuss?*

Related Material:

ECP Catechism ‘The Holy Scriptures’, ‘The Sacraments’, ‘Other Sacramental Rites’

Articles 19, 25

ECP Book of Common Prayer services of Confirmation, Reconciliation of a Penitent, Marriage and Ordination

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<sup>116</sup> Article 19.

<sup>117</sup> The title Gregory the Great (Pope 590-604) chose for himself, a poignant adoption of the instruction Christ gave to his disciples (Mk.10:41-45).

<sup>118</sup> *The Ministry of Healing: An Introductory Manual* by Andrew Daunton-Fear (2007)

## Baptism and Eucharist

If, in the words of the catechism, a sacrament is ‘an outward and visible form of an inward and spiritual grace’, Jesus Christ left his Church two: baptism and the eucharist.

### Baptism

The ritual use of water for purification is found in many religions. The word ‘baptism’ is from the Greek *baptizein* ‘to dip or immerse’. Christian baptism is then essentially a dipping or immersion of someone in water as an act of initiation into the Church.

There is speculation as to whether John the Baptist, before his spectacular ministry in Judea (Mk.1:4-11 and //s) had had contact with the Jewish Qumran community on the north-west shore of the Dead Sea<sup>119</sup> and practiced ritual washings. John’s own baptism was for forgiveness for those who confessed and turned away from their sins in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus was himself baptized by John, it seems, to identify with humankind he came to save. The Holy Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove, and a voice from heaven declared he was God’s beloved Son (Mt.3:16-17). Later Jesus’ own disciples are said to have baptized (Jn.4:1-3). Before he ascended into heaven Jesus commissioned his disciples to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mt.28:19).

In the earliest days of the Church we hear of baptism ‘in the name of *Jesus Christ*’ (Ac.2:38), which may have been the first practice, though it is possible this is an abbreviation of the full formula of baptism in the three-fold divine Name. Prerequisites for baptism were clearly repentance for one’s sins and faith in Jesus Christ as divine Messiah, and the spiritual benefits were forgiveness, salvation, and the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38, 16:30-33). In other passages baptism is referred to as new birth (Jn.3:5, Tit.3:5), dying and rising with Christ (Rom.6:3-4, Col.2:12), and being clothed with Christ which obliterates before God distinctions of race, class and sex (Gal.3:26-28).

In the early post-New Testament Church baptism in the three-fold Name was the universally accepted rite of admission into the Church, and only those baptized could partake of the eucharist. The earliest church order, the *Didache*, prescribed that baptism should be by immersion in running water if possible, otherwise in still water or, failing that, by sprinkling with water three times. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century it was seen as conferring the blessings referred to in the New Testament and in addition as placing the seal of God’s ownership upon those baptized (cf. Rev.7:3, 9:4). By the 3<sup>rd</sup> century baptism had become not just immersion in water but a complex of rites which included the laying on of hands, anointing with oil, and perhaps exorcism.<sup>120</sup>

Certain Fathers, such as Origen, stressed the importance of repentance, faith and humility before baptism but, as the centuries passed, though promises of repentance and faith were still made, the need for heartfelt commitment to Christ was sometimes overlooked. When pagan peoples were conquered by Christians forced baptism became quite common.<sup>121</sup> Baptism was

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<sup>119</sup> Which wrote the ‘Dead Sea Scrolls’ which were found last century preserved in jars in caves in the cliffs nearby.

<sup>120</sup> As in the *Apostolic Tradition* 21, though it is quite possible that this feature was a later addition.

<sup>121</sup> E.g. when Charlemagne conquered the pagan Saxons in the 790s he did so with great bloodshed and made acceptance of baptism a term of surrender.

seen to place an indelible mark on the vanquished. At the Reformation Luther saw baptism as necessary to salvation. Zwingli stressed its importance as a sign admitting Christians into the covenant community. Article 27 of our Articles of Religion declares baptism is not just a sign marking Christians out from others, but a sign of new birth sealing the promises of forgiveness of sins and adoption as children of God (cf. Rom.8:15, Gal.4:5) and confirming faith.

In contrast to the Anabaptists the ‘mainline’ Reformers<sup>122</sup> accepted the baptism of children of believers as a sign of God’s grace. Article 27 calls the baptism of young children ‘most agreeable with the institution of Christ’. No doubt this has in mind Jesus’ blessing of the young children (Mk.10:13-16) and his statement that a person must become like a little child to enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt.18:3). Additional biblical support for the practice of infant baptism comes from the reference to *households* being baptized after the head of the household became a believer (Ac.11:14, 16:14-15, 33, 1 Cor.1:16) – a household would normally include children and slaves; though we cannot prove these particular households contained small children the possibility that they did cannot be excluded. Again, why does St. Paul address children as well as adults in some of his letters (Eph.6:1-3, Col.3:20) if children were not fully part of the church? Furthermore, as boys a week old were circumcised under the old covenant (Gen.17:9-14) would one not expect that infants, boys and girls, should be baptized under the new? By the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century it is very clear that they were being baptized, though in North Africa Tertullian objected to this, wishing children to come for baptism when they were old enough to understand what they were doing.<sup>123</sup> Origen claims the practice of infant baptism was inherited from the apostles.<sup>124</sup> In the *Apostolic Tradition* we hear it is the parents or another family member who take the promises of faith on their behalf.<sup>125</sup> This has continued in our church to this day and so the ECP Catechism states, ‘Promises are made for (infants) by their parents and sponsors, who guarantee that the infants will be brought up within the Church, to know Christ and be able to follow him.’

After saying that an infant is by baptism incorporated into the Christian community Macquarrie makes some helpful comments about the development of a child’s faith:

The fullest efficacy of the sacraments requires the response of faith and the cooperation of the recipient... In the case of baptism, while the child to begin with is unconscious of the influences that are working upon him in the context of the body of Christ, such influences will come increasingly to his conscious notice and will elicit his response; for we are not to suppose that everything happens in an instant, but rather that there is initiated a process.<sup>126</sup>

Without in the very least detracting from the value of baptism in itself...we must nevertheless acknowledge the desirability of coming to a point where the response of faith is deliberate and explicit. Thus it is desirable that confirmation should take place when the baptized person has attained in himself the capacity for at least a measure of the faith and understanding which, at the moment of baptism, belonged primarily to the community into which he was incorporated.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and their associates.

<sup>123</sup> *Concerning Baptism* 18.

<sup>124</sup> *Commentary on Romans* 5.9, *Homilies on Leviticus* 8.3.

<sup>125</sup> *Apostolic Tradition* 21.

<sup>126</sup> *Principles*, p.413. The same point was made centuries before by Calvin when he said that little children ‘are baptized for their future faith and penitence whereof, although we see none in appearance, nevertheless the seed is here implanted by the hidden working of the Holy Spirit.’ (*Institutes* 4.16.19)

<sup>127</sup> *Principles*, p.415.

So infant baptism followed by confirmation of one who has developed a personal faith is the episcopal counterpart of infant dedication and believer's baptism within the Baptist tradition.

## **Eucharist**

The richness of this sacrament, Macquarrie declares, is suggested by its range of titles:<sup>128</sup> we hear first, in the early chapters of Acts, of Christians 'breaking bread' in each other's homes (Ac.2:46). Then St. Paul refers to it as 'Lord's Supper', showing its origin from Jesus' last supper with his disciples (1 Cor.11:20). He also speaks of it as 'sharing' in the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor.10:16), the Greek word for sharing being *koinōnia* from which we get the word 'communion'. The term 'eucharist', from the Greek *eucharistia* meaning 'thanksgiving', is first found in the *Didache*.<sup>129</sup> It recalls Jesus' giving thanks over the bread at the Last Supper (1 Cor.11:24), the equivalent to our saying grace before meals. 'Mass' is a later title, a corruption of *ite missa est*, the last words of the Latin Roman Catholic eucharist, meaning literally, "Go, it is sent (= finished)". Perhaps then in the Philippines we should call the sacrament *Tapos Na!* 'Mass' is certainly the least satisfactory title, retaining its popularity presumably because it is a one-syllable word.

Whilst baptism relates to entry into the Christian life, the eucharist relates to Christians' spiritual sustenance. It is one of the important 'means of grace'<sup>130</sup> by which we grow spiritually. But, down the centuries there has been great controversy over what actually happens to the bread and wine at consecration. Do they actually change in some way at that moment, or do they rather become meaningful signs or symbols of the body and blood of Christ? And are they connected with the body and blood of Christ living or dying? We can be sure they focus on the death of Christ for, in probably our earliest account of the institution of this sacrament, after stating the words Christ said over the bread and wine, St. Paul comments, 'for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you *proclaim the Lord's death* until he comes'. This is not surprising when we remember Christ gave his disciples this sacrament on the night before his crucifixion. It was to be a memorial of his death the next day. But, as the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) report 'Eucharistic Doctrine' (1971) points out, this memorial is not simply the remembering of a past event, as we might remember the end of the last World War but, as with Jewish Passover celebrations, 'the making effective in the present of an event in the past'.<sup>131</sup> But is there also a sense in which the sacrament refers also to the living Christ? St John gives us no account of the Last Supper in his gospel but, after recording the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 (Jn.6:1-14), he relates an extended discourse of Jesus with the Jewish crowd and his disciples in which he says,

Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them (vv. 53-56).

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<sup>128</sup> *Principles*, p. 416.

<sup>129</sup> *Didache* 9. The *Didache* appears to have come from Syria, c.AD 100.

<sup>130</sup> Along with prayer, Bible reading etc.

<sup>131</sup> Section 5.

Many commentators,<sup>132</sup> have seen this as a reference to the eucharist. If it is, it suggests feeding on the *living* Christ; by partaking of the eucharist we gain spiritual strength from him.

In the Early Church the Church Fathers could speak of the consecrated bread and wine as ‘figures’, ‘symbols’ or ‘signs’ of the body and blood of Christ but, comments J.N.D. Kelly, ‘It must not be supposed, of course, that this ‘symbolical’ language implied that the bread and wine were regarded as pointers to, or tokens of, *absent* realities. Rather they were accepted as signs of realities which were somehow actually present though apprehended by faith alone.’<sup>133</sup> And he goes on to say that the more common interpretation was that the elements were somehow actually converted into the body and blood of Christ. It is not a large step from this to the statement of Paschasius Radbertus (c.790-c.860), a monk of Corvie in France who, in his book *Concerning the Body and Blood of the Lord*, said that in the Lord’s Supper the believer actually receives the body of Christ which was born of Mary, suffered on the cross and rose from the dead. Whilst the outward appearance of the bread and wine is unchanged by consecration the substance is miraculously inwardly changed. This doctrine of ‘transubstantiation’ (change in the inner substance of the bread and wine) was endorsed by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and has remained official Roman Catholic Doctrine ever since. Popular devotion could believe the real flesh of Christ lay just beneath the surface layer of bread!

At the Reformation a variety of alternative interpretations were put forward. Luther, while denying transubstantiation, declared that (through consecration) Christ’s body and blood became *spiritually* present intermingling with the bread and wine. He used the analogy of a piece of red-hot iron in which iron and fire are intermingled. His view became known as ‘consubstantiation’.<sup>134</sup> His Swiss contemporary Zwingli thought this far too close to the Roman view. He pointed out that, though we have in Scripture Christ’s words ‘this *is* my body’, elsewhere Christ sometimes used the word ‘is’ metaphorically as in ‘I am the vine’ where he meant he was *like* a vine. Zwingli therefore saw the bread and wine as signs representing Christ’s death for us on the cross, the Lord’s Supper being simply a memorial of that death. Calvin, however, declared that a sign is closely connected with what it points to. When the believer then partakes of the consecrated elements his soul is actually feeding spiritually on Christ. Christ is not present in the elements for he is in heaven at the right hand of God, but the believing communicant is enabled by the Holy Spirit to draw sustenance from him there.<sup>135</sup>

Amidst these differing views where does Anglicanism stand? Article 28 (‘Of the Lord’s Supper’) strongly denounces transubstantiation as being unscriptural, declares it ‘overthroweth the nature of a sacrament’ (by viewing the bread and wine as becoming *literally* the body and blood of Christ not *signifying* them), and says this has given rise to many superstitions – in which the bread was believed to have turned to actual flesh no doubt. The Lord’s Supper is rather, it says, a ‘sacrament of our redemption by Christ’s death’ (a visible sign of it) and, for those for those approaching it ‘rightly, worthily, and with faith’, it is further a partaking of the body and blood of Christ in a ‘heavenly and spiritual manner’. Coming to communion with the right

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<sup>132</sup> Including the Reformer Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.4 and, from our time, the Methodist scholar C.K. Barrett in his commentary on the St. John’s Gospel, pp. 236, 247. The Reformer Zwingli, however, pointing to v.63, sees in this passage merely a graphic restatement of v.35 where ‘eating and drinking’ are a metaphor for having faith in Jesus Christ.

<sup>133</sup> *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp. 441-2.

<sup>134</sup> ‘Con’ from Latin *cum* meaning ‘with’.

<sup>135</sup> Calvin has become associated with ‘receptionism’, the teaching that the consecrated bread and wine are only the body and blood of Christ when *received in faith*.

attitude is clearly of vital importance. This is reinforced in our Catechism when it says, 'It is required that we should examine our lives, repent of our sins and be in love and charity with all people' as we come to communion (cf. 1 Cor.11:27-29). The article goes on to say that the sacrament was never ordered by Christ to be 'reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped'. This no doubt had in view Roman Catholic practices at the Feast of Corpus Christi when the reserved sacrament was carried in procession and revered as if it were Christ himself, and Benediction when the reserved host (bread) is held up in church for people to worship. Another article (Article 25) stresses Christ gave us the sacraments (bread and wine) that we might reverently consume them, not worship them. If today in our church consecrated elements are reserved for a situation of need, for example when no priest is available to celebrate the eucharist, they must be used only for the purpose of communion.

At the time of the Reformation the right to partake of the cup was restored to the laity. Communion using both bread and wine continued in the Western Church until the 12<sup>th</sup> century but then the chalice became reserved to the clergy (was it to avoid expense or prevent drunkenness?). The practice was defended by saying the whole of Christ is received in either element, or body contains blood. In England the cup was restored to the laity immediately after the death of Henry VIII (1547). Article 30 states that since Christ instituted both parts of the sacrament, both should be administered to all Christians.

Another focus of controversy between us and the Roman Catholic Church has been about the 'sacrifice' of the Mass. It is quite uncontroversial to think of Christ's body on the cross as a sacrifice for sins replacing the animal sacrifices under the Old Covenant (Heb.9-10). But in the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century Cyprian, when attacking the Aquarian heretics who celebrated eucharist with water instead of wine, declared the presbyter 'fulfils the role of Christ when he imitates what he did, only then does he offer a true, complete sacrifice in the Church of the Father'.<sup>136</sup> In the late 4<sup>th</sup> century the great preacher Chrysostom could speak of 'The Lord sacrificed and lying there, and the presbyter bending over the sacrifice and interceding'.<sup>137</sup> In the Western Medieval Church it came to be taught that the priest's offering to God of the sacrifice of Christ in the Mass had a value of its own. While Christ's death on the cross availed for the forgiveness of *original* sin, the offering of the Mass made satisfaction for the *actual* sins of humans. Article 31 firmly denounces this view, declaring Christ's offering (on the cross) is 'that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual'. Though Roman Catholicism still speaks of the 'sacrifice of the Mass', the ARCIC report 'Ministry and Ordination' (1973) has sought to pour oil on troubled waters by asserting:

Because the eucharist is the memorial of the sacrifice of Christ, the action of the presiding minister in reciting again the words of Christ at the last supper and distributing to the assembly the holy gifts is seen to stand in a sacramental relation to what Christ himself did in offering his own sacrifice...Such language does not imply any negation for the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ by any addition or repetition. (section 13)

Let us end our study of the eucharist with an important and uncontroversial matter. At the Last Supper Jesus said, 'This cup is the **new covenant** in my blood' (1 Cor.11:25). At Sinai in the time of Moses God had made a covenant with Israel. He would be their God and they would

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<sup>136</sup> *Epistle* 63.14. Such a statement has contributed to the view in both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches that a woman cannot be a valid priest because, being female, she cannot take the place of Christ in the eucharist, offering his own sacrifice to the Father.

<sup>137</sup> *On the Priesthood* 6.4.

keep his commandments. It was sealed by the blood of sacrificial oxen, half of which was dashed against the altar, the other half thrown over the people binding the parties of the covenant together (Ex 24:1-8). The Old Testament reveals how subsequently Israel repeatedly disobeyed God's commandments. War, captivity and exile followed, and in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC Jeremiah prophesied the establishment of a 'new covenant' (Jer.31:31-4). This new covenant Jesus introduced, sealing it with his own blood. When we drink from the eucharistic cup we show that we are participants in this new covenant. The agreement entered into is not specified, but may we not deduce from Jn.3:16 and many other New Testament passages: that to those who put their trust in Jesus Christ as God's Son, the Savior of the world, God grants eternal life? Let us, unlike Israel of old, strive to remain faithful to this covenant. In this eucharistic bond we are intended to find unity with other Christians (1 Cor.10:17). How sad this sacrament has been such a focus of disunity!

*In what ways have you extended your knowledge of these two dominical sacraments through this study?*

Related Material:

ECP Catechism 'Holy Baptism', 'The Holy Eucharist', 'The New Covenant'  
Articles of Religion 26-31

ECP Book of Common Prayer 'The Celebration of Holy Baptism', 'The Holy Eucharist'

## Christianity in the World

What is ‘the world’? We instinctively think it is the globe we live on - ‘planet earth’, or perhaps the universe consisting of billions of stars and galaxies, unimaginably large! But in the New Testament ‘world’ also refers to the human race – ‘God so loved *the world* that he sent his only begotten Son...’ (Jn.3:16). The word is also used for what has aptly been called ‘human society organized without reference to God’. Such a world tends to pull people away from God and his will, as we acknowledge when we call various attitudes or people ‘worldly’. St. John had this meaning in mind when he wrote:

Do not love the world or the things that are in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world – the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches – comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its desires are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever. (1 Jn.2:15-17)

So much in the world, the preoccupation with sex, the advertisements that make us want to acquire more and more material things, the quest for more and more money, draw us away from God. This is not surprising, if Satan is the ruler of this world (Mt.4:8-9, Jn.14:30, 1 Jn.5:19). So we must resist its pressure to conform to its outlook and ways, as J.B. Phillips’ translation of Rom.12:2 puts it, ‘Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its mould.’<sup>138</sup> And, very conscious that Christians were living in a hostile, persecuting environment, John declared, ‘Whatever is born of God conquers the world...Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God’ (1 Jn.5:4-5). In Rom.12:2 Paul goes on to say, ‘but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.’

Such instructions might lead us to believe the only sensible thing for Christians to do is to separate themselves from the world, forming enclosed orders of monks and nuns or other exclusive societies. There have been in the course of Church history many who have done just that, but how then is the good news of God’s love for mankind shown in Jesus Christ to reach those he came to save? If God loves the world so must we his servants. The risky business of involvement in the world is not an option but a necessity,<sup>139</sup> though, like Jesus himself, we must not neglect our regular times of personal prayer, Bible reading and attending public worship.

### Natural Law

It is reassuring to realize that God is already at work in the world that ignores him. He works through human reason and conscience (cf. Jn.1:9, Rom.2:14-15). Theologians speak of ‘natural law’, a certain universal sense of right and wrong, though its scope has varied in different places and times. It led the ancient Greeks to speak of four cardinal virtues: wisdom, moderation, courage and justice, which Thomas Aquinas (c.1225-74) saw as supplemented and deepened by the three Christian virtues: faith, hope and love. He also taught that the first precept of natural

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<sup>138</sup> The Greek word translated ‘world’ here is not *kosmos* as in the previous passages but *aiōn* ‘age’, referring to the world at present.

<sup>139</sup> Unless one is convinced of God’s call to a life of intensive prayer for the world, living in some quiet place. To be fair a huge amount of evangelism was and is still done by monks and nuns not belonging to closed orders.

law is: ‘Good is to be done and promoted and evil is to be avoided.’ Many non-Christians would accept without dispute the fifth to the ninth of the Ten Commandments, and would feel that those who break them deserve punishment. Because of this we can surely rightly claim to live in a ‘moral universe’ which, in basic matters at least, distinguishes between right and wrong, and where ultimately right prevails.<sup>140</sup> John Macquarrie is among those who say natural law has no clearly formulated precepts valid for all time but is rather continually developing. He quotes with approval the verdict of J.V. Langmead Casserley:

The natural law for men must necessarily grow and expand as man’s potentialities and responsibilities are deepened and widened through his gradual fulfillment of God’s purpose in creating him...<sup>141</sup>

One might instead say the basic elements of natural law find more and more applications as time goes on, but Macquarrie is surely right when he says that, in the course of history, humans with their God-given freedom take over more and more the shaping of their own future. He takes as an example the possibility now of responsible family planning, an option not available until recent decades, but emphasizes that such action should not be taken with ‘proud autonomy’ but with a ‘sense of stewardship and a consciousness of the divine grace and judgment over man’.<sup>142</sup> The aim of natural law, he says, is to direct us towards achieving our highest potential.

### **Attitude to Our Rulers**

In the New Testament it is clearly stated that we should respect those in authority in the society in which we live. Taxes should be paid even to colonial overlords (Mk.12:13-17), and their rules must be obeyed for they are God’s agents appointed to keep law and order and administer justice in society (Rom.13:1-8, 1 Pet.2:13-17). We should pray for them (1 Tim.2:1-2). What if they order what is against God’s will? Then it is right to disobey them as Peter and John did when ordered by the Jewish authorities to stop telling people about Jesus Christ (Ac.4:19-20). But, as Macquarrie sagely comments, ‘In sinful human society anarchy is likely to be even more destructive of human well-being than tyranny. On the whole the civil law provides at least a minimal level of order and justice that makes possible the pursuit of good,’ and he notes that the modern state today often provides facilities well above the minimum.<sup>143</sup>

### **Evangelism**

Of greater importance even than being fulfilled in this life is the assurance that we shall have a fulfilled life for eternity. Evangelism means ‘announcing good news’, and the good news is that just such a life is available through putting one’s trust in Jesus Christ (Jn.3:16). God, out of his

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<sup>140</sup> There are many examples of this. The Church Father Lactantius in his book *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* (c.AD 314-6) relates how Roman emperors who persecuted the Church all died miserably. In our era German Nazism and Japanese imperialism were overthrown (admittedly at great cost) in the last world war, and in the 1980s the Ugandan dictator Idi Amin was driven out of his country by Tanzanian troops. Still today there are tyrannical regimes in some parts of the world but the end of the story has not yet been told.

<sup>141</sup> Quoted Macquarrie, *Principles*, p.447.

<sup>142</sup> *Principles*, p.448. He means that we must remember that we are answerable to God for all our actions.

<sup>143</sup> *Principles*, p.460.

love for humankind, sent Jesus to earth for this very purpose. The name ‘Jesus’ means ‘savior’<sup>144</sup> and he died to pay the price of our sins (1 Cor.15:3, Rom.3:21-6), and then rose not only to conquer death but also to demonstrate his divinity (1 Cor.15:20-22, Rom.1:4). Those who put their in Jesus as Son of God and Savior, taking the step of baptism (if they have not done so already), receive forgiveness of their sins and enter a personal relationship with God as Father who puts his Spirit in their hearts (Ac.2:38, Rom.8:15-16). What amazing news indeed! How does this affect a person’s life? St. Paul says, ‘If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old things have passed away, see, the new have come’ (2 Cor.5:17). After such spiritual new birth there must be careful nurture for spiritual growth.

Evangelism involves **p**resence with people, **p**ersuasion of individuals (cf. Ac.17:16-17), and **p**roclamation of the message to larger groups. Of course many different methods are possible for different kinds of people and situations, but to begin to learn about these requires a separate course of instruction and practical experience.<sup>145</sup>

## **Service**

Jesus made **service** central to the Christian lifestyle (Mk.10:45, Lk.22:24-7, Jn.13:1-15). John Stott helpfully points out that this should be exercised in five spheres: home, workplace, local church, local community and the wider world:<sup>146</sup>

### In the Home

Personal interests like watching one’s favorite program on television should not be allowed to crowd out family events. Parents should not be so preoccupied with outside responsibilities that they neglect their children. Teenagers should not treat their home like a hotel providing them with free board and lodging but to which they contribute nothing.

Macquarrie particularly emphasizes the value of marriage as being both a sacred and a secular institution, seeing it as ‘the gateway through which the grace of holy Being (God) made present in the sacraments can penetrate the wider world of human relationships’.<sup>147</sup> Ideally this may be true, but in many countries today marriage is undermined by many couples living together unmarried without, it seems, any sense of shame, and by too easy resort to divorce. The former is well-known in the Philippines partly because divorce is not possible and annulment is so hard to obtain.

### In the Workplace

As God himself worked in creating the world, so he made humans to work, caring for this world (Gen.2:15). Stott has some interesting points to make about this:

It is to be a genuine partnership in which God has deliberately humbled himself to need our cooperation. He creates; we cultivate. He plants; we develop. What he gives us is called ‘nature’; what we contribute is called ‘culture’...

Every honourable work, whether manual or mental or both, whether waged or voluntary, however humble or menial, needs to be seen by Christians as some kind of co-operation with God, in which

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<sup>144</sup> Or more strictly ‘Yahweh is salvation’. ‘Jesus’ is the Greek form of the Hebrew ‘Joshua’.

<sup>145</sup> It is hoped in time to produce such a course in this lay-training program.

<sup>146</sup> *Your Confirmation*, ch.10.

<sup>147</sup> *Principles*, p. 453.

we share with him in the transformation of the world which he has made and committed to our care.<sup>148</sup>

We witness to the world by the way we do our work, seeing our tasks as not just for a perhaps unfair boss or ungrateful family, but for our Lord Jesus Christ (Col.3:17, 22-3).

### In the Local Church

It should be taken for granted that all Christians will be active members of their local church. How else can the church be rightly described as a body in which all the members are interdependent (1 Cor.12:12-31)? All members should find roles there that make use of their gifts and interests<sup>149</sup> but they should also be prepared to perform their fair share of menial duties.

### In the Local Neighborhood

Christians are to be salt and light in this world (Mt.5:13-16); salt giving flavor to its life and preserving it from corruption, light bringing enlightenment by their character, words and deeds. Rather than being back-biters, for instance, they should be encouragers; rather than grumbling, they should be praising God.

Christians can penetrate their local community by home visiting, taking church literature around - the parish magazine or newsheet, and organizing attractive events to which the community is invited (e.g. at fiesta or Christmas carol service). They should also join in various existing community activities or organizations: school support groups, the barangay council perhaps, hospital and prison visiting and, if necessary pioneer new organizations such as a Mums and Toddlers group, something for youth or an occasional medical mission, as resources allow.

### In the Wider World

Here we have to be realistic. What we can do depends on what resources we have and what opportunities we are given, though let us not underestimate the power of prayer to change things.

How is politics to become less corrupt in this country unless sincere and dedicated Christians are willing to play their part in local and national government? In 19<sup>th</sup>-century England William Wilberforce and later Lord Shaftesbury ('the poor man's earl') achieved far-reaching results through introducing bills to Parliament that ultimately led to laws outlawing the slave trade, and the improvement of the conditions of British workers. Perhaps these were exceptional men but many less 'high profile' people have contributed beneficially to politics in many countries. And Christian dedication can come to the fore in other ways. Were not nuns in the front line of the EDSA I 'people power' revolution, holding out flowers to soldiers in tanks?

Part of the stewardship of our money (perhaps through our local church) could be making an annual donation to a missionary society, or a world charity such as World Vision. Other possibilities include supporting cancer or AIDS research/relief, joining an environmental group, and responding to an appeal to help earthquake victims. Charity begins at home, they say, but it's sad if it also ends there! Every small donations help.

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<sup>148</sup> *Your Confirmation*, p.148.

<sup>149</sup> In *The Purpose-Driven Church*, ch. 19 Rick Warren tells of the wonderful way members of Saddleback church discover what each of its members' ministries within the church should be. Everyone is assessed for his/her S-H-A-P-E: Spiritual gifts – Heart (what they are most 'fired up' about) – Abilities – Personality – Experience, before being allocated tasks.

The writer D.H. Lawrence once said, “If only one could have two lives. The first in which to make one’s mistakes...and the second in which to profit from them!”<sup>150</sup> But of course we only have ONE LIFE. Let us make the best use of it.

*What should be our attitude to a President and government with whose policies we disagree?  
Who should be involved in evangelism? Why is our church weak in this activity?  
In what ways can church members best serve their local community?*

Related Material: Articles of Religion 32, 37-9

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<sup>150</sup> Quoted Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Life*, p. 219.

## The Last Times

Doctrines about the end of the world constitute ‘eschatology’, from the Greek *eschatos* ‘last’ and *logos* ‘discourse’.

By the first century of our era the Jews, depressed by suffering under a series of colonial masters: Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and finally Romans, despaired of the present age and eagerly looked forward to the age to come when Yahweh or his agent the Messiah would take control of human history, destroy the alien world powers, and grant Israel a privileged position in his glorious kingdom.

### The Messiah Comes

Jesus came announcing the arrival of the new age, the kingdom (Gk. *basileia*, better translated ‘reign’ or ‘rule’) of God, and in his miracles demonstrated its supernatural powers.<sup>151</sup> Following his death, resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, his disciples and those who responded to their message entered that kingdom. Effectively the age to come had broken into the present age though without destroying it; the two continued together, with evil far from eliminated. Jesus had ascended into heaven promising to return within the lifetime of his contemporaries, though he had confessed he did not know exactly when it would be.<sup>152</sup> Certainly there were wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and famine as he had predicted; in AD 66, the Zealots led a revolt against the Romans which culminated, after a long siege, in the capture and destruction of Jerusalem and its temple by the Roman armies in AD 70. But the delay in Jesus’ own return posed problems for the Early Church as the New Testament reveals.<sup>153</sup> Various explanations were attempted but one thing remained unchanged, the apostles had been commissioned by Jesus to make disciples of *all nations*, and they must attend to that lengthy task.

Throughout Church history there have been those who predicted the end was near. In the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Montanus and his prophetesses Priscilla and Maximilla in Phrygia, central Asia Minor, predicted the imminent descent of New Jerusalem near the village of Pepuza - it never happened. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century a number of Anabaptist sects expected the imminent return of Christ; they called people to accept believers’ baptism and form a pure church in preparation. To some extent in the Early Church, and again since the Reformation there have been people who have shown an intense interest in the millennium, the thousand-year reign of Christ with his saints mentioned in Rev.20:4. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Britain and the United States there were ‘Pre-millennialists’ who saw the urgency of world mission, believing that when all the nations had been reached with the Gospel, Christ would return (Mt.24:14) and the millennium would follow. ‘Post-millennialists’ thought rather that by improving the condition of the poor the church could effectively create a millennium of prosperity on earth after which Christ would return.

Still today Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses and others are convinced the signs are being fulfilled and Christ’s return is imminent, but should we not learn the lessons of Church history

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<sup>151</sup> ‘If I by the finger of God cast out demons then is the kingdom of God come upon you.’ (Lk.11:20)

<sup>152</sup> Mk.13:26-27, 30-32.

<sup>153</sup> See for instance 2 Thess.2, 2 Pet.3:8-10.

and, while striving to live lives worthy of him lest he should return at any time, realize that probably we shall go to Jesus first – at our death?

## **The Last Judgment**

In Daniel 7 God sits on his throne as judge of all (v.9ff), but gives to the ‘Son of Man’ dominion over all nations (vv.13-14). Although this passage goes on to show that ‘Son of Man’ is a personification of God’s holy people (vv.22, 27), it is not a big step to the New Testament claim that Jesus Christ (who frequently applied the title ‘Son of Man’ to himself) would one day be judge of all nations (Mt.25:31ff, Ac.17:31). The judgment scene of Rev.20:11-15 follows from that of Daniel 7, though who it is that occupies the great white throne is not specified, but people are judged on the record of their deeds (recorded in books), and there is also a ‘book of life’ which is said in Rev.13:8 to contain the names of those who have been faithful to God through persecution. They are assured of a place in God’s kingdom (20:15). St Paul too talks of judgment, even for Christians, on the basis of their deeds (2 Cor.5:9-10). How can this be reconciled with his cardinal doctrine ‘justification *by faith*’? A possible way out of this impasse is to see our faith in Christ as, by God’s grace, securing a place for us in heaven (Jn.3:16), but the life we have lived as Christians determining where we are allocated there. Alternatively one might see faith and works as indissolubly linked, like two sides of one coin, genuine faith showing itself in good deeds (Eph.2:10, Jas.2:26). According to Rev.20:15, those whose names are not found in the book of life are thrown into the ‘lake of fire’ and presumably destroyed along with death and the underworld Hades which have no further use (v.14). Elsewhere it is said the wicked will go into ‘eternal punishment’ while the righteous into eternal life (Mt.25:46), or into ‘outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (Mt.25:30). This has been commonly taken to mean unending punishment, a matter we shall consider further below in the section on hell.

## **Heaven**

We can scarcely begin to conceive the perfect realm of God which is heaven. Clearly it is a place of sheer goodness, those who do evil being denied entry (Rev.21:8). Some would say it is a state of mind rather than a place, but this scarcely satisfies our hopes. The book of Revelation paints a picture of a city, new Jerusalem, of dazzling beauty with streets of gold, gates of pearl, and walls adorned with jewels, lit by the light of God’s presence (Rev.21:9-22). Its inhabitants are immortal and experience neither pain nor sorrow (21:4). It is a place of abundant food and of healing (22:1-2). Other chapters indicate that those who are there will devote much of their time to worshipping God in word and song (5, 7, 19 etc). In Jn.14:6 Jesus tells his disciples that in his Father’s ‘house’ there are many dwellings; he will go and prepare places for them and then return to take them to be with him there. These dwellings are not temporary resting places, like inns along the route of a journey as some have suggested, but permanent dwellings, for the Greek word for ‘dwelling’ here is *monai* from the same root as the verb *menein* ‘to remain’.

## **Eternal Life**

Clearly heaven is the destination of those who have ‘eternal life’. This phrase is particularly characteristic of the Fourth Gospel where it occurs seventeen times; most commonly it is said

that those who *believe in Jesus* will receive it (3:15-16, 36, 5:24, 6:40 etc). Other references to Jesus giving people ‘life’ (e.g. 10:10, 11:25) must surely refer to it too. But what does ‘eternal’ mean? The Greek *aiōnios* comes from *aiōn*, an ‘age’ or ‘period of time’. So ‘eternal life’ means ‘life of the age (to come)’. It speaks of the *quality* of life rather than its unending duration. In Jn.17:3 Jesus gives a definition of it which William Barclay translates, ‘It is eternal life to know you, who are the only true God, and to know Jesus Christ, whom you sent.’ It seems fair to deduce then that the essence of eternal life is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, the trusting relationship of a small child to its father (Rom.8:15-16). This starts not at death but in *this* life as soon as we put our trust in Jesus Christ (Jn.3:16 etc) and continues unbroken through death (Jn.11:25-6).

## The Spiritual Body

But if at death we move on to the next world without our physical bodies, what form shall we take? In 1 Cor.15:35-50 Paul says the bodies of those raised from death at Christ’s coming will be transformed into ‘*spiritual* bodies’ (v.44) for perishable flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (v.50). Why we need a body at all rather than just being invisible souls or spirits is surely to express ourselves and be recognized by others. Do Christians get this body at death? When Paul realized he was likely to die before Christ’s return he spoke of his death as departing and ‘being with Christ’ (Phil.1:23), but Jesus says believers will be raised ‘*at the last day*’ (Jn.6:39-40, 44, 54). In the Early Church it was thought that martyrs went straight to heaven at death, but the souls of all others waited somewhere until the Last Day.<sup>154</sup>

## Hell

Some English versions of the New Testament translate both ‘Hades’ (the place of the departed, good and bad) and ‘Gehenna’ (the place of torment for the wicked) by the word ‘hell’. The NRSV leaves ‘Hades’ untranslated and reserves ‘hell’ for ‘Gehenna’.

In the late 7<sup>th</sup> century BC the valley of Ben-Hinnom (Heb.), or Gehenna (Gk.), had become a place of child sacrifice to Moloch, the god of the Ammonites, and so Josiah, in his reforms following the discovery of a ‘book of the law’ (Deuteronomy?), ‘defiled it’ (2 Ki. 23:10) turning it, it seems, into the refuse dump of Jerusalem. As a place where fires were always burning, and crawling with maggots, it provided an apt image of the place of eternal torment for wicked humans after death (Mk.9:42-8). Eternal fire is also the destiny of the devil and his angels (Mt.25:41).

Whilst in the Early Church this was orthodox belief, there were some who thought otherwise. Origen put forward the idea that ‘Each sinner kindles his own fire...and our own vices form its fuel’,<sup>155</sup> their punishment will be inner anguish and the sense of separation from God. But this is remedial. Ultimately all, even the devil, would repent and be saved. This view provoked an outcry, but also influenced some later theologians. Whilst not going so far as this universalistic conception which denies the right of individuals to reject God, one may yet question the belief that ‘eternal’ punishment is *unending* for it seems inconsistent with a God of love. The lake of fire in Rev.20:14-15 is clearly destructive for it destroys death and Hades; presumably the wicked thrown into it are annihilated. Alternatively ‘eternal’ punishment as with ‘eternal’ life

<sup>154</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, ch. 21 gives very helpful insight into the range of views of the Fathers.

<sup>155</sup> *On First Principles* 2.10.4.

should be seen as *qualitative* meaning simply ‘punishment of the age to come’, its intensity and duration being decided by God.

## **Purgatory**

The concept surely developed from the Early Church’s belief that, for the souls of all except the martyrs, there would be a delay between death and the Last Day. Augustine was the first to say that in this period human souls would experience torture or enjoy rest according their previous conduct in this world.<sup>156</sup> Gregory the Great (pope, 590-604), thought ‘light sins’ could be purged in purgatorial fire after a person’s death (cf. 1 Cor.3:11-15) and said it was good to offer the eucharist for the deliverance of that person’s soul. In the Middle Ages the Schoolmen<sup>157</sup> said that the guilt incurred by sins was forgiven by a priest’s absolution through the merits of Christ on the cross, but sins also incurred penances which must be worked off in this world and, if not complete at death, in purgatory before a person could go to heaven.

Purgatory developed into a dominant theme of Medieval Christianity. A person’s appointed time there could, it was believed, be reduced in advance by pilgrimages, good works and the purchase of indulgences.<sup>158</sup> After death the soul’s release could be hastened by prayer, Masses and indulgences. Purgatory remains a belief of the Roman Catholic Church today, but not of the Orthodox churches. It has no foundation in Scripture, and denies the completeness of Christ’s atonement. It also ‘tends to rob the soul of peace and to fill it with fear of the future.’<sup>159</sup>

## **Out of the Body Experiences**

Many cultures find no difficulty in believing in spirits, good and bad, the latter often being greatly feared. Christ came to break the power of evil spirits and, trusting in him, there is no need to fear or placate them. Secular Western culture however is materialistic and inclined to deny the reality of spirits altogether and even life after death. In the face of such materialism it is helpful to consider certain evidence pointing in the opposite direction:

- Many people on their death-bed have been aware of the presence of deceased relatives, and some of Christ himself, and there are those who claim to hear heavenly music.
- Some people who have appeared to die for short periods during operations or through accidents have claimed to have risen above their prone body and those watching over it, moved away, gone down a dark passage, met angels or even Christ and before him reviewed their lives so far, then to have encountered a barrier and had to turn back – awaking on their deathbed very much alive and with a new sense of purpose. Books telling such stories include Raymond A. Moody, *Life after Life* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975) and George Ritchie, *Return from Tomorrow* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1978).
- Visions of the next world, such as those of Sadhu Sundar Singh which he claimed to have received during prayer and subsequently recorded in his book *The Spiritual World*

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<sup>156</sup> *Predestination of the Saints*, 24.

<sup>157</sup> Great theological teachers such as Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>158</sup> See ch. 11 above, ‘Penance’.

<sup>159</sup> Griffith Thomas, *Principles*, p. 303, cf. Article 22.

(1926). He tells of an intermediate state which most souls enter at death, going to a level appropriate to their spiritual development, where they then receive instruction from angels, preparing them for heaven. Those particularly wicked go straight to hell.

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So, guided by the Scriptures, and encouraged by those ideas and experiences of other Christians which are consistent with them, 'let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith' (Heb.12:1-2). One day our curiosity will be satisfied!

*Now please review in turn each section of this topic to see what you find most helpful, what debatable. We may not have all the answers, but we have enough to give us great hope.*

Related Material: ECP Catechism 'The Christian Hope'  
Articles of Religion 3-4, 22

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