



GCE

Religious Studies

**RS3 CHR:
Studies in Christianity (A2)
Topic 2**

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Topic 2: Contemporary Christological Debates

AIM

At the end of this topic you should be able to:

- Understand Christological debates on the person of Jesus
- Examine issues surrounding what can be known about the historical Jesus
- Explain the concept of the Jesus of history
- Examine the notion of the Christ of faith
- Explain the concept of Jesus as God Incarnate
- Evaluate scholarly opinions on the person of Jesus
- Explain the concepts of Jesus as Suffering Servant, New Adam and New Moses
- Examine the concepts of Jesus as Saviour and Logos
- Evaluate the use of mythological and symbolic language
- Evaluate the value of these titles today

Christology is the study of the person of Jesus Christ and his spiritual and theological significance. It is concerned with discovering who Jesus Christ actually was.

The Jesus of History

Scholars have speculated on what can actually be known about the historical figure of Jesus – when he lived, what he did and when he died. The gospels tell us a great deal but they are not historical books as such, but books encouraging faith. Ideally, historically reliable evidence needs to come from unbiased sources other than the scriptures. There is, however, very little solid historical evidence that can tell us anything about Jesus beyond some interesting, though brief, references from Roman and Jewish historians of the period.

- The Roman historian Tacitus spoke of a religious teacher titled '*Christus*' who had a following among the Jewish people and was executed by Pilate.
- Pliny the Younger wrote of a religious sect called 'Christians' who worshipped their teacher Christ as God.
- The Jewish historian Josephus in '*Antiquities*' wrote:

'Jesus, a wise man, did surprising feats. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who became his disciples reported that he appeared to them three days after and that he was alive; accordingly, he was, perhaps, the Messiah.'

Faced with this very limited evidence, scholars undertook what became known as the quest for the historical Jesus to try to discover whether there was a significant difference between the historical figure of Jesus and the 'Christ of Faith' figure that had been developed by the Christian church from the accounts in the gospels.

These scholars took a hard look at the historical evidence of Jesus and tried to strip away the dogmas added by the Church – for example, the notion that Jesus was the Son of God and that he rose from the dead. In this way, it was thought, a more believable and credible picture of Jesus Christ would emerge.

One of the first such scholars was Reimarus who, in his book *An Apology for the Rational Worshipper of God* (1774) put forward the theory that the early Christians had tampered with the gospel accounts of Jesus. He believed that Jesus was a political leader who tried, and failed, to lead an uprising against the Roman and was executed. He suggested that the followers of Jesus invented the notion of the resurrection simply to cover up the issues raised by Jesus.

However, later scholars said that this was mere speculation and there was no historical proof to support Reimarus's view, so the quest for the historical truth of Jesus continued. In the nineteenth century, a number of distinguished writers tried to work out what the historical figure of Jesus must have been like. They wrote a number of speculative 'Lives of Jesus' books, but, like Reimarus, these were guesswork. McGrath noted in *'Christian Theology – An Introduction'* (Blackwell 2004):

'They certainly saw him as he had never been seen before; sadly, they believed that they saw him as he actually was.'



Seminar Work:

Does any of this offer truly reliable evidence about the life and work of Jesus Christ?

Why/ why not?

Three differing approaches have been adopted by scholars:

- **Apocalyptic critique** - Albert Schweitzer in *'The Quest for the Historical Jesus'* (OUP 1991) argued that Jesus could not be known through the limited historical material available, and that his ministry was determined by his apocalyptic outlook. The limited evidence leaves us with Christ as a remote, unworldly figure.
- **Sceptical critique** - William Wrede in *'The Origin of the New Testament'* (Biblio-Bazaar 1993) questioned the historical and factual basis of Jesus. He argued that the gospels were a theological picture of Christ, disguised as an historical one. Historically speaking, the evidence is both unreliable and unverifiable.
- **Dogmatic critique** - Martin Kahler in his work *'The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historical Biblical Christ'* (OUP 1964) claimed that the historical facts of the life of Jesus were irrelevant to religious faith. The importance of Christ lay not in who he was, but what he did in the lives of believers – it was the Christ of Faith, not the Jesus of history, who was truly important.

'The Jesus of the 'life of Jesus' movement is merely a modern example of a brain-child of the human imagination.'



For reflection:

Are historical facts irrelevant to religious faith?

Rudolf Bultmann in *'New Testament and Mythology'* (Augsburg 1990) went further by suggesting that the quest for the historical facts of the life of Jesus was a waste of time and that the Christ can only be understood by faith.



For reflection:

Can Christ only be understood by faith?

Ernst Kasemann in the *'New Quest for the Historical Jesus'* (Eerdmans 2010) argued that it was possible that the gospel writers had included accurate historical information alongside theological truths about Jesus. The crucial aspect, he said, was to see the links between the preaching **of** Jesus and the later preaching **about** Jesus.

Joachim Jeremias in '*The Problem of the Historical Jesus*' (SCM 1974) took this a stage further by emphasising the continuity between;

- the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith.
- the preaching of Jesus during his ministry and the preaching about Jesus given by the Christian Church.

Many scholars today have looked towards establishing the historical truth about Jesus by stripping away the religious doctrine surrounding accounts of his life and instead getting a picture of Jesus based solely on valid historical evidence. In '*The Historical figure of Jesus,*' (Penguin 1993), E.P. Sanders listed all the facts of Jesus' life which could be regarded as likely to be true and from these gained a picture of Jesus not as the Son of God, but as a Jewish holy man who preached about the love and kingdom of God. He may or may not have had disciples nor performed miracles and, Sanders claimed, there is insufficient evidence to know if Jesus was crucified and resurrected.

John Crossan, in '*The Historical Jesus*' (Harper 1993) argued that Jesus was simply a Jewish teacher who tried to break down social conventions, particularly in his teachings about sinners and outcasts. In the same way, Geza Vermes In '*Jesus the Jew*', (SCM 2001), stripped away Christian doctrine to find the historical Jesus as a Jewish holy man very much set and involved in the social and religious culture of the time and who whose message was misunderstood by his fellow Jews. Similarly, the Jewish Seminar, a group of 150 biblical scholars brought together in 1985, saw the historical Jesus as a Jewish teacher and healer who was not in any way divine, but a human being who was close to God.



Seminar work:

Is the Quest for the Historical Jesus of any value today?

The Christ of faith

The 'Christ of faith' is a term used to distinguish religious beliefs about Christ from historic claims about the 'Jesus of history'. The former is concerned with claims of faith and belief, such as Christ being the Son of God, whilst the latter looks at notions of historical fact and scholarly evidence, such as Jesus being a religious leader in the first century.

This section deals with the former.

Jesus as God Incarnate

Jesus angered the Jewish authorities when he claimed to be God incarnate, that is, in human form – a claim that they regarded as blasphemous.

'For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God.' – John 5:18

The view that Jesus Christ was God incarnate is made very clear in John's Gospel:

'...the Word was God.' – John 1:1

'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.' – John 1:14

Indeed, the disciple Thomas, upon seeing the risen Jesus, declared:

'My Lord and my God!' – John 20:20

The early Christians understood that Jesus Christ, in human form, functioned as God and was therefore an object of worship. Jesus himself instructed the disciples in just this way:

'I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.' – John 16:23

Elsewhere, Jesus speaks of himself as God:

'...anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.' – John 14:9.

But what did Christ incarnate really mean? Did God actually become human, or was this simply a symbolic picture? The controversy about just how 'human' Christ really was and in what respects did he differ from other humans began when a group called the *Docetists* gave their strong support to the view that Christ was God and that he took human form just for the sake of symbolic appearance. Saturninus of Antioch, declared;

'...the Saviour was unborn, incorporeal and without form...he was a human being in appearance only.'



For reflection:

What does it mean to be a human being 'in appearance only'?

However, others argued that Christ really was God in human form. Ignatius of Antioch in his '*Letter to the Trallians*', wrote that Jesus was;

'...truly born, who ate and drank, who was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and truly died, in full view of heaven, earth and hell, and who was truly raised from the dead.'



For reflection:

Is it possible for a transcendent God to take on human form?

The Nicene Creed of 381 CE is the basis of orthodox Christianity and confirms the belief that Christ really was God incarnate. In the '*Book of Common Prayer*' (1662) it declares

*'I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father, God of God, light of light; very God of very God; begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father...and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost and of the Virgin Mary and was made man.'*

In 451 CE, the Council of Chalcedon declared that Jesus Christ was truly human and truly divine. This has become the accepted view of mainstream Christianity;

'...we all with one voice confess our Lord Jesus Christ to be one and the same Son, perfect in divinity and humanity, truly God and truly human, consisting of a rational soul and a body, being of one substance with the Father in relation to his divinity, and being of one substance with us in relation to his humanity.'

More recently, in '*The making of Christian Doctrine*' (SCM 1999) Maurice Wiles wrote:

'...the source of salvation must be God; the locus of salvation must be humanity. It is quite clear that these two principles often pulled in opposite directions. The Council of Chalcedon was the church's attempt to resolve, or perhaps rather to agree to live with, that tension...'

In modern times, scholars have highlighted the role of Christ as the Saviour who had come into the world as the only way that God could break the power of sin and give eternal life to humanity. If God alone could bring salvation, forgive sin and offer eternal life, then, Jesus, if he were merely a creature, could not do this. Since the scriptures said that Jesus did bring salvation, then Jesus must be God incarnate. God took on human form to enter into the human situation and change it for the better. As McGrath in *'Christian Theology- an Introduction'* noted:

'Only the creator can save the creation.'



For reflection:

Does it really matter today if Jesus was or was not God incarnate?
Why?

Karl Barth argued that the reality of God was to be found in the reality of human life. God became human as Jesus in order to become real to humanity. God is thus revealed through the life and work of Christ.

Bonhoeffer in *'The Cost of Discipleship'* (SCM 2001) spoke of the notion of divine limitation, where, by becoming human, God, in Christ, emptied himself of divine knowledge, to make himself truly incarnate:

'God lets himself be pushed out of the world on the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us...the Bible directs us to God's powerlessness and suffering; only the suffering God can help.'



Seminar work:

Was Jesus really God Incarnate?

Why did God need to take human form?

Jesus as Suffering Servant

In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah speaks of a 'Suffering Servant' - a mysterious individual who undertakes to do God's future work of redemption. It is not clear who the Servant actually is. Some Jews believe it may be a symbolic representation of Israel itself, but many Christians believe that the Servant is a depiction and prophecy of Christ himself. In *'Introducing the Old Testament'* (Lion 2011) Drane observed:

'It is more likely that Isaiah was thinking of some future person in whose life the ideals of Israel's covenant faith would become a reality, and through whom God's intentions for his people and the world could be brought to pass'.

So why do believers think that the Servant might be a representation of Jesus? One reason is the closeness of the 'Servant' passages in Isaiah, with the descriptions of Jesus in the gospels. For example, in Isaiah 42:1 God describes the Servant thus:

*"Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight."* - Isaiah 42 v.1

Compare those words and note the similarity with these spoken by God at Jesus' baptism:

'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' – Mark 1:11

Later on, Jesus is shown reading aloud in the synagogue from the prophet Isaiah concerning the Servant: - and then declares that it refers to him:

'The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recover of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him and he began by saying to them; 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.' – Luke 4: 17-21

Anderson in *'Understanding the Old Testament'* (Lion 2011) observes:

'The Servant is a person...who includes and represents Israel, the community that is explicitly designated as God's servant'.

Isaiah shows that the Servant will be humble, obedient to God in the service of humanity:

'Here is my servant. I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out...a bruised reed he will not break.'

– Isaiah 42: 2-3

Jesus highlighted the importance of being a servant:

'Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be slave to all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.' – Mark 10: 43-45

In John's Gospel, Jesus makes it clear that his role is one of service. In an action which initially shocked and bewildered his disciples, Jesus washed their feet – normally the act of a servant or slave. In doing this, he was displaying the love of God – which requires service to others, reflecting his pending sacrifice on the cross. The service of foot washing is about humility, love and sharing – reflecting the ideal community of believers. He tells his disciples that they must follow his example of service:

'Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master' – John 13:14-16



For reflection:

Why do you think that Jesus placed such importance on the need to serve?

Moreover, in Luke 22:37, Jesus specifically refers to himself as the Servant by quoting from Isaiah:

'It is written "...and he was numbered with the transgressors", and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me.'

However, it is in Isaiah 53, that we find the most evidence that the Servant is an image of Jesus. This chapter speaks of the suffering and execution of the Servant, which mirrors many of the images raised in the Passion narratives in the gospels.

Isaiah 53 begins with the Servant being depicted as *'a man of sorrows'* (v.3). The Servant is despised by the world and his heavenly background is unrecognised:

*“He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering”. - 53 v.3*

This same image is shown concerning Jesus in John 1:11:

‘He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.’



For reflection:

Are the passage links between Jesus and the Suffering servant convincing?

Taking Isaiah as a whole, we can see other symbolic links and similarities between the Servant and Jesus:

Servant - *‘I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.’ – Isaiah 49: 6*

Jesus: *‘I am the light of the world.’ – John 9:5*

Servant: *‘See, my Servant will act wisely, he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted’ - Isaiah 52:13*

Jesus: *‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man then you will know that I am the one I claim to be.’ – John 8:28*

Servant: *‘He was despised and rejected of men... and we esteemed him not.’
- Isaiah 53: 3*

Jesus: *‘The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him.’
– Luke 22:63*

Servant: *‘He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted.’ – Isaiah 53: 4*

Jesus: *‘the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him.’ – Mark 10:33-34*

Servant: *‘He was pierced for our transgressions...the punishments that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed.’ – Isaiah 53: 5*

Jesus: *‘One soldier pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.’ – John 19:34*

The Servant, it is prophesied, will suffer a great 'punishment' from God. He will not be punished for his own sins, but instead he will take upon himself the sins of humanity. The reason for the punishment is clear – the Servant is a 'vicarious sacrifice', that is, through his redemptive act, all those who accept his sacrifice and turn to God, will be saved;

*'But he was pierced for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our infirmities.
The punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed'. - Isaiah 53 v.5*

The Servant is obedient to God and, even though he is innocent, will go to his death without crying out or blame others. He will be executed as a criminal;

*'For he was cut off from the land of the living:
For the transgressions of my people he was stricken.
He was assigned a grave with the wicked'. (53 v. 8-9)*



For reflection:

What do these verses mean?

Are they symbolic in meaning or to be understood literally?

The suffering of the Servant is part of God's divine plan of salvation. The sacrifice of the Servant was God's way of providing a means by which people could be freed from sin and restore the relationship of love with God.

Anderson:

'The Servant is the goat through whom God overcomes broken relations and effects reconciliation'.

All of this is reflected in Jesus' own crucifixion – he is executed even though he has done no wrong:

Pilate said *'I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him...he has done nothing to deserve death.'* – Luke 23; 15-16

Jesus tells his followers that he is a servant who has come to die to save others;

'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' - Mark 10:45.

The whole issue is clearly summed up by St Paul;

'God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.' - Romans 3:25.

'While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.' – Romans 5:8

The prophecy predicts that the Servant's mission will end in victory. Through God's love and justice, the Servant will be restored:

*'After the suffering of his soul,
He will see the light of life and be satisfied'.* – Isaiah 53: 11

'Taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being formed in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross.' – Phil. 2:6-8



Seminar work:

To what extent is the evidence that Jesus is the 'Suffering Servant' convincing?

Is there any relevance in this title today?

Jesus – the New Adam

'The comparison that Paul draws between Adam and Christ sheds light on the inferiority of the first man compared with the prevalence of the second.'
– Pope Benedict XVI: 'General Audience' 3.12.08

Many theologians regard the biblical figure of Adam as the representative of sinful humanity. Adam, the first human, gave in to temptation, disobeyed God and as a result, sin and death came into the world. Adam, and consequently humanity, became sinful and mortal – the close relationship with God was fractured and humanity no longer had eternal life:

'...for dust you are and to dust you will return.' – Genesis 3:19



For reflection:

Was Adam a real person or a mythological figure?

In the New Testament, Jesus is symbolically deemed to be the new Adam, the perfect man who does not succumb to temptation and, through his obedience and close relationship to God, is able, through his atoning death, to defeat sin and death and restore the relationship between God and humanity:

'Since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ, all will be made alive.' - 1 Cor. 15:21-22

The New Testament highlights both similarities and differences between Adam and Jesus:

- Luke traces the lineage of Jesus back to Adam, thus emphasising his relationship to the whole human race, not just the Jews. (Luke 3:37)
- Adam gives in to temptation in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:6), Jesus resists temptation in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42)
- Eve, who brought temptation and death comes from Adam's side (Genesis 2:21). At the crucifixion, a soldier pierces Jesus' side and blood and water flow out – a sign of the new covenant and eternal life. (John 19:34).
- Whereas Adam introduced sin and death into the world, Christ brought eternal life:

'Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.'
– Romans 5:18

St. Paul highlighted the physical mortality of Adam and his descendants (humanity) and contrasted it with the spiritual immortality of Jesus and those who believe in him:

'The first man, Adam, became a living being, the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.' – I Cor. 15: 45-48

This reflects the gospel teaching of John who wrote:

'Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.' – John 1; 13

The contrast of Adam and Christ is clear – Adam’s sin brought sin and death, Jesus’ obedience brought truth and life:

‘Therefore just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all men...Adam was a pattern of the one who was to come....for if, by the trespass of one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness, reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.’ - Romans 5: 12-14, 17.

In a very real sense, Adam symbolically represents the failure of the old way, and Christ highlights the success of the new way:

‘Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old one has gone; the new one has come!’ – 2 Cor. 5:17



Seminar work:

What does it mean to call Jesus the ‘New Adam’?

What is the relevance of this title today?

Jesus: the New Moses

*‘Matthew presents Jesus as the ‘New Moses’ for the people of Israel.’
– Felix Just; ‘The Discourses of Jesus’ (SBL 2007).*

Moses, whose name in Egyptian means ‘child of God,’ was the great Jewish leader who received the Law from God and led the Israelites across the desert to the Promised Land. In the New Testament, and the Gospel of Matthew in particular, much is made of the similarities between the life and work of Moses and that of Jesus Christ and, symbolically, Jesus is portrayed as the new Moses who will lead God’s people to eternal life. Moses prefigured Jesus and both had similar roles as both priest and miracle worker.

The Priestly Role

Both Moses and Jesus acted symbolically as priests, instigating the sacrifice that sealed the covenant between God and humanity:

‘Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said; ‘This is the blood of the covenant that God has made with you.’ – Exodus 24:7

This foreshadows Jesus’ words at the Last Supper where he announced the coming in of the new covenant, marked by his death on the Cross:

'This is my blood of the new covenant, my blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.' – Matthew 24:28



Seminar topic:

What was the covenant?

Does it have a function today?

Allison in *'The New Moses'* (SBL 2007) observed:

'Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people and said, "See the blood of the covenant". Through blood Moses was the mediator of the old covenant. Through blood, Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant.'

Miracle Worker

Moses and Christ were also miracle workers, yet there was a difference. Moses' miracles offered physical sustenance, whereas Christ's fulfilled spiritual needs. Thus, during the Exodus in the desert, Moses brought life-giving water from a rock:

'Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.' - Exodus 17:6

In the same way, when on the Cross, Jesus' side was pierced by a spear and life-giving water comes from his side:

'One soldier pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.' – John 19: 34

In the same way, Moses prayed and God rained down physical bread from heaven to keep the people alive in the desert:

'Moses said to them, 'It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat.' – Exodus 16:16

In turn Christ miraculously fed the 5,000 and offered himself as the spiritual bread of life:

'Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never go thirsty.' - John 6: 35

However, Jesus highlights the symbolic difference between himself and Moses:

'Jesus said, 'It is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' – John 6:32



For reflection:

Did Moses perform miracles?

This prompted St Paul to observe:

'All ate the same spiritual bread and drank the same spiritual drink. They drank from the spiritual rock that went with them; and that rock was Christ himself.' - I Cor. 10:3-4

Other symbolic similarities between Moses and Christ include:

- As a baby, Moses' parent took him and fled to Israel to escape the Pharaoh's to kill all the Hebrew baby boys (Exodus 1: 22-22:10). As a baby, Jesus' parents take him and flee to Egypt to save him from King Herod's command to kill all male babies in Bethlehem (Matt 2: 13-18)
- Moses fasted for forty days before receiving the Law from God (Exodus 34:28). Christ fasted in the wilderness for forty days before starting his mission (Matthew 4:2)
- Moses was a leader who led his people through the desert. Jesus was a leader who led his people through the darkness of sin and death.
- Just as Moses went up a mountain to receive the Law, (Exodus 19:3) so Jesus taught the Sermon on the Mount from the side of a mountain. (Matthew 5;10)
- Moses commanded his followers to go out into the world and teach and obey God's commands. Jesus ordered his disciples to go out into the world and preach the good news: Allison:

'Just as the lawgiver (Moses) commissioned Joshua both to go into a land peopled by foreign nations and to observe the commandments of the Law...so Jesus told his disciples to go into the world and teach observance of all the commandments uttered by the new Moses.'

Finally, God tells Moses of the future coming of Christ as Messiah:

'I will send them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will tell him what to say, and he will tell the people everything I command.' – Deut. 18:18

Felix Just observes:

'Overall, Moses was considered the greatest teacher, prophet and lawgiver in the Hebrew Bible; so also, Jesus is portrayed as a great teacher, prophet and lawgiver, equal or even greater than Moses.'



Seminar Work:

To what extent were the lives of Moses and Jesus similar?

What is the relevance of the title 'Jesus- the New Moses' today?

Jesus as Saviour

Salvation comes from the Greek 'soteria' which means 'make safe' and the name Jesus comes from the Hebrew 'Jehoshua' which means 'God saves.' The Bible teaches that humanity lives in a state of separation from God, due to sin. This sin, left unchecked, leads to spiritual death. Humanity needs help because it cannot help itself and people are saved through the death of Jesus, which is believed to have defeated the power of evil and sin forever. God's love, which the Bible calls grace, takes the initiative and he reaches out to humanity with the chance of salvation through the death of Jesus. All who have faith and accept Jesus will be forgiven their sins.

You are from below; I am from above. I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.'

- John 8:22



For reflection;

What is sin and why does it lead to spiritual death?

In the Bible, all humanity is deemed to be sinful and has failed to live up to the standards laid down by God. Sin prevents humanity from receiving God's blessing. Humanity cannot be freed from sin without divine help. Jesus is seen as being the Saviour who died in the place of sinners; he is 'at-one' with them - that is atonement.

'God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.' - Romans 3:25.



For reflection:

Why can't humans pay the price for sin themselves?

Atonement is depicted in several different ways in the New Testament – as forgiveness for the sin of Adam (I Corinthians 15:22), the freeing of a slave (Galatians 5:1) and as escape from the judgement and condemnation of God:

**‘Through Christ Jesus the law of the spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.’ – Romans 8:1*

Why is an act of atonement needed? It is because the righteous judgement of God must be carried out and Jesus takes the punishment upon himself in order to restore the relationship between God and humanity. In the New Testament, this is seen as Christ giving his life as a ransom for sinners:

‘The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many’. - Mark 10: 45

Early scholars Origen and Gregory the Great said that Christ was paying a ransom to the Devil, whom, they claimed, had control over sinful humanity. They argued that the Devil exceeded his authority when he claimed Christ because he was sinless. In this way the Devil trapped himself. Gregory the Great noted:

‘Our Lord, therefore, when coming for the redemption of humanity, made a kind of hook of himself for the death of the Devil.’

This was salvation in a physical sense and in the Middle Ages this became the tradition known as ‘*Christus Victor*’ (Christ the Victor). After dying on the Cross, Christ went to Hell, broke down its gates and set sinful humanity free.

However, Aquinas and Anselm saw atonement not as a physical act as in ‘*Christus Victor*’, but as a spiritual act – where the action of Christ reflected the love and forgiveness of God and modern scholars such as Karl Barth have tended towards the view that atonement is about God’s love for undeserving humanity. In ‘*Church Dogmatics*’ (Clark 2009) Barth spoke of Christ as having:

‘...represented me before the judgement of God and has taken away all condemnation from me.’

For Barth, God made his judgement against sinful humanity manifest through the sacrificial death of Christ who, for his part, willingly took this judgement on himself so that humanity could be saved. He wrote:

‘Why did God become a human being? So that God as a human being might do and accomplish and achieve and complete all this for us wrongdoers, in order that in this way, there might be brought about by him our reconciliation with him and our conversion to him.’

Gustaf Aulen in his book ‘*Christus Victor*’ (SPCK 2010) saw salvation and atonement in a slightly different way. He argued that Christ fought and defeated the powers of evil and freed humanity from the bondage of sin. Then

Christ was able to reconcile God and humanity by atoning for the sins of humanity. The crucial thing about this view was that Aulen emphasised spiritual, rather than physical bondage, saying that people were *spiritual imprisoned by hidden forces* which lay in their subconscious minds. This view became very popular with people who had seen the suffering caused by humans on each other in the First World War. McGrath noted:

'Aulen's approach seemed to resonate with a growing awareness of the darker side of human nature.'

The New Testament offers slightly differing views of Jesus as Saviour. For instance, in Luke's Gospel the notion of being the Saviour is applied to Jesus right from his birth, for at his birth, the angels declare:

'Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.' – Luke 2:11

In the Fourth Gospel, the nature of Jesus as Saviour is linked to the faith of those who believe:

'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.' – John 3: 16-17

'I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.' – John 14:6



For reflection;

Is Jesus the only way to God?

Meanwhile, St Paul explained how humanity is saved through the sacrificial death of Jesus:

- *'For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.'* – Romans 3:25
- *'While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'* – Romans 5:8
- *'Now that you have been set free from sin...the benefit you reap leads to holiness and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.'* – Romans 6:22-23
- *'Taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being formed in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross.'* – Phil. 2:6-8

- *'Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.'* - Romans 8:1

Salvation, therefore, comes from the life, death and resurrection of Christ. The New Testament message is sometimes called *christomorphic* in that it states that Christ not only makes life possible, but also can also redeem humanity.



For reflection:

What does it mean to say that Jesus can 'redeem humanity'?

But what does it really mean to say Jesus is the Saviour and how does Jesus' death bring salvation? These are questions that scholars throughout the ages have struggled to answer.

Martin Luther claimed that Jesus symbolically united himself with humanity through his incarnate life and atoning death. Christ identified himself completely with humanity and took the guilt of human sin on the Cross with him. Luther argued that Christ died to pay the legal penalty for the sins of humanity, and, as a result, humanity is forgiven. In his *'Commentary on Galatians'* (Fortress 2011) he said:

'If the sins of the whole world are upon that one man, Jesus Christ, then they are not upon the world...Further, if Christ himself was made guilty of all the sins which we all have committed, then we are absolved from all sins, yet not through ourselves, our own works or merits, but through him.'

Luther said Jesus was the Saviour. He died so that sin could be removed and the relationship between God and his people was restored:

'...truly suffered, been crucified, dead and buried, that he might reconcile the Father to us and might be a victim not only for original guilt but also for all the actual sins of men.'



For reflection:

Is Luther right?

In contrast, John Calvin argued that the sin of Adam had plunged all of humanity into a state of depravity. Sin was not simply the name given to human actions, but was the direction and inclination of human nature – people were sinners because that was the consequence of their 'fallen' condition – they sin because they are sinners. Freedom from sin came through Jesus Christ. To do this, God became human because humans lacked the ability to save themselves. In *'Institutes'* (Hendrickson 2007) he wrote:

'...the situation would surely have been hopeless had the very majesty of God not descended to us, since it was not in our power to ascend to him...it was his task to swallow up death...it was his task to conquer sin...our most merciful God, when he willed that we be redeemed, made himself our Redeemer in the person of his only-begotten Son.'



Seminar work:

What are the main similarities between the views of Luther and Calvin?

Do these views have any significance today?

Bonhoeffer in *'The Cost of Discipleship'* (SCM 2001) described Christ as;

'God revealed in the flesh; the God-man Jesus Christ, is the holy mystery which theology is appointed to guard...it is the task of theology solely to preserve God's wonder as wonder, to understand, to defend, to glorify God's mystery as mystery.'

According to Bonhoeffer, Jesus Christ was the Saviour and is the path to salvation – Christ is true God and true human being at the same time. As a human, Jesus can reach humanity and as God, he can save them:

'The finite can hold the infinite, not by itself, but by the aid of the infinite!'

This finds support in the New Testament:

'Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.' - Hebrews 9:15.

McGrath in *'Christian Theology'* observed:

'...humans lack what is required in order to be saved; they do not want to be saved, and they are incapable of saving themselves. True knowledge of God and salvation must both therefore come from outside the human situation...the mediatorship of Jesus Christ.'



Seminar work:

Why can't God just forgive everyone without the need for Christ's death?

Do we need a saviour? Is all this teaching about sin, salvation and sacrifice really relevant today?

Jesus as Logos

In the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel, the author introduces the concept of Jesus Christ as God incarnate - that is, God came into the world as a human being, Jesus Christ. The term that the author uses for this is the *Logos* which means 'Word' or 'wisdom'. Jesus is the Logos.



For reflection:

In what sense is the Logos the '*means of the world's creation*'?

In '*John – The Maverick Gospel*' (Westminster 2007) Kysar noted that Christ, as the Logos, is an extension of God's own personality. The Logos was both God himself and in another sense, a person (Jesus) who was distinct from God:

'Christ is so important that he could not simply have come into being like any other person or object...Christ is no created being. He is before creation.'

Kysar suggests that the Logos is a Jewish notion, notably the idea of God's creative breath (*ruah*) – his speech, wisdom and purpose from which creation comes – for in Hebrew thought, when God speaks things happen:

'Then God said "Let there be light"; and there was light' - Genesis 1:3

'The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.' - Genesis 2:7

C H Dodd in '*The Fourth Gospel*' (CUP 2001), claimed that the Jews identified the Word of God with the Torah. The Word was, in a sense, God's wisdom, embodied in the Law – the Word gave meaning to life:

'By the word of the Lord were the heavens made.' - Psalm 33:6

Tasker in '*John*' (IVP 1983) said that the Logos was;

'...dwelling with the Creator before creation began and acting as the divine agent in creation...it is His life which is imparted to all living creatures.'

For Tasker, Christ, as the Logos is the eternal purpose of God. In Jesus, the whole purpose of God and creation has meaning. He is the source of life and the light for humanity, which the darkness of the world could never put out.



For reflection:

In what sense is the Logos the source of life itself?

The Logos is also the source of human intellect and spiritual awareness. It is *'the light'* which enabled people to contemplate the world and to look inwardly at themselves. The Prologue speaks of the Logos as the light of God that will never go out. This light has become flesh in Jesus to reveal the truth of God to humanity. God's chosen people, the Jews, had rejected this light but it shines on;

'The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.' – 1:5

Writing task:

- (i) Examine the different views of Jesus Christ in modern Christology
- (ii) 'The Quest for Historical Jesus is of no importance.' – Evaluate this statement



Seminar work:

What does it mean to refer to Jesus as the Logos?

What relevance has this got in today's world?