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CTH 222

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES

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Module 1 DOCTRINE OF GOD AND HUMANITY

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UNIT 1 NAMES AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The course CTH222 Christian Doctrines introduces you to major doctrines of the Christian faith. The course does not treat specific doctrines of any denominational church group or sect. Rather, it presents a broad overview of all the major doctrines that the Christian church has developed over the years through ecumenical council decisions. It is a summary of Christian teachings compiled through a deep reflection of competent church bodies and theologians. The course is for beginners. It is a basic introduction to the study of doctrines that a student will later study as full courses. For example: the doctrine of the church, commonly referred to by theologians as Ecclesiology is an independent course in its own right. Similarly, a student of theology will get to study the doctrine of salvation (Soteriology) as an independent course. But as you may have noticed already, Soteriology is just a module in this course material. In this Unit, you will learn about the meaning of doctrine with the view to further defining the doctrine of God.

Names and Attributes of God that make God distinctive from other beings are also discussed in this Unit.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of a careful study of this Unit, you should be able to:

- Define doctrines,
- State the necessity of doctrines,
- List and discuss names and attributes of God.

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 What is doctrine?

The word “doctrine” is used more often than not in contemporary theological discourse to replace “dogma”. In Greek, the word “dogma” is a derivation of *dokein* meaning “it seems”. Louis Berkhof (1996) argues that *dokein moi* means “I am certain”, or “it is my conviction”. Dogma in its theological usage is therefore defined as a body of statements accepted by the Christian church. Dogma is no longer frequently used in the academic study of theology. Doctrine is the word that is used to describe a body of acceptable teachings of the Bible. From the Roman Catholic perspective, doctrines are, apart from Scripture, derived from Papal declarations and Church Traditions. From the evangelical perspective, however, doctrines are strictly summary of biblical teachings. For all Christian religious groups, at least mainline Christianity, doctrines are true set of biblical beliefs which define the borders of true Christian faith. By them, a Christian group is able to distinguish between a true faith and a false faith. Therefore, there is true doctrine and false doctrine. Some people may ask: why Christian doctrines when there is the Bible and church traditions handy to guide Christians in their daily lives? In the next section, you will learn about the necessity for Christian doctrines.

3.2 The Need for Christian Doctrines

The necessity of Christian doctrines is evident from the definition of doctrine itself. Doctrines set parameters of every belief system, be it philosophical, sociological, psychological or religiously. It is the set of doctrines that state what it is that is to be known and believed. Furthermore, it is through doctrines that a distinction can be made between what is true of a belief system and what is false about the same belief system.

3.3 Defining the Doctrine of God

The definition of the doctrine of God can be deduced from the definition of Christian doctrines above. If Christian doctrines are acceptable biblical teachings that set the perimeters of the Christian Faith, the doctrine of God is true biblical teachings about God. The doctrine of God defines in clear terms who God is, who He is not, how to know Him and what He does. The doctrine of God sets the Christian God apart from other gods by describing him as a person who communicates with his believers in human language. The Christian God has names by which his believers call Him. The names of God also describe God's wondrous acts in history. John Frame (2002) argues that *Yahweh* is the covenant name of God describing his Lordship over all of creation. In the section that follows, some names of God will be discussed further.

3.4 Names and Attributes of God

God identifies himself by specific names. When he appeared to Abram he identified himself by a specific name. God said to Abram, *I am the God Almighty* (Gen. 17:1). It is the same name of *I am* that God identified himself when he appeared to Moses in Exodus 3:6. God said to Moses *I am God of your father Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob* (cf. Ex. 3:14). The American theologian, Frame rightly argues from God's command in Exodus 3:15 that *I am* is *Lord*. In that verse God commanded all the people of Israel, and all generations to come, to know him by the name Lord. By this name, God sets Himself aside as the only Lord, and all must love and adore Him only, the true God. The Hebrew words *Yahweh* and *Adonai*, are also translated as Lord. There are other names for God that were used in the Old Testament dispensation that were common to names of pagan deities. The name *El* and *Elohim*, the names of God rendered in English simply as God, are not in their usage restricted to the God of the Bible. *Elohim* means the 'most-high God' or 'the exalted One'. In Exodus 6:2, another name for God is listed. The name is *El-Shaddai*, which has been translated by many as 'God of blessings'. Berkhof (1996) argues that *El-Shaddai* is a contrast to the *Elohim*, in that it sets God apart as a merciful and caring God. There is also New Testament rendering of Old Testament names for God. For example; the name *Lord* is *Kurios* in the Greek New Testament. God wants His people to know Him through His names –the names with which he reveals himself. In most cases in the Bible, names of God reveal something about his attributes, his nature, and his works. A discussion of the names of God must also involve a discussion of his attributes.

Attributes of God

You learned in the previous section about the names of God. You learned that God is called and known by specific names. The names of God communicate something about the nature of God as a divine being in human language. In this section, the description of God goes beyond name-calling to the study of the inherent nature of God. For easy understanding of these attributes of God, it is important to define from the onset, the attributes of God.

Attributes of God are inherent qualities that God has, which cannot be lost or gained. They are permanent and form part of the nature of God. They describe God *as He is in Himself* and not as perceived or described by human beings. Without these attributes, God cannot be God, distinctive from other beings. In other words, the attributes of God define the nature and power of God. They reveal something about the personality of God. God is known more clearly by these attributes. In what follows, you will learn more about each of the attributes of God. For the purpose of this Unit, the following attributes of God are listed: *Authority/Power, Immortality, Holiness, Love, Goodness, Eternity, and Omnipresence/Ubiquity*. Note that some of these attributes are listed under different names. However, whatever name used in the discussion of the attributes, the actual description of the nature of God remains the same. In what follows, you will study the specific attributes of God.

Authority

One of the attributes of God is *Authority*. *Yahweh*, the covenant Lord has authority over his subject with whom he enters into a personal relationship. Because the Lord is the creator of all that is, he has authority over all creatures. For this reason, he is also *sovereign*. Sovereignty defines God's greatness. Some theologians speak of God's sovereignty (as a divine attribute) by describing God as being all powerful (omnipotence). He does not need any creature to compliment his powers to do anything. Rather, it is the creatures that need God's enabling power to do what they do. Thus, he is set apart from creatures by his sovereign ability to act in history. He is not limited by time, space or power. Therefore, there is another attribute of God called *Omnipresence*. He is present anytime and everywhere at the same time.

That is the traditional way of looking at the sovereignty of God. But there are modern critics of this view of God's sovereignty, especially when it

concerns human free will. To what extent does God's sovereignty contradict or permit human free will? Richard Rice (1989) and Clark Pinnock (1989) argue that God knows the future to the extent that human decisions allow Him to know, but He is open to future decisions of human beings. Because decisions that are yet to occur are not knowable. Until such decisions occur, they are potentials to be realized at a later stage. Therefore God is open to future knowledge of these decisions and could not have known and predetermined them before they occur. The reason that Rice and Pinnock came to this conclusion is to avoid God being responsible for human actions. You will see how divine sovereignty in this sense affects responsibility of human beings in the problem of evil. If God determines everything that comes to pass to such an extent that He has foreknowledge of what will come to pass, He is obliged to stop sin and therefore evil in the bud. That He often fails to do so would be either as a result of weakness on God's own part or deprivation of God's goodness and love. To leave rational human beings free to make their independent decisions, they are wholly responsible for their actions. Again the relationship between God's sovereignty, goodness and human responsibility raises the problem of evil that you will learn about later in this Module.

God is also *eternal*. There is no identifiable time when God *began* to exist and when he was *absent* in history. Neither is there a time when God will cease to exist (Ps. 102:24-27). In order to live eternally, and to act according to his will, God does not need any external assistance or compulsion to do or not to do so. He is totally sovereign. Many theologians discuss attributes of God in different ways. However, the above attributes summarize all other minute enumeration of God's attributes for the purpose of their easy understanding and comprehension by anyone who cares to know about the Christian God.

Goodness and Love

Most of the discussions about the dealings of God with created universe and all that is in it is center on the goodness and love of God. 'God is love' is the most common inscription written on the altar of most churches the world over. It is out of God's Love for the world that His Son came into the world, so that out of God's kindness (goodness), not willing that any should perish, anyone who believes the Son shall have eternal life (John 3:16). Later in this Course you will learn about divine election (predestination) of some to salvation, a view maintained by conservative reformed churches following the Calvinistic tradition. You will notice that the goodness and love of God is given as the reasons for election. The love of God surpasses that of all other creatures. He is willing to forgive sinners where human

beings are unwilling to forgive their own for the wrong they have done. God is so good to the extent that all His decisions are for the benefit (providence) of the created beings. You will soon learn in this Module how the goodness of God is called into question as a result of evil. At this point, it suffices for you to know that goodness and love are some of the attributes of God.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The course CTH 222 Christian Doctrines is aimed at giving you a broad overview of all the major doctrines of the Christian church. The course therefore cannot be studied as catechism of any specific Christian group or denomination or sect. The Doctrine of God and Humanity offers you beginner's knowledge of who God is in relation to His creatures and vice versa. The names and attributes of God convey in a unique way, the nature of God as Lord. A study of names and attributes of God is imperative for ones understanding of the relationship between God and his creatures. Your knowledge of the contents of this Course is requisite for study of third and final year course such as: Pneumatology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology and Apologetics.

5.0 SUMMARY

You have learnt in this Unit some of the qualities of God. God is known by these qualities called attributes. Some of the biblical names for God were also mentioned and discussed. In the following Units and Modules, you will be referring to these attributes back and forth. Take some time again and reflect on the names and attributes of God before commencing the study of the next Unit. This will help you to understand further discussions that are based on one or more attributes of God.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

- 1 What are Christian doctrines?
- 2 Identify at least 4 names of God
- 3 Discuss attributes of God that you know
- 4 In your own words, relate some of the attributes

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 2 TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMINENCE OF GOD

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main content
 - 3.1 Transcendence of God
 - 3.2 Imminence of God
 - 3.3 Relationship between Transcendence and Imminence of God
 - 3.4 Implication of Transcendence and Imminence of God to the Knowledge of God
- 4.0 Summary
- 5.0 Conclusion
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Suggested Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

You will study in this Unit the remoteness and nearness of God to his own creatures. Also, the Unit will discuss relationship between the two doctrines. How near is God to the world? If God is *above* and *beyond* what he has created, how much, if at all, is he involved with the world and its events? How can a transcendent God be known by his creatures operating from *below* (on earth)? This Unit will discuss these questions. However, you should note from the on-set that there are no simple and easy answers/solutions to the problems posed in the questions above. But there are still answers to them provided in the Bible.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

Define the transcendence and imminence of God

Show the relationship between God's transcendence and imminence

Explain the implication of God's transcendence and imminence to the knowledge of God

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Meaning of Transcendence

Transcendence is a metaphysical concept. In the study of *beings*, something is said to be transcendent if it is above other things in terms of space and

time. A transcendent being is above other things related to that being. Therefore, it is often thought in philosophical circles that a transcendent being is removed from other beings. Normally, such transcendent beings are remote to the other beings in such a way that a transcendent being cannot be known *as it is in itself*. Hence, the great German philosopher, Immanuel Kant refers to God, as transcendent being that cannot be known by human beings. To him, God belongs to a transcendent world that he refers to as *noumena*. For Kant, human beings belong to the *phenomena* world below the nominal. Since human beings can only know fully things as they appear to them because they operate in the phenomenal world, they cannot know God as He is in Himself. This is because God is nominal. He transcends human knowledge. In the doctrine of God therefore, a number of people are skeptical about the transcendence of God because a strong affirmation of the remoteness of God shall call into question His nearness to the world. God is said to have created and is governing. In what follows, you shall learn about the nearness of God, *Imminence*.

3.2 The meaning of Immanence

Immanence of God means that God is above, but is involved in the day to day events of the world. In fact, it means that God controls everything in the world. He directs the course of the earth in such a way that no event takes place on earth without His knowledge and permission. The immanence of God further affirms God's control of human thoughts and science. God's imminence includes His communication with human beings in human language e.g. His appearances to people in the Bible, the epiphany in Exodus. It also includes God's blessings and curses to people for good or bad behavior (sin) on earth. He also communicates to his believers during worship and in their private lives. The Bible also states succinctly that God reveals (explains Himself) Himself to people in nature. The Psalmist proclaims that the heavens reveal the glory of God. God communicates with the world including human beings in human language and in nature. In the sense discussed above, God is deeply and constantly involved in the world. Therefore, he is immanently the God of the earth.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Discuss the meaning of transcendence and imminence of God

3.3 The relationship between Transcendence and Immanence

If God transcends all that is created by Him, how come He is also involved with everything that He has created? Can God be above and below at the same time in the same sense? These questions raise the problem of the relationship between God's remoteness and nearness to the world He brought into being. Frame (1987) decries some of the ways some scholars attempted to solve the apparent contradiction between God's transcendence and imminence. To some, God transcends the world in such a way that He is "wholly other", completely removed from all of creation. Such a God does not communicate in any way with beings on earth. In this way, God is fully transcendent. Frame also argues that to those who would want to protect God's imminence, God is wholly involved in the world to such an extent that He is subsumed by the earth. In this way, God is not in any way different from the earth. Both views pose more problems than they purport to solve. A wholly remote God is not in control of what He has created. Similarly, a god completely subsumed by the earth loses divine sovereignty. A transcendent God has the ability to oversee, control and authoritatively direct the course of what is. This is possible only if such a God is relating to what is in a personal way. Such a personal involvement includes responding providentially to the needs of the universe. A completely remote father will not be able to know the needs of his children. Thus, such a father is not in a position to provide for the needs of his children. In the same way, a wholly other God is not in a position to know the needs of the earth in order to sustain it. Therefore, the relationship between divine attributes of transcendence and immanence is *perspectival* as Frame (2002) sees it. They are perspectives of God's involvement with His created universe. And the two perspectives of divine attributes make God a personal God that should be worshipped.

3.0 Implications of Transcendence and Immanence on the Knowledge of God

Those who insist that God is wholly other like agnostics contend that God cannot be known. Immanuel Kant, being a rationalist, fails to see God's immanence and declares God unknowable. God is noumena. To be fair to Kant, he also contends that in order for us to live ethically, we have to 'live as though God exists'. But this contention does not show any sense of the knowledge of God. Kant's agnosticism is a good example of some of the implications an extreme view of divine transcendence has on the knowledge of God. When God is seen as transcending the realm of human understanding it is difficult to affirm His knowability. How possible it is to

know what is perceived to be by nature unknowable? Similarly, an extreme view of immanence pervades the knowledge of God. If God is subsumed by the universe, there is no way He could be distinguished from the created beings. Thus, He cannot be personally known. His knowledge can only be implied in the knowledge of the universe that contains Him. In order to know God as Lord, there must be a creator-creature distinction. The Object of knowledge (transcendent God) and the subject of knowledge (human beings) cannot be one and the same. However, since God is in a relationship, a covenant relationship with His creatures, He is involved with them eternally. In this way, God's covenantal presence affords created beings to know Him personally. Hence, immanence enhanced the knowledge of God.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Clearly state the relationship, if any, between transcendence and the knowledge of God from the perspective of human beings

4.0 CONCLUSION

You learned in this Unit that God as the creator of the universe is not wholly other to such an extent that He is not involved with the earth. At the same time, you learned that God is not subsumed by the universe. He is distinctly a covenant Lord that the universe submits to His control and governance. Through governance, God is directly involved in events that take place in the universe. God is knowable because of His transcendence above the universe but also due to His involvement in the act of governance of the universe created by Him.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit provides the following lessons:

- God transcends all that is created in such a way that He directs the course of the universe.
- He is involved with the universe in such a way that the universe feels His presence and control.
- God's transcendence and immanence both have implications on the knowledge of Him as a covenant Lord.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Describe in your own words, God's transcendence
2. What, if any, is the relationship between God's transcendence and immanence?
3. State the implications of divine transcendence and immanence on the knowledge of God.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 3 THEODICY: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
 - 3.1 Statement of the Problem of Evil
 - 3.2 Theodicy
 - 3.3 Traditional responses to the Problem of Evil
 - 3.4 Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References/Suggestions for Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to the problem of evil as it pertains to divine attributes mentioned above. The concept of the problem of evil is stated in a simple way for your easy understanding. The Unit further describes what is generally referred to as theodicy: the justification of God's love and goodness while human suffering persists. Why should believers in a powerful God be allowed/or let alone to suffer while this powerful God sits and look? Is this God justified by doing this? A sample of attempts made by Christian and non-Christian scholars to justify God in the presence of evil are discussed in this Unit.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to ensure that through a careful study of its contents, you should at the end be able to:

- Clearly state the problem of evil
- Evaluate the justifications of God amidst human suffering
- Respond to the problem of evil

3.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

In Unit 2, you learnt about attributes of God. Sovereignty, control, goodness and love are some of the attributes. The attributes are the reason Christian theism affirms the existence of the God of the Bible. In this section, you learn about the issues that the presence of evil raises for Christian theism to resolve concerning the existence of the all good all powerful and all loving God of the Bible. To put it in another way, if such a God exists, why is there evil? Hence, the problem of evil, from a philosophical point of view, is called the “logical problem of evil” (Frame, 2002 p., 160). It is called a logical problem because of the inconsistency with which Christian theism insists that God exists but still admits evil is real.

Frame (1994), states the logical problem of evil as follows:

Premise 1: If God were all-powerful, he would prevent evil.

Premise 2: If God were all-good, he would desire to prevent evil.

Conclusion: So, if God were both all-powerful and all-good, there would be no evil.

Premise 3: But there is evil.

Conclusion: Therefore, there is no all-powerful, all-good God (p., 150).

The philosophical way of reasoning looks at the problem of evil from the logical point of view as demonstrated in the syllogism above. The theological point of view discusses the problem of evil from the point of the pains that believers endure while serving an all powerful all benevolent God. This point of view attempts to establish a justification of God in the presence of evil. You will learn more about this in the next section where theodicy is discussed.

3.1 Theodicy

Theodicy has to do with the justification of God in the midst of human suffering. At the heart of theodicy is the problem of evil. It is a problem because of the issues that the prevalence of evil raises for anyone that wants to account for divine attributes of sovereignty, control, love and goodness of God. In Christian theological circles, as Louw (2000) puts it, “the problem is whether or not one can hold simultaneously that God is omnipotent, omni-benevolent and evil is real, without contradiction” (p. 25). You saw in the previous Unit that a transcendent God has control over all that is created in the heavenly above and below. That this transcendent God is so good that he provides for the needs of, cares for and protects all that is created by him. Theodicy calls into question, this affirmation in the light of the prevalence of evil and suffering. The most perplexed aspect of

evil and suffering is that true believers and worshipers of the all powerful and all good God also go through untold suffering and are more often than not victims of evil (cf. Job 1-4). The following sections offer a sample of responses to the problem of evil.

Theodicy is a logical problem. Louw (2000) contends that theodicy “is primarily, a logical problem of how to ingest apparently contradictory propositions simultaneously without contradiction” (p., 25). That is to say, why is God not preventing evil when He says He is a good and caring God that protects? God could be excused if He wills to prevent evil but He is not able to do it. But God is an all powerful God that controls everything including evil. So why is He not doing away with evil? This is the crux of the contradictory matter: God is all good and powerful but allows created beings to suffer and endure evil and yet He is not responsible for evil as its author. And if God is not, who is the author of evil? There are various responses to the problem. For your convenience, the responses will be grouped into two: traditional and biblical responses.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Discuss theodicy in Christian theology.

3.3 Traditional Responses to the Problem of Evil

There are a number of responses to the problem of evil. Traditional responses here refer to non-biblical responses. One of such responses is the denial that evil exist. This is treated as unreality of evil defense.

Unreality of Evil Defense

There are non-Christian views that maintain that evil is actually not real. Buddhism and Christian Science are not willing to admit that evil exist. To these world views, evil is at best an illusion (Frame, 1994 p.155). Augustine did not argue that evil was an illusion but that it is a lack of good. In this way, evil is to be viewed as a privation of good (Frame, 1994 p. 156). You will note that if indeed evil was an illusion the logical problem of evil too would have been an illusion. This is because the nature of the problem of evil presupposes the existence of evil. For the problem of evil has to do with the presence of pain and suffering while there is a good and powerful God. Also, it is difficult to find a person living on this earth who has never had a cause to ask: why is this thing happening to me? Or simply: why me? There are painful things too happening around the world that show the existence of evil.

Free Will Defense

The idea of free will here has to do with the ability of rational human beings to take decisions and therefore full responsibility on events around them. What this means is that God cannot be held accountable for events that occur out of free decisions of rational creatures. The term “free” here refers to non-determinism or external control. God can be responsible only for events caused by Him. But since events like evil occur due to human rational free will, it is illogical to blame God on account of evil arising from human free actions. In this way, the proponents of this view think they have apparently solved the problem of evil. God is willing and able to eliminate evil but free rational human beings make evil decisions or decisions that result to evil.

The Best Possible World Defense

There are scholars who think that the problem of evil can be resolved by looking at the presence of evil as unavoidable. They see the present world as the best God could do. There is no other perfect world – the one without evil – God could have created. Once it is accepted, they argue, that a world without evil is not feasible, the goodness of God in the presence of evil will no longer be questioned. In a way, this is an admission of the weakness of God. If God could not fathom a possible world without evil when He is all powerful and too good to want to exist alongside evil, we can as well accept God’s inability to do certain things and in this case, the inability to create a world without evil. It is a matter of inability on the part of God.

Divine Weakness Defense

Some scholars are bold enough to admit that God does not possess the ability to undo evil. It is not that He wants to live and operate a universe alongside evil. But God cannot eliminate evil. This is the reason why human beings will have to experience sufferings and pains. To this view, God is not omnipotent though He is good. The presence of evil does not arise from deprivation of God’s holiness, but from God’s inability to prevent evil. In this way, the view hopes to successfully solve the logical problem of evil. There are other ways too, that scholars of religion and philosophy adopted over the years in attempt to resolve the issues around the prevalence of evil. However, those other views will be discussed in more details in CTH 422 Christian Apologetics. It is also important that you learn something about biblical responses to the problem of evil.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

What are the traditional ways scholars have attempted to solve the problem of evil?

God is His own Standard

One of the lessons that Christian apologists have learned is that God is the standard for His own actions. This is to affirm God's own sovereignty. If God is absolutely sovereign, it is legitimate to contend that He does not owe human beings any explanation for His own actions. Frame (1994) points to a number of God's actions that human beings have not understood – and there is no indication they ever will – like the events in Genesis 3. Why did God fail to prevent these from occurring? A number of Christian theologians are willing to admit that for the purpose of faith and salvation, God has given us enough information in the Bible. But the Bible never makes any claim that God intended to explain to us the reason for every action of His.

The Greater Good Defense

Paul in Romans 8:16-26 opens and closes a discourse on the problem of evil. In this passage, Paul attempts to explain that evil exists as a matter of time. At this particular time, we are exposed to all kinds of sufferings and pains waiting to be glorified. Above all, evil exists as a means of achieving a greater good for the person(s) experiencing the pains and sufferings. The greater good is so great that it cannot be compared to the evil that is being experienced at this particular time. In a word, evil is a means to a greater good, according to Paul.

The Bible Plants a New Heart

One of the ways that Frame (1994) considers paramount for resolving the problem of evil is the power of Scripture to transform the heart of believers. This "conversion" of heart enables Christians to look at the problem of evil in a new perspective. Instead of asking, why me, God? the believer is thankful to God for His providence, care and protection to a point that he or she is willing to say it could have been worse without God's intervention. Like the traditional responses to the problem of evil, there are more biblical responses to problem of evil other than the ones mentioned above. Since the

purpose of this Unit is to only introduce you to theodicy and the problem of evil, the few responses given here should give you some insights into what the issues surrounding the problem of evil are. CTH 422 Christian Apologetics treats the problem of evil in much more details.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Discuss some of the biblical responses to the problem of evil

4.0 CONCLUSION

Theodicy is an attempt to understand and justify God's love and holiness in the midst of human suffering. The problem of evil arises as a result of the apparent inconsistency in two attributes of God, namely; omnipotence and goodness. There are attempts to resolve the problem of evil. Some of these responses to the problem are discussed above.

5.0 SUMMARY

This Unit introduced you to theodicy, the justification of God in the presence of evil occurrences. You also learnt about the problem of evil. Some of the responses to the problem of evil are that God is weak and therefore could not have prevented evil. There are other scholars who think that evil itself is an illusion. It does not exist. Those who prefer to offer biblical solutions assert that God does not owe us any explanation for His own actions. He is a standard for His own actions. This Unit therefore has prepared you enough for further study of the problem of evil in CTH 422 (Christian Apologetics).

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Formulate in your own words, the problem of evil
2. Respond to the problem of evil
3. How is God justified when good people experience pain?
4. Discuss traditional responses to the problem of evil
5. How does the Bible help you to address the problem of evil?
6. What do you think is the relationship between God's power and the prevalence of evil?

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UNIT 4 THE GOD-HEAD (TRINITY)

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
 - 3.1 Constructions of the doctrine of Trinity
 - 3.2 The Nature of the Persons in the God-head
 - 3.2.1 God the Father
 - 3.2.2 Jesus Christ
 - 3.2.3 Holy Spirit
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References/Suggestions for Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

You learnt in Unit 1 of the names and attributes of God. These names and attributes speak about the nature of God. They attempt to answer the question: who is God? Most Christians would answer in the basic and simplistic way by saying God is love or God is good. Some would say God is spirit and others prefer to say God is truth. God is all of these. But what is the inherent nature of God as a being? This question goes beyond the basics and demands a more thoughtful answer than the ones given above. Ontology, the study of beings in religion is never discussed on the surface so as to find simplistic answers to complex questions about beings. The concept of “being” itself is complex to explain. Questions like when does being become non-being? Or when does non-being become being? Can being undergo changes? These are complex questions about beings and a shallow and simplistic answer will never satisfy thinkers that border to raise such questions. Take for example, the thoughts of Process philosophers on change. For Process philosophers, everything is in the process of *becoming*. Process theologians maintain the same view of “beings” regarding “change”. In order to emphasize the primacy of change, Process philosophers and theologians insist that every being is in a process of actualizing its actual “form” before which it is still a potential “form”. God too is according to this view in the process of becoming an actual God. For now, God is a potential being in the present form. Hence, in their own

opinion, God do change. This then affects the nature of God. Each time God changes, His nature changes. This also affects the knowledge of God by creatures. Before you capture God, He has changed His views, nature, mind, among other things to the extent that the God you knew half an hour ago is different from the one you are attempting to know.

You can see how questions about the nature of God are very complicated. Trinity is an attempt to construct the God-head. It states that there is One God but One God in Three Persons. These Three Persons are equal in *essence* and *substance*. God is not God without any of the Persons. The Three Persons make One God. Therefore, it is important that you study as one of the cardinal doctrines of Christianity, the doctrine of trinity.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Why do you think the study of the doctrine of Trinity is essential?

2.0 OBJECTIVES

You will be able at the end of this unit to:

- Construct the doctrine of Trinity
- Identify the Persons in the God-head
- State the unity of the God-head
- State the major elements of the doctrine

3.0 Main Contents

3.1 Constructions of the doctrine

Christianity, according to Erickson (1984), has distinguished itself among world religions by making the bold claim that God is three persons and yet one. No one has ever been able to pin point a particular section of Scripture, where the doctrine of Trinity is explicitly stated. What is thought about Trinity throughout Christian history is through exegetical study of collected passages of Scripture. Different interpretations of such passages have given rise to multiple and divergent constructions of the doctrine of Trinity. In this section, you will learn of such constructions. You will be able to do your own construction of the doctrine after a careful study of this section and Unit.

The Economic View of Trinity

This construction of Trinity is based on the external manifestation of the Three Persons in the God-head in the universe and in redemption. Both Berkhof (1995) and Erickson (1984 repr.1985) identify Tertullian as the originator of the economic view of Trinity in the patristic era. Tertullian was of the view that creation and redemption manifest the Holy Spirit (in the act of creation) and the Son (in the works of redemption) to be distinct from the Father, though indivisible from the Father. In this sense, Tertullian saw the Triad of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three distinct manifestations of the only One God. Hence, Erickson, in his analysis of Tertullian's view of Trinity, asserts that Tertullian concentrated only on the "external" and not the "internal" nature of God. The "external" manifestation of God in creation and in redemption is the basis for construction of the economic Trinity. The implication of the view is that God is essentially one person but the works of creation by God and redemption work as accomplished by the Son sent by the Father make God numerically three persons. But in essence, God is One Person. Towards the end of the second and third centuries, another construction of the doctrine emerged. This is called *dynamic Monarchianism*.

Dynamic Monarchianism

This construction emerged as a result of desperate attempt to protect the sovereignty of God. Thus, the view is essentially concerned with the relationship between Christ and God. The term "Monarchianism" is literally rendered as "sole sovereignty" (cf. Erickson 1985, p.333). The view maintains that only God is sovereign. In His sovereign works, "the man Jesus" was fully inspired. The Spirit (Christ) descended on the man Jesus at baptism and he became divine after baptism. A Byzantine merchant by name Theodotus is the originator of this construction of Trinity. Paul of Samosata later gave an expanded construction of the view. Samosata was of the view that the word "*Logos*" was not in any way "a personal and self-subsistent entity; that is Jesus Christ was not the Word" (Erickson 1985, p. 334). It was God who ordered and accomplished His plans through the Word (logos). This view was condemned by an ecumenical council at Antioch in 268 (cf. Erickson 1985, p.334).

The Orthodox Construction

The Orthodox formulation of the doctrine of Trinity is traceable to the ecumenical council that met in Constantinople in 381 AD. This Council was prompted by the teaching of a presbyter in the city of Alexandria in Egypt, by name Arius. Another heresy – a false teaching unacceptable to the church – Monarchianism discussed above was another construction that led to the orthodox formulation of the statement on Trinity. The Greek expressions *ousia* and *hypostases* were used to describe the nature of the God-head. What this expression means is that the One God exists simultaneously in three persons as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each of the persons in the Godhead is “conterminous with the being of the God head” (Frame, 1995 p. 67). One of the Cappadocian fathers, Basil (the others are Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa) describes the nature and properties of the persons in the God head as follows:

For all that are the Father’s are beheld in the Son, and all things that are the Son’s are the Father’s; because the whole Son is in the Father and has all the Father in himself. Thus the hypostasis of the Son becomes as it were form and face of the knowledge of the Father, and the hypostasis of the Father is known in the form of the Son, while the proper quality which is contemplated therein remains for the plain distinction of the hypostases (*Letters*, 38.8 in: Erickson, 1985 p. 336).

The Cappadocian divines attempted to remove any form of subordination in the construction of the doctrine of Trinity. They also made frantic attempt to address the issue of distinctive properties akin to each of the persons in the God head while still maintaining that the three persons are the being that is called God. The doctrinal formulation of Trinity does not accommodate the view that the addition of the three persons in the God head equals one God. The fathers were not willing to accommodate a formulation that any of the persons in the God head is less divine. The deity of the three persons is clearly affirmed in the Orthodox formulation of the doctrine of Trinity. Concerning the personality of the three persons in the God head you will learn in many details in the following sections.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Evaluate the constructions of the doctrine of Trinity you have learned in this Unit.

3.2 The Nature of the Persons in the God-Head

That God is one is not a statement in dispute. Israel proclaimed this as a creed long ago in the statement שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד (Hear Israel, the Lord our God is One Lord. Exodus 6:4).

What was the bone of contention was precisely how this God is one and still three persons. In other words, what is the precise nature of these three persons that are the being God? We will take a moment to look at the person of each of the persons in the God head in this section.

God the Father

You learnt in the previous Units about God in general. There are attributes that describe the nature of God. But it was not stated explicitly whether or not God the Father alone was in view or all the three persons. In any formulation of the doctrine of Trinity, God the Father comes up quite prominently and a situation has never arisen where the precise nature of the Father in terms of His deity and humanity is in question. All formulations of the doctrine in the history of Christianity assume the deity of the Father. It is also unthinkable to expect that there would have been arguments within the church in favor of the humanity of the Father. The debates has always concerned the person of the Holy Spirit and that of the Son in relation to the Father. Therefore, more will be said in what follows about the relationship of the other two persons to the Father.

The Son

Who is Jesus Christ? This is the main contention of this section of the Unit. Jesus Christ was Himself concerned with people's perception of who He is. He raised this question before the disciples in Mathew 16:13-18. Their answers show that many people have different perceptions of the person of Jesus Christ. You should take time and study this section very carefully. You will notice that the Western Jesus is different from the non-Western Jesus (see Brinkman, 2009). The non-Western Jesus too assumes different forms (nature) according to various functions on the basis for which he is so characterized. In the discussions that follow, the controversies around the deity and humanity of Jesus are basically Western. In the non-Western world, the discourse is hardly about whether or not Jesus is God and human at the same. The second and the last part of the discussion about the person of Jesus Christ will introduce you to the non-Western Jesus.

Jesus as God

If the Father is God and the Son is God, and yet there is one God there is a logical problem. This explains why there were controversies in the history of church surrounding the problem of the nature of the person of Jesus Christ. The first controversy that arose in the history of the church and of the development of dogma about the deity of Christ was initiated by the thought of Arius, a church elder in the North African city of Alexandria. He argued that there is only one transcendent God with all divine attributes that can not be credited to any other person or thing. Arius' motivation was to promote and protect monotheism and the transcendence of God. If Jesus who has human parents, lived and died here on earth is said to be God then there will be confusion regarding the deity of the Father. His view that Jesus is not God was condemned by an ecumenical council that met in Nicea in 325 AD as heresy. The church maintains the view that Jesus is of the same substance, *homoousis* and essence with the Father. There was another smaller group called the Ebionites. Their view later came to be called Ebionism. They were also concerned about monotheism as Judaism. Ebionites contended that it will be wrong to believe in one God and at the same time identify a person born to a known family on earth as God. This will mean believing in multiple gods. Therefore, they insist that Jesus Christ was an ordinary man with abnormal gifts but certainly not supernatural gift or righteousness and wisdom. The group also denied the virgin birth, saying that Jesus was born the normal way. Do not forget that the main motivation of the Ebionites was to protect their monolithic view of God like the Jews. But since they conceded vital Scriptural texts in order to protect monolithic view of God, the church was compelled to reject their view as false teaching.

The other controversy about the person of Jesus was the question of whether Jesus is human or not. The above mentioned controversy was about the divinity of Jesus: was He God? The question with which the controversy you will learn about here is: was He human? Here too, there were Christians in the history of the church that made desperate attempt to protect and promote the belief that Jesus is God. Thus, they rejected the position of the church that God was also human in the person of Jesus Christ. There were some Christians who maintained that Jesus only *seemed* to be human but actually He was not. The name of this view of Jesus was *docetism* from the Greek word *dokew* meaning to seem or to appear. A literal rendering will be that Jesus only appeared to be human.

A closer view to that of docetism is apollinarianism. This view argued that Jesus assumed some part of human nature but not the whole of it. Jesus according to this view was different from other human beings since not all of human nature was in Him. In any case, He was still human. The leader of

the group after whose name is the view called was Apollinarius. To him, Jesus' human soul took up a divine soul therefore making Jesus divine. Since assuming this divine nature, Jesus lacked what every human being has, the *nous*. The church rejected Apollinarianism. The church's description of the humanity of Christ was that He is fully God and fully human. The next question is how could God be human? In the next section you will learn about the unity of the two natures as the church constructed it.

The Unity of the Two Natures in Christ

Jesus is not a schizophrenic personality. How then is He having two natures? There were honest and deliberate attempts in the history of the church by theologians to resolve the problem of the actual relationship between the deity and humanity of Christ. For the purpose of this Unit, the implication of the unity of the two natures on the doctrine of Trinity is enormous. For if Jesus is human, what grounds are there to affirm that He is God? And if He is not God, then there is no Trinity to talk about in the first place. The first person that offered a solution to the problem of the two natures of Christ was Nestorius. According to him, the use of the word *theotokos* to describe Mary was an unacceptable construction for the personality of a member of the God head. To him, how is it possible that Mary, a human, could be the bearer of God? Can God be in the womb of a woman for nine months and be born to a human family? Nestorius felt that accepting this type of description for the personality of a member of the God head would mean that the views of Apollinarius and Arius early rejected by the church are nevertheless been re-affirmed by her. Nestorius in order to protect the deity of Christ and therefore of the doctrine of Trinity insisted that Mary was *man-bearing (anthropotokos)* and not *God-bearing (theotokos)*. At an ecumenical council that met in Ephesus in 431 AD (Berkouwer, 1954 {repr. 1980}) the humanity of Christ was affirmed.

Another view that came out after Nestorianism was identified with Euthyches. According to him, Jesus was born human but assumed the divine nature after baptism. It is not as if before birth Jesus was God. Therefore Mary could not have been *theotokos*. After baptism, the Spirit descended on Jesus and the human nature in Him was absorbed by the divine nature. Euthyches' motivation was to resolve the controversy within the church that was threatening the church's unity. To him, Christ had two natures but one after another and not simultaneously. Euthyches' view was rejected by the church through what came to be known as "robber synod" (Erickson, 1985 p.729). Since the robber synod was not properly constituted because those who convened it were not the people with

authority to do so, another emperor more sympathetic to the doctrine of the two natures called a council that met in Chalcedon in 451. This Council adopted the Nicene Creed and further issued a statement later to be known as the Chalcedonian Creed. The Latin construction used to describe the Chalcedonian formula is *communicatio Idiomatum*, i.e. communication of the attributes. What this means is that regarding the two natures, “what is said of the one can also be said of the other and not merely in a manner of speaking. Every attribute concerns the entire person [of Christ], so that one can say without scruples, that God died and that the man Jesus is almighty” (Berkouwer, 1954 p. 280; emphasis added). One can put it in simple terms as follows: concerning the unity of the two natures, whatever properties that are attributed to the deity of Christ is applicable to His humanity. In other words, there is only one person and two natures. The Lutherans issued the Formula of Concord that condemns the confusion of the two natures and affirm that the human nature like the divine nature is omnipresent in the same way as the divine nature. Furthermore, they state clearly that Christ suffered for us in His divine nature as well as in His human nature. In other words, there was no point in the life of Jesus when any of the two natures was absent. Since the Son Jesus shared all the attributes of the Father, there are no other grounds to think that He is not God. Also, since He is of the same substance and essence as the Father, He is not part of God but God. Note that the few historic views about the person of Christ are not the only controversial views in the History of the church. There are others too. In the course on Christology, you will learn more about the person of Christ. However, it is important that we introduce you also to the non-Western Jesus in this Unit already.

In the non-Western world, the debate is not really whether or not Jesus is divine or human. Certainly, the problem of the two natures of Christ and the unity of the natures are not the preoccupation of the various constructions of the doctrine of Christ in the non-Western world. There, the constructions about the personality of Jesus are based on cultural norms and experiences. The question asked about Jesus in the non-Western contexts is where is Jesus more at home? (Brinkman, 2009 p.3). Brinkman (2009) defines culture as “*a comprehensive system of meanings, norms and values by which people give form (meaning) to their material existence in a certain time and context*” (p.3) (original emphasis). This means that contextualization of the person of Jesus Christ in the non-Western world is geared towards finding the meaning and value of Jesus in various contexts at different times. For example: while Jesus Christ is *Bodhisattva, Avatara and Guru* in Asia and Latin American contexts, He is regarded as Ancestor, Healer, Counselor, Prophet and God of the oppressed (see Bediako, 2000 and Brinkman, 2009) in the African context. More on Christology in the

non-Western world will be discussed in CTH 422 Christology course. The basic concern of this Unit is with Trinity.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Discuss the person of Jesus Christ

The Person of the Holy Spirit

You have learned about the first two persons in the God head. You can now argue why they constitute a Trinity. But you cannot do this convincingly without a discussion of the Holy Spirit. In this last part of our discussion of the doctrine of Trinity, you will learn about the Holy Spirit.

There are passages in the New Testament that speak of the Holy Spirit as God. Some of these passages use the Holy Spirit and God interchangeably as Erickson (1985) argues. One of such instances where the Holy Spirit is listed as God and God as the Holy Spirit is Acts 5. When Ananias and Sapphira lied about the proceeds from the sale of their farms, Peter told them that they have not lied to men but to God, referring to the Holy Spirit (v.3). In v. 4, Peter further makes the clarification that the couple actually sinned against God and not to humans by lying to the Holy Spirit (Erickson, 1985 p.857). Referring to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the body of a believer, Paul in I Corinthians 6 admonished the Corinthian church to “glorify God in their body” (see v.19-20). In 2:10-11, Paul gave more insights into the nature of the Holy Spirit by asserting that the Spirit is everywhere – a divine attribute (Erickson, 1984 p. 857-858). These biblical passages among many others affirm that the Holy Spirit is God. But can spirit be personal?

The Holy Spirit is not only divine, He is also personal. He relates with people and the earth in human terms and language. This explains why the Holy Spirit is referred to in the New Testament as *parakletos* (comforter) in John 14:26; 15:26; and 16:7 (Erickson, 1985 p.860). It is only a person that can comfort people. An abstract object does not have the ability to speak, to communicate. These abilities are necessary for one to serve as a comforter in the life of a person. There are many other references as well. In the course CTH 322 Pneumatology and Soteriology you will learn more about the person of the Holy Spirit especially with respect to salvation. The purpose here is to show that the Holy Spirit is of the same substance and essence with the Father and the Son. There are series of debates regarding

the procession of the Holy Spirit: is it from the Father or the Son and what is the implication of this? Does it mean there is hierarchy in the God head? These are not debate to entertain in a brief introductory course such as this one. As you advance in your theological studies you will be exposed to more of these debates. For now, it suffices to learn that the Holy Spirit is God and a person with the same attributes as the Father.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In the God head there are three persons: Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. They are three manifestations of the being God. It is the being God that has manifested Himself to us in three personalities of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son due to incarnation for the purpose of paying the price for our sins and meeting the just requirement of the law has a human and divine nature. The two natures are however not to be confused. The Holy Spirit is God. You see in the work of the Holy Spirit as a comforter that He manifests in human form. He is not an abstract object but a person. In this way, we have a Trinity: One God, three persons.

5.0 SUMMARY

You learn that God has manifested Himself to us in three persons. Despite the various controversies that emerged in the history of the church about the nature of the personalities of members of the God head, the church has consistently maintained that the three persons in the God head are One God. Regarding the personality of Christ, you have learned that the orthodox position is expressed in a Latin construction: *communicatio idiomatum* – communication of the attributes. The import of this construction is that whatever is said of the person of Christ is applicable to the two natures. The debate in the non-Western world about Christ is however centered on the cultural context. There, whether or not Christ is divine or human is not the question. You also learned that the Holy Spirit is God. He manifests Himself also in human form. As you continue your studies more will be said on these doctrines.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. State in your own words the orthodox construction of the doctrine of Trinity
2. How many persons is Jesus Christ?
3. What is Arianism?
4. Relate Arianism to Apollinarianism
5. At what point did Jesus become God?

6. What is the relationship between God and the Holy Spirit?

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UNIT 5 THE DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY

CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Importance of the Doctrine
 - 3.2 The Origin of Humanity
 - 3.3 The Nature of Humanity
 - 3.4 Image of God in Humanity
- 4.0 Summary
- 5.0 Conclusion
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit, you learned about doctrine of Trinity (one God, three persons). You also learned about the person of each of the persons in the God-head. In the discussion of the person of Christ, you also learned of the two natures of Christ, namely; divine and human. In this Unit, you will study the doctrine of humanity. You will appreciate the human nature of Christ more after learning carefully, the contents of this Unit. This is because the Unit will teach you the origin and nature of humanity, the doctrine of Sin – including its nature and effects on both the sinner and his/her community.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of your study of the contents, you should be able to:

- State the importance of the doctrine of humanity
- Identify the effects of sin
- Discuss the three major views of the nature and origin of sin
- Evaluate arguments on the nature and origin of humanity and sin

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Importance of the Doctrine

You may be asking yourself what in a word is this humanity? What are we calling humans? The Greek understanding of humankind is “one that looks up” to god (Geisler & Mackenzie, 1995 p. 53). The Latin word for humans, *homo*, is derived from *homus*, “which seems to indicate a certain kinship with the earth” (Geisler & Mackenzie, 1995 p. 53). This rendering of *homus* conveys the basic idea that “humans have an essential connection to the earth, but also, by virtue of their minds possess a transcendence that marks them as different from the nature that surrounds them and orients them towards God” (Geisler & Mackenzie p. 53). Drawing from Geisler and Mackenzie’s etymological study of humanity, you may conclude that humanity is that creature that is connected to, and shares attributes with, the universe but is uniquely different from other creatures within the universe because of its special likeness with God. This presupposes that humanity is created by God (more on this latter in this Unit when you will study the origin of humanity).

The relationship between humanity and God is central in every discussion of God’s activity on earth. The extent to which God is involved with the universe is a point at which many theologians or Christian traditions differ. You will come across some of these differences in this Unit. One point to note here is that the study of the doctrine of humanity is central to theology, philosophy (Christian and non-Christian), sociology and other related disciplines because it is the central axis upon which the understanding of the extent of God’s involvement in the universe is based. In what follows, you will learn about some of the reasons why you should study the doctrine of humanity.

You are a human being, and you probably know your own self, and possibly others, too well to spend your own time, and that of others, studying about humanity. This may be your thoughts, as you are about to study this Unit. The sixteen century Reformer, John Calvin states categorically at the beginning of his famous book on Christianity, *Institute of the Christian Religion*, that the Knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves is identical. In the context of this Unit, you will note that if the process to the knowledge of God is tedious, so it is with that of humanity (self). There is no way that human agents could come to the true knowledge of God without first of all knowing who they are in relation to God. Your

perception of the self and humanity will inevitably affect your view of God. For example: if your perception of humanity is that humans are free agents, acting independently of God, of whose decision and future actions, God does not determine, you will see yourself and other human beings as free and independent of God's determination. In other words, you will like Clark Pinnock and Richard Rice from the tradition of "Open Theism" or "Free will Theism", argue that God knows ultimately future events that are free from human future decisions. This, they argue, is because until decisions are made, there is nothing to be known about them by God.

You will note already that the view that humans are "free" from God's determination of events that results from their own moral decision affects the view of God's sovereignty, foreknowledge and foreordination (cf. Module I). The few points below will help put together in simple terms, the importance of the doctrine of humanity. You should study them carefully. The points are as follows:

1. The doctrine of humanity is important because it is the meeting point between biblical revelation and human concerns (Erickson 1985, p. 457). The subject of man and woman is the existence of the self in dialogue with his/her day to day life experiences. While the French philosopher, Rene Descartes could doubt the existence and experience of anything else around him, he was able to concede that he exists as a doubting being. Hardly is there any one that is not certain about his/her existence and life experiences (whether or not there is an accurate interpretation of these experiences is another thing). When you read of the "Perceptive Will" of God for your own life in the Bible you quickly seek to apply that revelation of God's Will to what Karl Rahner (1978 reprinted 1996) describes as your mundane experiences. The point of contact between mundane experiences and the revelation of the Will of God is human beings. The universe is meaningless without human beings. A study of the doctrine of humanity is necessary for a better understanding of how biblical revelation and human concerns "converge".
2. The doctrine of humanity is also important, says Erickson, because of the present quest for human identity – the question of who is human? What is humanity composed of? What is the origin of humanity? These questions are answered, even if unsatisfactory, in the study of the doctrine of humanity.

3. The doctrine of humanity is also important because our conception of humanity affects the way we minister to the world. When we know the people we are ministering to, it becomes easier for us to discern what message God is sending to the people. It may go as far as determining to us whether the people actually need the message or not. A study of the doctrine helps preachers to discern what humanity's mundane concerns are in order to address them in the course of the ministry. Ignorance of the aforementioned concerns of humanity at a particular time and place is a pointer to failure in ministry.

Jack Mahoney (2003) identifies for the Roman Catholic tradition, four cardinal doctrines of Christianity. According to him they are: the doctrine of creation, the doctrine of sin, the doctrine of salvation and the doctrine of fulfillment. Humanity is created. It is human beings that do commit sin and thereby in need of salvation. Going by Mahoney's four cardinal doctrines, the doctrine of humanity is central. A study of the doctrine is therefore necessary for the understanding of the other doctrines of the Christian faith, since it is organically connected to all the other doctrines.

These are not just about the only importance of studying the doctrine of humanity. You should at this point be able to identify other importance for studying the doctrine of humanity. If not at this point, at the end of the entire study of the doctrine you should be able to identify other importance of studying the doctrine of humanity.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

State in your own words why it is necessary to study the doctrine of humanity

3.2 The Origin of Humanity

It should be clear to you how important the study of the doctrine of humanity is to you and other scholars of religion (theology). Perhaps, your interest in the doctrine is heightened. You are ready to explore the doctrine. The next question that many would ask is the origin of humanity. Where did human beings come from? The answer to the question to what purpose did God bring humanity into this world is easy. To love and enjoy Him. But is it everyone that is willing to accept that God indeed brought humanity into existence? Not at all. Among those who are willing to contend that God bring humanity into this world for the purpose of loving and enjoying Him are some who have raised further and more probing questions like:

how did God brought humanity into existence? Was it by means of an evolutionary process or through fiat creationism? How exactly did humanity come about? A sample of views on the origin of humanity is given below.

Evolutionary Theory

In an attempt to trace the origin of humanity, there are theologians who see sense in arguing that humanity evolved through natural processes. This means that there was no supernatural involvement in the processes that brought humanity into being. Popular of such naturalistic evolutionary views of humanity's origin is Darwinism.

Fiat Creationism

This is the idea that God, by a direct and instantaneous act, brought into being all that exists (Erickson 1985, p.479). Humanity too came into existence through instantaneous act of God. To the fiat creationism theorists, it is meaningless to think that it took the omnipotent God 24 hours, a whole day to make a pronouncement that could bring things into existence. Therefore, they maintain that humanity, the last of all that God created too came into being by a simple fiat and instantaneous pronouncement of God.

Deistic Evolution

This view states that God guides and directs all things according to His own purpose. Hence, He programmed the processes that could bring things into existence including humanity. After setting the processes in motion, He withdrew from it for things to evolve out of these processes. Humanity evolved from these processes.

Theistic Evolution

The physical dimension of man arose through evolution. God set into motion a process that brought man and other things into being by utilizing what was already in existence for this purpose. Once a while, God will intervene in the process to put it on course and towards achieving the purpose to which the process was set in motion. Humanity came into being as a result of evolution from already existing things that God put in place for the purpose that humanity could evolve from it. You may be wondering what difference exists between the Deistic and Theistic schemes. The

difference lies largely in the continuous intervention of God under the theistic explanation of the origin of humanity. Whereas in deistic view, God withdraws to allow the processes to evolve potential beings without hindrance or interference, in theistic evolutionary account of the origin of humanity, God still intervenes or even change the processes to see to it that out of them evolves what needs to be evolved. Through this intervention, humanity was able to emerge from the processes that God indeed, out of His sovereign goodwill and pleasure, set in motion.

Progressive Creationism

The last explanation for the origin of humanity that you will study in this Unit is Progressive Creationism. The view says that God at various times created *de novo* (created afresh) (Erickson 1985, p. 482). Although each time He created things, there may be some things similar to other existing beings, God created new and different things all together each time He brought to being, *de novo* (Erickson, 1984 p.482).

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Discuss some of the natural (unbiblical) views tracing the origin of humanity

A Biblical View of the Origin of Humanity

Any theology worth the name Christian must base its final conclusions on biblical revelation because it is the primary source of knowledge about God's relationship with the universe. All our judgments and analysis are based on what we originally learned about God in Scripture. The origin of humanity is no exception. All the theories of the origin of humanity you have studied above originate from disputes and interpretation of what people originally read from biblical accounts of the origin of humanity. The Christian way of doing Christian Theology is to go back to Scripture in search of what it said about issues that we theologize about. This in itself is ambiguous. The ambiguity involved in discerning what Scripture itself says is also not in question and has more often than not been the reason for most of the theories formulated by scholars over the years on different aspects of the Christian religion. But once you contend there is no better source of knowledge than the Bible as the source through which we came about knowing God, you will have no choice than to respect it as the final authority on the origin of humanity as well as on other things.

You find two places in the book of Genesis accounts of the origin of humanity. These are Gen. 1:26, 27 and Gen. 2: 7, 21-23. In both places, the origin of humanity is traced to God's creative acts. You read from these biblical accounts that God made the first human being from the dust of the earth – different from the mode He used in bringing other beings into existence. In the accounts of the creation of all the other things, God simply said “let there be...” and the refrain is that “and there was...”. But perhaps, because of the uniqueness of humankind, God declared: “let us make man (*sic*) in our own image...” (Gen. 1: 26). You will notice that this is different from the words God uttered in the creation of the other things (cf. Gen. 1:3-25). There was no mention of “our own image”. Certainly, the use of first person plural language: “let us...” is absent in the accounts of the creation of other things. In a unique way, humankind was brought into being by the creative act of God. From the dust of the earth that He already created, the first man was created and from the rib of the first man, Adam, the woman was created (Gen.1:27). Despite all feminist reconstruction of biblical origins, the point remains that this is the biblical account of human origin, namely; God created Adam from the soil of the earth and Eve from the rib of Adam. Since there is no other biblical account of how humanity came into being, we are left to contend that from Adam and Eve the rest of humanity came into being. The accounts in Genesis should therefore guide your understanding and interpretation of human origin.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Discuss the biblical view of the origin of humanity

3.3 The Nature of Humanity

In the previous section, you learned about the theories of the origin of humanity. In this section, you will study the nature of humanity. The question you should concern yourself with in this section is: what is humanity composed of? What are the elements (properties) that make the being that is humanity? There are three basic views of what constitutes humanity. These are explained below.

Trichotonomism

There are scholars (not only theologians) who maintain that man and woman are each composed of three elements: the physical body, the psychological element called the soul and spirit (Erickson, 1985 p.524). The physical body is what humanity shares with other animals. For example: goats have bodies and you identify them and differentiate them

from other animals by their bodies. Human bodies are distinguished from animals because of the shape they take. The body shape is the main distinguishing element between a human body and an animal body. The soul is the psychological element in humans that enables human beings to reason, to have emotions and also to interact both with animals and other human beings. Animals too have souls. But according to trichotomists, human beings do not share spirit with animals at all. To them, spirit is the main element in human beings that clearly set them apart from animals and other beings.

Dichotomism

This view unlike the former, maintains that humanity is composed of only two elements, namely; body and the soul. Their conception of the body is same as in trichotomism. Dichotomists insist that the physical body is the human element that perishes. The soul is immaterial and therefore immortal.

Monism

Monism takes a rather different view from the two. For monism, humanity is radical unity that is not composed of separate parts (elements) (Erickson, 1985 p. 524). In the monistic understanding, the Bible does not view humanity as body, soul and spirit but as “self” (Erickson, 1985 p. 524).

Self-Assessment Exercise 4

Discuss the nature of humanity

3.4 Image of God in Humanity

In the discussion of the biblical origin of humankind, you were told that one of the uniqueness of humanity among created beings is that it was created in the image of humankind’s maker. Simple as this statement sounds, it is in actual sense complex. What is the meaning of this image? What constitutes this image? Of what significance is it to be in the image of God? You may come across other questions about the nature of the image of God in humanity: the *imago dei*. There are several interpretations of image of God in humanity. Natural theologians would want to liken this image to “moral excellence”. The whole debate about the *noetic* effect of sin – humanity is devoid of any moral excellence – mainly arose from interpretation of the meaning of the image of God in humanity and its functions therein. You

will learn more about this debate in a 400 level course, CTH424 Christian Apologetics. A sample of some of the interpretations of the image of God in humanity is given by Henri Blocher (1995). They are as follows:

1. One of the meanings of the image of God in humankind is sharing in the Spirit with God. According to this interpretation, God is Spirit, and there is the Spirit of God in humanity, it is taken that humanity is also composed of Spirit in the similitude that God is Spirit (Jn. 4:24 “God is Spirit...”; Gal. 5:22 “fruit of the Spirit...”).
2. Some scholars have interpreted Ecclesiastes 12:3-5 to suggest that the image of God in humankind has to do with the idea of dominion. As God, they say, has dominion over all that is in the universe and in the heavens above, so humankind has dominion over the universe entrusted into its care by God.
3. Image of God in humanity is also interpreted in terms of original righteousness commonly referred to in theological circles as moral excellence. God saw all that He has created and said it was good is the affirmation of Genesis 1:31. This ability to do things right is also in humanity. And since this is a special attribute of humankind from the beginning, it is taken for granted that moral quality is still in humanity despite the fall. The purpose of the image according to this view is moral excellence.
4. People who are favorably disposed to the critical study of human sexuality interpret the doctrine of the image of God in humanity as a declaration that humanity is made up of male and female based on Gen. 1:27 (in the image of God he created them male and female). In restoring this image in humanity by Christ (Col. 3:1), the glory of humanity is again reinstated in such a way that male and female humans could respect their dignity in a reciprocal way.

There may be other ways that scholars have interpreted the image of God in humans that you will study in the suggested further readings at the end of this Unit. You may also come to your own conclusion about what this image means and constitute (its nature). This Unit has given you enough insight into some of the ways theologians have looked at the concept over the years.

Self-Assessment Exercise 5

Discuss the concept of imago dei.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Any course in Christian Theology that does not include the doctrine of humanity is incomplete. All Christian doctrines are concerned with the relationship between God and humans. This explains the centrality of humankind in God's economy of creation; of governance and salvation of the universe. It is the doctrine of humanity that actually necessitates the doctrine of salvation and of the last things, Eschatology. It is the sin of humankind that has humbled it in such a way that it stands in need of salvation. The understanding that humanity is subject to the control and authority of the creator leads to the understanding of the relationship between the creator and the created beings of which humankind is an integral part.

5.0 SUMMARY

You learned in this Unit about the importance, nature and origin of humankind. Your study indicates that humanity is subject to the authority of God in several ways. One of the ways to look at this is to affirm that a creature cannot in any way be above the creator. You also learned how humanity has tried to live above its limits by attempting to seek understanding of its origin outside God's revelation. However, you notice that humanity is just being human by failing to recognize the difference between the knowledge and authority of God and that of humanity. Biblical revelation is still the ultimate source of knowledge about God and that of human beings. In the next Unit you will study the doctrine of Sin.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Account for the origin of humanity
2. Why is the doctrine of humanity necessary in Christian Theology?
3. What does the image of God in humanity mean?
4. Human beings are composed of several elements. Discuss this claim exhaustively.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 6 THE DOCTRINE OF SIN

CONTENTS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

You learned in the previous Unit about humanity. Humankind was brought into this world by God for the purpose of loving and enjoying Him forever. But there was an intrusion in humankind's history. This intrusion is sin. In this present Unit, you will learn about the doctrine of sin. The treatment of the doctrine of sin follows immediately that of humanity because it is as a result of humanity's relationship with God that sin originated. This is a factual statement. But it is not that simple. You will learn in this Unit that the concept of sin itself is complex. It has been understood differently even by scholars within the same church tradition. Thus, you will study the meaning and nature of sin, some historic views about sin and its effects on humanity. You will realize at the end of this Unit why it became necessary for Christ to incarnate and die for His own people. This is treated in the next Module under the Doctrine of Salvation. I am sure you will enjoy studying this Unit.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of its study, you will be equipped to:

- Describe using biblical sources, sin
- Discuss three views about sin and its effect on humanity

- Evaluate various conceptions about sin

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 The Meaning and Nature of Sin

You learned in the previous section that there are theologians who maintained that the image of God in humanity is the source of humankind's moral excellence. The continued presence of this image in human beings accounts for their ability to do good, despite the prevalence of sin and its consequences. In this section, you will learn about sin and its effects on humanity. This includes the image of God in humankind.

It is important to begin with a clear understanding of what sin is. The theologian, Lehman Strauss (1997) has done an etymological study of the word sin and he reports the result of that study as follows:

Dr. Charles Ryrie has given a listing of Hebrew and Greek words which describe sin. He says that in the Hebrew there are at least eight basic words: “*ra*, bad (Genesis 38:7); *rasha*, wickedness (Exodus 2:13); *asham*, guilt (Hosea 4:15); *chata*, sin (Exodus 20:20); *avon*, iniquity (I Samuel 3:13); *shagag*, err (Isaiah 28:7); *taah*, wander away (Ezekiel 48:11); *pasha*, rebel (I Kings 8:50). The usage of these words leads to certain conclusions about the doctrine of sin in the Old Testament. (1) Sin was conceived of as being fundamentally disobedience to God. (2) While disobedience involved both positive and negative ideas, the emphasis was definitely on the positive commission of wrong and not the negative omission of good. In other words, sin was not simply missing the right mark, but hitting the wrong mark. (3) Sin may take many forms, and the Israelite was aware of the particular form which his sin did take.”

“The New Testament uses twelve basic words to describe sin. They are: *Kakos*, bad (Romans 13:3); *poneros*, evil (Matthew 5:45); *asebes*, godless (Romans 1:18); *enochos*, guilt (Matthew 5:21); *hamartia*, sin (I Corinthians 6:18); *adikia*, unrighteousness (I Corinthians 6:9); *anomos*, lawlessness (I Timothy 2:9); *parabates*, transgression (Romans 5:14); *agnoein*, to be ignorant (Romans 1:13); *planan*, to go astray (I Corinthians 6:9); *paraptomai*, to fall away (Galatians 6:1); and *hupocrites*, hypocrite (I Timothy 4:2). From the uses of these words several conclusions may also be

drawn. (1) There is always a clear standard against which sin is committed. (2) Ultimately all sin is a positive rebellion against God and a transgression of His standards. (3) Evil may assume a variety of forms. (4) Man's responsibility is definite and clearly understood." (p.1)

The most common Greek word used by theologians in their study of sin is *harmatia* in I Corinthians 6:18 and Romans 3:23. The simple rendering *harmatia* is acting below the standard of God's own norms. To act below the standard of God's norm is to transgress (Rom. 5:14). To transgress is to fall off the track of righteousness. It is to act in an unrighteous way. Scripture states clearly that there are consequences for acting in an unrighteous way. For Paul, the most serious consequence is death (Rom. 5:14, 6:23). But there are various conceptions of the extent of effect of sin on humanity, especially the type of sin that is in view. Is it our individual sins only or this includes the sin of Adam and Eve. In other words, is humanity liable to their present and individual sins only or are they also held liable on account of the sin of the first man and woman that ever lived on earth through imputation? You will learn in the next section some of the debates on this matter.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

What is Sin?

Pelagian View of Sin

This view is associated with a former British Monk Pelagius (some scholars did not see him as a monk) (cf. Erickson, 1985 p. 632). Pelagius moved to Rome in the later part of his life to teach but fled to Carthage in North Africa because of Alaric's invasion of Italy (Erickson, 1984 p. 632). The main theological motivation of Pelagius was human morality. His contention was that human beings ought to live the highest moral life possible. This ambition to live a high moral life will not be fulfilled if there is such a negative view of humankind's ability to do good. For if God determines human being's future moral decisions, it is unthinkable that humankind could strive to live high moral lives, since it is not to them to decide to be morally upright or not without God's intervention. The theological goal of Pelagius was to remedy this deficient (according to him), view of humanity. He did so by laying heavy emphasis on free will. To him, human beings are free moral agents. As free moral agents, they are not readily affected by the depravity and determination arising from the fall. In other words, the sin of Adam has no moral effect on human

capability for moral excellence. Pelagius further taught that “the influence, if any, of Adam’s sin upon his descendants is merely that of bad example. Other than this, there is no direct connection, between Adam’s sin and that of the rest of the human race” (see Erickson, 1985 p. 632). Hence, he rejected Augustinian concept of predestination and imputation of Adam’s sin.

Soon after the Reformation, there was a small “splinter group” called Socinians. They are known mostly in Poland who followed the teachings of Socinus, a former professor at Saumur. They held a modified view of Pelagianism. Socinians “insisted that it was a contradiction of human freedom to believe in the sovereign foreordination of God. So they went ‘all the way’ (logically) and denied not only that God has foreordained the free decisions of free agents but also that God foreknows what those decisions will be” (Strimple, 1996 p. 140-141). If human beings are free moral agents, they can be liable or responsible for their own actions and those actions alone. But they cannot be responsible for a sin not willfully committed by them. Therefore, Socinians deny any human culpability in the present life on account of the sin committed by Adam. Since they rejected the imputation of Adam’s sin, they also rejected the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. To them, humankind is saved and justified on the account of their own righteousness, not that done by any person in the history of God’s dealings with humanity. This conviction, according to Pelagianism, is necessary to motivate people for striving to attain a high moral standard.

Later on, coming from the Roman Catholic tradition, Karl Rahner explicitly maintains Pelagius’ contention that there is no direct connection between Adam’s sin and the individual sins of human creatures. He clarifies his position further by stating succinctly his own understating of original sin. He says that original sin means we humans are already imbedded in the “freedom of guilt” right from the “origin of history”. With regard to the original sin as Adam’s sin, Rahner maintains as follows: “‘original sin’ does not mean of course that the original, personal act of freedom at the very origin of history has been transmitted to subsequent generations in its moral quality”. More so, “the notion that the personal deed of ‘Adam’ or of the first group of people is imputed to us in such a way that it has been transmitted on to us biologically, as it were has absolutely nothing to do with the Christian dogma of original sin” (1996 p. 110). Like Pelagius, Rahner contends that “personal guilt from an original act of freedom cannot be transmitted, for it is an existentiell [note that this is not existential] ‘no’ of personal transcendence towards God or against him” (p.111 note added). To him, original sin “in the Christian sense in no way implies that the original, personal act of freedom of the first person or person is transmitted

to us as our moral quality” (p. 111). Again, this is because we are free moral agents ourselves and therefore responsible for our own actions individually in what Rahner describes as our “mundane” experiences. Both earlier and later “Pelagius” emphasize human ability to strive to attain a high moral standard. The doctrine of total depravity of the moral agency of human beings is rejected in all forms of conservative Pelagianism.

The Arminian View

Arminianism is a theological position named after its principal founder, Jaccobus Arminius. He was a Dutch theologian and pastor. He sought to modify the reformed position exposed more extensively than ever in the history of the development of Christian dogma, John Calvin (Erickson, 1985 p. 634). Whatever form of culpability or depravity that could have been accrued to us from Adam’s sin is atoned for by Christ. Therefore, depravity as a result of Adam’s sin is removed. For maintaining this view of the nature and effect of original sin, Armenians are called four points Calvinists. At the Council of Dort, Arminianism was condemned and total depravity of the human race as a result of Adamic sin re-affirmed. The Canons of Dort that is confessed and believed among Dutch Reformed Churches all over the world alongside Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confessions came about as a result of the Arminian controversy.

The Calvinistic View

This view is associated with the theology of one of the sixteenth century reformed theologians, John Calvin. You will learn more about John Calvin through one of the most recent works on the life and legacy of John Calvin by John W. De Gruchy. According to De Gruchy, John Calvin was born on 10th July 1509 in Noyon, a city north of France (De Gruchy, 2009 p.79). His parents were of the middle class but with a connection to royal nobility. His mother died while Calvin was still a child but his father worked in the diocesan office of the bishopric as a clerk. This position helped Calvin’s father to train him. At twelve, Calvin already got an appointment at a Chaplaincy attached to the Cathedral where his father became a prominent staff. At age fourteen, Calvin was sent to the University of Paris where he came into contact with scholastic philosophy in the likes of that of Augustine and Duns Scotus. Gradually, Calvin moved away from Catholic theology and began to expose some of the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church that contradicted, according to him, biblical teachings. He was also not comfortable with some aspects of Lutheran theology especially transubstantiation, grace, Christian baptism, predestination; among other doctrines. His basic theological treatise is contained in his famous book

referred to in this Course Material over and over, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He wrote several other works as well including commentaries on the whole Bible. Calvin theology, especially the five points against the followers of Jacob Arminius – the remonstrant Dutch reformed theologian – can be summarized as follows: that humanity is totally deprived as a result of sin, predestination of the elect and the reprobates is unconditional; that Jesus Christ died only for the elect and therefore atonement is limited to the elect; that once an elect, you shall persevere to the end of this age. Therefore, there is no possibility that the elect could lapse from the grace. Calvinists generally maintain that as a result of the fall of Adam and Eve, humanity is deprived of any good works without God’s intervention through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Sin originated, they contend, from the very day that Adam sinned. Since then, humankind is devoid of moral exigencies without the aid of the Holy Spirit.

Calvinists are quite consistent on their view of the origin and nature of sin. For the Calvinists, humankind was in Adam. When he committed sin, it was humankind that sinned. The guilt and corruption that followed the sinning of Adam affects entire human race because the entire race indeed sinned when Adam sinned. Calvinists therefore maintain that there is an inseparable connection between Adam’s sin and the people of the entire human race. This is true of all ages. Adam’s sin is not “just the sin of an isolated individual, but is also our sin. Because we participated in that sin, we all, from the beginning of life, perhaps even from the point of conception, receive a corrupted nature along with a consequent inherited tendency toward sin” (Erickson, 1985 p. 634). As Erickson asserts, the Calvinistic position is based on Pauline theology in his argument with respect to the origin, consequence and nature of our sin in Romans 5: 12-19. There, Paul says that sin entered the world through the active agency of Adam and so death as a result of that sin came to humankind through Adam because humankind committed the sin that Adam committed – the original sin. For the Calvinists, the only way that we could participate in the righteousness of Christ for everything that it worth, is to first of all share in the guilt arising from the sin of Adam, which is the reason for Christ’s righteousness and death. Paul understands this very well when he gave the reason for the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to human race as the imputation of Adam’s sin to the race. Some Roman Catholic scholars like Jack Mahoney deny that the righteousness of Christ cannot be imputed to us just as the guilt of Adam is not accrued to us in any way (2003).

You should at this point of the discussion be able to make your own judgment having been equipped by this Unit. The discussions in the

previous section will illuminate your understanding of the contents in the next section on effects of sin.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Identify and discuss three views on sin you learned in this Unit.

3.2 The Effects of Sin

Jack Mahomney (2003) says “one ignores the doctrine of human sinfulness at one’s own peril, and at the risk of indulging in moral complacency and Pollyanna-ism, and even imperceptibly cultivating ethical blindness” (p. 725). This is a Pelagian speaking (see p. 726). The effects of sin are so pronounced such that the need for the study of doctrine of sin is quite clear to the eyes of Pelagians who may appear, to some, as weakening the effects and seriousness of sin. You will notice that Scripture is clear about the seriousness of sin. It is no joke when Paul wrote that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). You will learn below about some of the consequences of sin.

Divine Disfavor

Erickson (1985) is clearer in his enumerations of the effects of sin than other equally good works. What you will learn in this section is drawn largely from Erickson’s work. However, you should not in any way attribute any of the weaknesses of this section to him. It is clear from Hosea 9:15 that sin attracts God’s disfavor. His clear rejection of the people of Israel whom He elected among the nations of the earth (see his covenant with Abraham in Genesis (especially chapter 12 & 17) is an indication that God does reject His own people once they indulge in sin. When God said the people of Israel were no longer His people, Israel lost God’s favor and became subservient to the pagan nations that surrounded them. You will learn from the next Module that one of the reasons why atonement by Christ became necessary was to regain the lost divine favor. You will also note in Romans chapter 8 that, not only is the sinner unable to enjoy God’s favor, the sinner is not in any position to please God. You will read in verse 7 that the unregenerate mind cannot please God because this mind is at enmity with God.

Guilt

Similar to divine disfavor is guilt. Guilt alienates humans from their creator. Once Adam discovered how guilt has stripped him naked before his Master he ran away from the presence of the very person that was sustaining him. The only explanation to what happens in Genesis 3 is that guilt alienates formerly good friends from each other. Guilt and shame go together. Once guilty, the next thing that follows is a feeling of a strong sense of shame, itself preceded by attempt to hide and alienate from others. When Nathan told David of his sin, he became saddened and he isolated himself. This isolation led to the decision to further commit sin as a way of covering his shame that came after his initial sin (I Samuel 11). Once guilt is not well managed, it leads to further sins and therefore increases or adds to the first guilt. Guilt is a major consequence of sin. When you bear in mind that guilt calls for its punishment you will appreciate further the extent to which sin has effect on humanity in their relationship with God and with one another.

Penalty

There is punishment for every sin that is committed. God told David that he is forgiven for the sin he committed against God and Uriah the servant of David. But as for the sin he committed, God insisted that it must be punished. Therefore, the child that David had with Uriah's wife died and David rather became relieved (see I Samuel 11-13) after the death of his son. It became clear to him that the sin has already been punished and he could look forward to better days of his relationship with his God. You will learn in the next Module that sins of humanity were punished on the cross by the death of Jesus the Son of God (Thipa, 2009). Sin is punished.

Death

The most obvious wage of sin that the Bible has told us is death (Rom 6:23). There are interpretations and classifications of death. There is spiritual death known as the death in spirit while still physically alive. There is physical death that implies that all of us human beings are going to die. There is eternal death which non-believers will "enjoy" at the end of the age – they shall not come to life (Rev. 20:4-6). The presence of any of these deaths could never have been contemplated had it being sin was not ushered into this world by humanity. Death is a consequence of sin. Belief in Christ becomes the only inevitable way to escape spiritual and eternal death.

Suffering

The presence of evil in the world, according to Romans 8, is as a result of sin following the curse of humanity and the earth. There is a “greater good” that awaits those who believe in the future. As for the present, believers like unbelievers will have to endure pains arising from the curse of the earth (see v. 18-23). The pains we endure today, and the one that our children will come to experience is as a result of the presence of sin on earth. Suffering therefore is a consequence of sin.

Self Assessment Exercises 3

Discuss what you consider to be effects of sin

4.0 CONCLUSION

The doctrine of sin is central to Christian theology in the sense that it is the reason (meaning) for the study of all the other doctrines. There are however different interpretations and understanding regarding the origin, nature and effects of sin on humankind. Despite all these divergent views, there is a consensus among Christian theologians that sin is indeed a serious thing in Christianity. The importance of, and the necessity for, the study of the doctrine of sin cannot be overemphasized.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this Unit, you learned about the origin and nature of sin. You are prepared through the study of the doctrine of sin in this Unit to answer the question: why study the doctrine of sin? You learned that you cannot ignore the doctrine of sin in Christian theology since sin is the pivot around which all the other cardinal doctrines in Christian theology revolve. You are at this point, able to enumerate some of the effects/consequences of sin. Sin alienates believers from God and from one another, as it brings death into the world. Guilt is also a consequence of sin and guilt called for punishment of the one that is guilty of sin. Suffering, one of the most perplexed issues in the Bible came into this world because there is sin in the world. In the next Module that deals with the doctrine of salvation, you will learn how Christ provided the remedy for our sins through His atoning work on the Cross of Calvary. I encourage you to study the next Module too very carefully.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. What is sin?

2. In your own words, discuss the importance of the doctrine of sin in Christian theology
3. Evaluate the various conceptions of the origin and nature of sin
4. Does sin have any effects on humankind? Discuss
5. Is there any where in Scripture that you think the doctrine of the imputation of sin is taught? Where, if any?

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MODULE 2 THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

- Unit 1 Various Conceptions of Salvation
- Unit 2 Atonement
- Unit 3 Order of Salvation

UNIT 1 VARIOUS CONCEPTIONS OF SALVATION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
 - 3.1 Time
 - 3.2 Nature and Locus of Salvation
 - 3.3 The Medium of Salvation
 - 3.4 The Extent of Salvation
 - 3.5 The Objects of Salvation
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

You learned in Module I about the doctrine of God and Humanity. The nature, names and attributes of God. You also studied the debate about the justification of God in the midst of suffering and evil. These were discussed under the doctrine of God. The nature of humanity in relationship to God – the image of God in humanity, sin and its effect on humankind are some of the topics treated under the doctrine of humanity. The doctrine of humanity – especially the aspect that deals with sin and its consequences – necessitates a discussion of the doctrine of salvation. In other words, it was as a result of sin that humankind became in need of salvation. Therefore, you will learn in this Module, the meaning of salvation, the nature of salvation, who is saved and how, and the order of salvation. Unit 1 of this Module will expose you to the various conceptions of salvation.

Salvation, over the years, has been understood by different people in different ways. As a student of theology, it is necessary that you are exposed to the major conceptions of salvation so that you will be able to form your own opinion on what you think Scripture teaches salvation really is. The various views (conceptions) of salvation arose over the ages due to hermeneutical differences among theologians on key portions of Scripture. Since almost all theological doctrines are formulated based on the understanding of Scripture, different hermeneutical views on salvation came up with different theological formulations of the doctrine of salvation. This Unit will help you to achieve the learning objectives as stated in the section below.

2.0 OBEJCTIVES

After a careful study of this unit, you will be able to:

- Identify major conceptions of salvation
- State the various convictions that inform divergent views of salvation
- Evaluate the major views on salvation

Self Assessment Exercise 1

What do you hope to learn in this Unit?

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

Erickson (1985), defines salvation as “the application of the work of Christ to the life of the individual” (p. 887). He identifies about six dimensions on which the various conceptions of the doctrine differ. These are: time, need, medium, extent and objects of salvation (p. 887). Although traditional theologians of the twentieth century evangelicalism limit the “dimensions” upon which the various conceptions of salvation differ to two, namely; “naturalistic” and “supernaturalistic” dimensions the scheme provided by Erickson affords you a better understanding of the major contentions on which the various conceptions of salvation differ. Therefore, in what follows, you will learn six dimensions, as Erickson calls them, upon which the divergent conceptions of salvation are based. The first dimension that you will learn is *Time* – when does salvation take place and how often is one saved? Is salvation a definitive (once for all) act or a progressive (continuous) act?

3.1 Time

As you read above, there are Christians who conceive salvation as a future event that will take place as part of grand and final events to accompany the second coming of Jesus Christ. According to this view, believers are waiting in eager expectation of the glory that will be revealed to the sons of the kingdom in futuristic terms (cf. Rom 8:16-27). Going by this view, salvation is to be expected. Believers are to hope that they will be saved when Christ reappears.

There are some Christians who believe that they have been saved by the definitive work of Christ on the cross of Calvary. When the veil in the temple was torn apart – meaning we have access to God – believers received their own salvation. The work of salvation was therefore accomplished on the cross of Calvary and all believers received their salvation at that point. There is also the Reformed view that believes salvation is both definitive and progressive. The work of Christ, on the Cross, merited for believers the gift of salvation. In this sense, salvation is a past event for believers. But there is also a sense in which salvation is still in abeyance. This sense has to do with the eternal destiny of believers, a destiny at which believers will know no suffering nor experience any pains. This benefit of salvation will come at the end of the age. Evangelical theologians like G.C. Berkouwer speak of “the already” and “the not yet”. Due to the differences that exist among Christians about when one is saved there are differing conceptions of salvation.

3.2 Nature and Locus of the Need

Of the six dimensions upon which the various conceptions of salvation differ is nature and locus of the need for salvation. What actually is the purpose to which the work of salvation was put? Or from what are believers saved? There are believers who think that the purpose of salvation is to reconcile humanity with God. This reconciliation is needed as a result of the sin imputed into all of humanity. Due to this sin, humanity is alienated from its creator, God. Salvation is therefore needed to restore trust and confidence between God and His created beings. There are other Christians who look at the need for salvation as arising from the wrong those human beings have done to each other. Liberation theologies like Black Theology, Latin American Liberation Theology and Feminists Theology believe the need for salvation goes beyond reconciliation with God. Such theologies look at physical salvation in terms of removal of all forms of oppression and injustices. To them, the application of the redemptive work of Christ is extended to the wronged, the destitute, the oppressed and the poor. The

theologies in view contend that as long as the conditions of the less privileged in the society do not improve, their total salvation is in abeyance. On the part of liberation theologies, the need and locus of salvation lies precisely in the removal of all forms of injustices and human oppression for which they are agitating.

3.4 The Medium of Salvation

What are the means by which salvation is applied to believers? This question is concerned with the medium by which the redemptive work of Christ is applied to individual believers. While some Christians contend that salvation is applied to the heart of individual believers through the agency of the Holy Spirit only, there are others who believe that apart from this singular work of the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption to believers, there is the agency of the sacraments. Sacramentalians or Sacerdotalists, as other traditional evangelical theologians like Benjamin B. Warfield (1989) called them, believe that by partaking of the sacraments, grace is conveyed to the believer, *ex opere operato* (automatically). Thus, Christians have over the years differed on the basis of the medium through which salvation is applied to individual believers.

3.5 The Extent of Salvation

Another major doctrinal point on salvation upon which Christians differ is the extent of salvation: who is saved? In traditional theology, the answers to this question have been classified under *universalism* and *particularism*. The two differ on their conception of the extent of salvation. Universalism states that God in His plan and dealing with humans has willed that all be saved. The universal call to respond to the gospel is therefore made to all of humanity. By universal acceptance of the gospel, all will come to salvation. However, particularistic view finds God willing to save particular individuals. Hence, according to this view, salvation is sufficient to all that were selected to be saved. Only the chosen (elect) ones who have been selected according to the will of God since the beginning of the world will come to faith and be saved. All others who were bypassed in that selection are left to their wickedness to perish. Calvinism consistently maintains this view. On whether salvation is meant and is available to all or select individuals, there are differences of opinion among theologians.

3.6 The Objects of Salvation

Different beliefs exist among Christians on whether it is only human beings that receive salvation or the cosmos too is object of salvation. In other

words, is cosmic renewal part of the redemptive work of God or only descendants of Adam and Eve? While some particularists and Universalists contend that salvation is accomplished for, and applied to, only Christians, there are many among them who appeal to Romans 8:18-26 to argue that cosmic renewal is an integral part of the redemptive work of Christ. Thus, salvation merited by that work is extended to the created world that was cursed together with humanity. Their main line of argument is that, if the whole earth groans with all of humanity as a result of the curse that arose by disobedience of Adam and Eve, why will it be, that the benefits that accrued from the obedience of Christ – the remedy for the disobedience of Adam and Eve – not be applied to the cosmos? Hence, on the basis of the object of salvation, Christians differ.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

What do you consider to be some of the dimensions upon which the various conceptions about salvation are based?

4.0 CONCLUSION

Over the years, Christians held different conceptions on the application of salvation. There is no uniformity of opinion among believers on: to whom, for whom and to what extent, salvation is applied. There is also another basis upon which Christians differ on their conception of salvation. You learned in this Unit that this has to do with time – when are believers saved? Different Christians throughout the history of the Church have held numerous divergent views on the application of salvation to believers (whether individually or collectively). You are at this point in your study of this Course, equipped to make an independent evaluation of the conceptions on the application of salvation to humanity.

5.0 SUMMARY

You were told in section 2 of this Unit, the section where learning objectives were stated, that at the end of this Unit you should be able to state and evaluate various conceptions of salvation. The following conceptions were discussed as dimensions upon which the various conceptions differ: time, nature and locus of salvation, the extent of salvation and the objects of salvation. These are a sample of dimensions and many others may exist. The Tutor-Marked Assignments listed below will help you to demonstrate how well you have achieved the stated objectives through your study of the various conceptions on the application of salvation. The next Unit will discuss the Plan of Salvation. The

knowledge you have gained in this Unit should prepare you for an easy understanding of the next Unit. You should therefore complete all the assignments in the next section before moving over to the next Unit.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Enumerate and explain at least four (4) dimensions upon which the various conceptions on salvation differ.
2. What is your own conception of the application of Salvation? Give reason(s) for your answer.
3. Who is, or, can be saved?

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UNIT2 ATONEMENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
 - 3.1 The Necessity of Atonement
 - 3.2 The Nature of Atonement
 - 3.3 The Extent of Atonement
 - 3.4 The Efficacy of Atonement
- 4.0 Summary
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- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last Unit, you learned about the various dimensions upon which various conceptions about salvation are based. These were discussed under the topic, various conceptions of salvation. One of the various conceptions of salvation that you learned in the previous Unit was the locus and need of salvation. The present Unit will discuss this theme further under the topic, the necessity of atonement. Why was it necessary for Christ to die the death of sinners though He was not a sinner? You also learned in the previous Unit that one of the points upon which Christians differ on their own conception of salvation was the nature of salvation. You will learn about this further in this Unit under the topic, the nature of atonement. You will also learn about the extent of atonement – to what extent does Christ’s redemptive work actually save sinners? To put it in another way, does Christ’s atoning sacrifice actually atone for all the sins of believers or was it for some but not all?

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this unit is to equip you to be able to:

- State the necessity of atonement
- Explain the extent of atonement

- Discuss the efficacy of atonement

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 The Necessity of Atonement

The Doctrine of Salvation (soteriology) deals with two aspects of redemption. Firstly, it explains the work of redemption accomplished by Christ. This aspect of salvation is discussed under the theme: atonement. Atonement denotes a means by which fallen sinners are reconciled with God (Ekem, 2005 p. 2). Secondly, the doctrine discusses exhaustively how that accomplished work of Christ is applied to individual believers. In other words, the second aspect of salvation that the doctrine teaches is how the gift of salvation merited by Christ on the Cross of Cavalry becomes that of believers. For most theologians of the twentieth century Presbyterianism, the doctrine of salvation can best be discussed under redemption accomplished and redemption applied (cf. Murray 1955). This Unit will discuss the first aspect of salvation, i.e. the work of salvation as accomplished by Christ. The second aspect will be discussed in the Units that will follow.

The work of redemption is known in historic Christian thought as atonement. Atonement here refers to the Old Testament Levitical sacrifices when the sacrifice of an animal was offered in exchange for the blood of the sinner. These sacrifices had a number of purposes. There were sacrifices offered to remove the sin of a person or group of people. There were other sacrifices that were offered for the purpose of reconciling humans with God. Another purpose of Levitical sacrifices was to pacify God by covering the sin of the sinner in such a way that the sin so covered is forgiven by God. Words like expiation, propitiation and reconciliation are used to describe the purpose of atonement. In a sentence, atonement is the process through which the sins of believers were removed and forgiven.

But a logical question to ask is: why was it necessary to atone for the sins of humanity? In other words, why did God kill His own Son for the sins committed by others? Was there no other way that God could have forgiven the sins of humanity except to kill His own Son? The moment you attempt to answer any or all of these questions, you are dealing with the necessity of atonement. The question of the necessity of atonement arises out of a quest

to know the origin of Christ's death. Why Christ had to die is the actual question of atonement. You will learn in what follows two categories of answers to the question of the necessity of atonement.

Hypothetical Necessity

Firstly, there were theologians like St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas (in the patristic and medieval periods respectively) who maintained that the necessity of atonement is hypothetical. The hypothetical necessity view of atonement arose from the conviction of some theologians that an Omnipotent God (cf. Unit 1) could have chosen to save humanity through other means but choose the path of atoning sacrifice "because this is the way in which the greatest number of advantages concur and the way in which grace is more marvelously exhibited" (Murray 1955, p. 12). The sovereign will of God to save humanity does not at any point put Him under compulsion to do anything for humanity other than the choice on the part of God to have mercy on whom He has chosen to show mercy, the view maintains. This been the case, it was not necessary for God to sacrifice anyone on account of sinners.

According to the hypothetical necessity view, a human sacrifice was not necessary for God to accomplish His redemptive plan solely because He possesses all the powers to even make a declaration that the "sins of humanity are forgiven" and that will be it. To conceive of such a powerful God been under compulsion to go the way of substitutionary sacrifice in order to save humankind is almost nonsensical.

Consequent Absolute Necessity

Secondly, there are other theologians who are not as sympathetic to the omnipotent God as the hypothetical view. According to Murray (1955), the word "consequent" in the construction "consequent absolute necessity" "points to the fact that God's will or decree to save any is of free and sovereign grace" (p.12). To save humanity, according to this view, was not of absolute necessity – because the decision to save in itself is of free will on the part of God – but of sovereign choice not controlled by the one receiving the saving grace. Therefore, it should not be construed that the designation "absolute necessity" carries the import that it was absolutely necessary for God to tread the path of substitutionary sacrifice without which He could not have actualized the will to save. The Absolute necessary is qualified by the adjective "consequent". The absolute necessity arises as a consequence of a sovereign decision made by God. This means

that having decreed to save humanity, God was under absolute necessity to consequently accomplish the purpose of this saving decree through the sacrifice of His only Son, a “necessity” arising from the perfections of God’s own nature. Therefore, the compulsion to sacrifice Jesus Christ arose from God’s own perfect nature. The justice of God demands that sin must be punished. Humankind was liable to that punishment. But God made a sovereign decision to save humankind from death. However, not without a satisfaction for the sin committed. The satisfaction for the sins committed must come from a sacrifice commensurate to the gravity of the sins committed. The requirement of the law must be met for the sins to be removed so that salvation on the part of the sinner is assured. Since such a perfect sacrifice is unattainable within the human race it became necessary that God sacrificed His own Son in order to accomplish His plan to save humanity. The sacrifice of the Son became necessary as a result of the decree of God to save. For a theology that is worth the name Christian, disputes arising out of interpretations of divine acts are resolved by obedient recourse to biblical authority. You must begin to ask yourself what the Bible really says about the necessity of atonement.

Evidence from the Bible

It is not as if when one opens the Bible he or she finds all answers to all questions. Everyone would wish this was the case. The emphasis on “obedient recourse to biblical authority” points to the fact that once it is granted the biblical revelation is authoritative to such an extent that it is dependable in controversial issues such as the necessity of atonement; it provides a guide for its accurate interpretation. Where the Bible itself is viewed as a site for ideological and class struggle and therefore viewed and approached with a deep sense of suspicion (cf. Mosala, 1985 & 86; Gerald O. West 1985) it is no longer helpful inviting the Bible to preside over debates like the precise need for atonement. But once it is granted that Scripture is authoritative in matters like this, it is worth the efforts of appealing to Scripture.

The argument put forward by the author of Hebrews seems to suggest that God could not have chosen any means to save humanity other than by vicarious sacrifice. Hebrews 9:9-14 identifies Levitical sacrifices as type, examples or the replica of the actual sacrifice necessary for the atonement of humanity to be offered by Christ. From verses 22-28, the author says more explicitly that the Levitical sacrifices with animals were exemplars and were specifically patterned after the things in heaven (verse 23). The necessity of the blood-shed, Murray argues, in the Levitical sacrifices emerged from the fact that the heavenly sacrifices – the sacrifice of Christ –

after which the Old Testament sacrifices were fashioned was a sacrifice of blood-shed (1955 p. 15). If sacrifices offered for the purpose of expiation are generally blood-sacrifices it is difficult to conceive of Christ's sacrifice of expiation as of hypothetical necessity. Purification necessitates a blood sacrifice. In this case, the necessity of atonement is inevitably of consequent absolute necessity. You may refer to other biblical passages in order to arrive either at a similar conclusion or your own independent conclusion.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

What would you consider to be the necessity of atonement?

3.2 The Nature of the Atonement

What exactly is the nature of the atoning work of Christ? It is one thing to know the necessity of atonement. It is entirely another to explore the nature of atonement. The former had to deal with the issue of whether it is important or not, and if it is, what made it so important that vicarious sacrifice be the mode of atonement for the sins of humanity? This present concern is precisely with the inherent nature of atonement. Murray (1955) provides you with a helpful guide to the understanding of the nature of atonement. To him, this atonement is (1) sacrifice, (2) propitiation, (3) reconciliation and (4) redemption.

Before discussing each of the four points mentioned above, it is important to first look at the broader way Scripture and most Christian theologians describe what made this atonement possible. The central theme in the work of Christ is obedience. In the Old Testament, a passage that clearly speaks of the work of Christ as that of a suffering servant is Isaiah 53 (Murray, 1955 p. 19). In verse 11, the servant is described as "righteous". The justifying work of this servant based on the fact that he is righteous is "reaped" through suffering. To bear testimony to this claim made by Isaiah, the suffering servant states categorically in John 6:38 that he came to do only the will of the one that sent him. Reading Isaiah and John together in a juxtaposition you will begin to gain some insight into Christ's atoning work as work achieved through obedience.

Paul sums it up all in Romans 5, the justification by grace through the righteous son passage of the New Testament. To Paul, "many" (cf. Isaiah 53:11) became sinners and stood condemned because of the disobedience of one man. Similarly, these "many" became righteous through the

obedience of one man. Obedience is the key word here: it was the lack of it that brought condemnation and the presence of it justification.

It is in recognition of the two-fold benefit arising from the obedience of Christ in the redemptive economy that many evangelicals speak of the two-fold obedience of Christ: the *passive* and *active* obedience. By His passive obedience, Christ paid the penalty for our sins when He died on the cross. By His active obedience, He merited for us the gift of salvation when He met the just requirement of the law. This two-fold obedience made complete, all that was necessary to atone for the sins of humankind. It is necessary as Murray (1955 p. 20, 21) advised, for you to know the exact import of the designation of the obedience of Christ as “passive”. To describe the obedience of Christ to death as passive we do not necessarily mean that in all that Christ did to save He was inactive in the process. Passive obedience in this sense simply means that Christ allowed Himself to suffer out of own volition, not by compulsion, to pay the penalty for our sins so that we could be set free. Christ was passive in the sense that He did not turn down the invitation by the Father to save humanity. He died a shameful death on the cross. But in carrying out this deadly responsibility He was actually active. At this point you will better appreciate the four aspects that categorize the nature of the atoning work of Christ.

Sacrifice

All religions have a notion of sacrifice. The work of Christ described as sacrifice in the New Testament economy of salvation must have a particular and peculiar connotation. What is this sacrifice you may ask? Murray who to the best of my knowledge has written most elaborately on this says finding an answer to this question demands searching to find out what was the notion of sacrifice in the New Testament times when Christ atoned for sinners. Hebrews 9 makes it clear that Old Testament sacrifices were fashioned after the heavenly sacrifice that Christ would offer. If this is the case, it will not be out of place to begin to search for the New Testament notion of sacrifice – to what purpose and effect were they offered – in the Old Testament understanding of same. The Old Testament describes sacrifice as expiation. They were offered for the purpose of removing guilt and cleansing sin. Sacrifice in the Old Testament economy of salvation was a divine initiative whereby sin is covered and divine wrath and disfavor or curse is removed (Murray, 1955 p. 25). The sacrifice of Christ, the heavenly sacrifice on the pattern according to which the Old Testament sacrifices were fashioned was offered to cover the sins of humanity and to remove the guilt of humankind. That the atoning work of Christ is construed as sacrifice is Catholic. The extent of atonement is the dimension

upon which some various conceptions and differences exist among Christian churches and traditions. But there is a general agreement that the atoning work of Jesus Christ is to be construed as sacrifice.

Propitiation

By now you should be conversant with the idea that one of the aspects of the effects of atonement is the “covering” of the sin of the one on whose behalf the sacrifice is offered. New Testament passages like Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; I John 2:2, 4:10 point to the fact that the death of Christ on the cross was to cover the sins of humanity. Since the Old Testament sacrifices were prototype and exemplars of the sacrifice of Christ, and whereas the purpose to which these sacrifices were put to was to cover the sins of the person(s) on whose behalf the sacrifices were offered, it is legitimate to construe the death of Christ as propitiation. Propitiation in this sense carries the import that the sins being atoned for is remembered no more and is therefore forgiven (cf. Lev. 4:32).

Reconciliation

One of the effects of sin that you learnt in Module 1 was alienation from God. The idea of sin itself contradicts God’s holiness. Thus, the sinner is liable to divine disfavor until he or she is reinstated through atoning sacrifice. This was the arrangement in the Old Testament economy of salvation. In the New Testament economy of salvation, however, once a person believes, the person becomes reconciled with God and his or her sins remembered no more. Reconciliation presupposes that there was alienation between the parties that are so reconciled. In this case, reconciliation between human beings and God carries the import that alienation existed between God and men/women. Paul describes the reunion between human beings and their creator, God, when he states quite eloquently that since we have been justified through faith we have peace with God and His son Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1). The basis for justification and the subsequent peace with God is the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross. It is the active obedience of Christ that is the ground for the justification by faith. The righteousness that is needed to discharge and acquit a sinner was done by Christ – the product of His active obedience. Since the sin on the basis for which alienation came between God and humankind is paid for, and the righteousness that is needed for the justice of God to be fulfilled, is successfully met in the singular act of Christ’s righteousness and vicarious death on the cross there is peace between

humankind and God. We now have peace with God is the Pauline contention. Granted that the argument thus far is compelling, it will follow that we are to construe the atoning work of Christ as reconciliation between God and humanity.

Redemption

As a student of Christian theology it is hard to imagine that a situation might have arisen where you are not familiar with the import of John 3:16. Here Jesus stated categorically that the love of God for the world necessitated that once a person believes in Him, the person must not perish but have eternal life. How else are we to understand the atoning work of Christ than to accept the reason given by Christ Himself for atonement? It is clear from the construction of the entire context of John 3 that the redemption we are concerned with here, is redemption through purchase with a ransom. There is a penalty imposed on humanity and the entire world as a result of sin. This penalty is death. The entire world was to perish but for the love of God for it. This love of God for the world is expressed so marvelously that it caused God the death of His Son to redeem humanity and the world from death. The Son was exchanged for humanity and the world. If this is the arrangement God made in order to save the world including the human beings that are in it, we are at liberty to come to the conclusion that the atoning work of Christ is redemption accomplished.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Discuss exhaustively, the nature of atonement

3.3 The Efficacy of the Atonement

The question that you are concerned with in the efficacy of atonement is whether the death of Christ completely atones for the sins of humankind or there is an effort that is demanded of individual believers for their own sins. This question is necessitated by the fact that there are Christian traditions that are not at all comfortable with the idea that the sin of one man committed several years ago could be imputed into people that were after all not born at the time the sin was committed. In other words, what precisely is the sin that is contemplated when we speak of Christ's atoning death as sacrifice for sin? You lean under the doctrine of sin that there are differing conceptions on this. The same differing conceptions are exposed in the doctrine of Salvation. Since such traditions and theologians do not believe that the sin of Adam is the sin of the human race, they consistently

maintained that the death of Christ is not to be construed as removing both the original sin and the sins of individual Christians.

If the Bible speaks of the sacrifice of Christ as a once for all act (Heb. 10:14) meeting the demand of the law as it may, it is clear in Hebrews 10 that all the exigencies arising from all sins have been sufficiently met in Christ. This way, there is no ground upon which we may base our arguments, at least from the Protestant perspective, that individual sins of human beings could be paid for through the instrumentality of their good works. However, there are quite some pretty impressive arguments for a contrary view (see Rahner, 1996 pp. 110-114). As a student of theology, you are at liberty to make your own analysis of the efficacy of atonement.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Explain what is meant by the efficacy of atonement

3.4 The Extent of Atonement

Similar to the question discussed above is who did Christ atone for? To put it in another way: for whom did Christ die? You learned already in the treatment of the doctrine of sin that there are differing views concerning the origin of sin. There are some who maintain that sin is never imputed. Humanity therefore has no culpability or liability in the sin of Adam. There are others who are willing to contend that it was the sin of Adam that indeed brought sin and its consequences into the world. All these views about sin have implications on how the atonement for sin is to be construed. Related to it is the question of divine decree and sovereignty. In God's sovereign will, is He at liberty to choose whom He pleases unto salvation and therefore destined the reprobates – the non-elect – to perdition? Or God's justice and love for all, not willing that any person may perish, compels Him to offer salvation to everyone. Next to it is the question of whether it is left for any member of the human race to embrace salvation. Or by virtue of being non-elect there are some who though may be willing but are predestined never to come to salvation despite Christ's death on the cross? The question of the extent of atonement has to do with all these range of issues: beginning with divine sovereign acts in the process of salvation to human free, will to the meaning of Christ's death on the cross and how one comes to faith.

Anyone who believes that the sin of Adam was his own sin individually and there is no organic (inseparable) connection between the sin of Adam and ours will certainly ignore or give an alternative interpretation other than

those given by evangelicals (in the broadest sense of the word) to Romans 5. This means that they will logically have to maintain that the death of Christ carries the import of making grace available for willing people to grab. In this sense, atonement will be for everyone including the unbelievers. There are also biblical passages from both testaments that apparently warrant such a contention. Isaiah 53 states explicitly that God laid on Christ the iniquities of not just the entire human race but those of the world. I John 2:2 affirms the claim of Isaiah by saying that Christ was a propitiation for all of us and the world. If this is the case, the Universalists have a point by claiming that Christ did not die for the sins of particular individuals but for the whole world and for the entire human race.

Particularists are vehement on their insistence that particular persons, out of God's sovereign will, were elected on to salvation. Because of this choice on the part of God, they are giving the grace to persevere in faith until the return of Christ at the end of the age. Divine decree must come to pass. Since the elect are predestined unto salvation, there is no way under any circumstance that these would fail to come to faith and perish. For this group of people too, there are scriptural passages to support their viewpoint. Romans 8:29-31 is one of such classical texts that teach predestination of specific persons unto salvation. For those that God knew before the creation of the world, these He also predestined to conform to the image of His Son. For those He predestined, He also gave them the grace to persevere to the end.

But there is also another perspective to the question of the extent of atonement. Whether or not one maintains the view that the death of Christ was only for the elect, the question is also raised about the sufficiency of atonement. Was it sufficient to cover the sins of all for whom it was meant or individuals will have to make their own salvation sure? In other words, does the death of Christ actually save?

People maintain different views on this question as well. There are some who insist that the death of Christ made grace available, or to put it in another way, Christ's death was sufficient to make salvation possible to all for whom Christ died. The responsibility of human beings is not to resist this grace. There are others who contend that the death of Christ placed into the church the instrument of grace for her to dispense to members. In this way, by part-taking in the means of grace – the sacraments – the members come to make their own calling and salvation sure (Rahner, 1976 p. 282; see also Erickson, 1985 p.902). The sacraments therefore convey grace automatically. Hence, there is no salvation outside the church. But there are theologians who reject this view. According to them, the death of Christ

atones for all the sins of the world and of humanity. Thus, a believer comes into faith through effectual calling. The calling initiated by God and effected through the instrument of the Holy Spirit in such a way that the one so called must favorably respond to the divine call to salvation.

However, the “all” is limited to those for whom Christ died. What this means is that in as much as the death of Christ is sufficient to save everyone; and that it is efficacious in the sense that it actually saves, it was not meant to save everyone but only the elect. Others could however benefit from the blessings accrued to the world from the atoning work of Christ. This is called common grace. A situation whereby unbelievers like believers enjoy the blessings of God accrued to humankind is referred to as common grace. A special grace is however, an exclusive privilege of the saints (believers).

Vatican Council II broke the view previously maintained as the official position of the Roman Catholic Church with respect to where and to whom grace is dispensed. Prior to Vatican II, the official position was that saving grace is entrusted in the hands of the church that dispenses it to members who part-take of the sacraments, especially of baptism and Eucharist. At Vatican II, a decision was taken to appreciate and accept the legitimacy of grace among religions and adherents of non-Christian religions. Therefore, the church sees salvation outside of the church even in non-Christian religions. What all these means is that atonement of Christ is sufficient for all the sins of humanity.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

For whom did Christ die?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The necessity of atonement arose out of the love of God to save humanity and the world. Having made the decision to save humanity by paying the price for their sins, it was necessary for the holiness and justice of God to accomplish that plan. So the vicarious death of Christ accomplished the redemptive plan. While there are differing views on for whom exactly Christ died, there is evidence in Scripture to suggest that the passive and active obedience of Christ has indeed merited all Christians the gift of salvation.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this Unit, you learnt about the necessity of atonement. There are different views on the necessity of atonement. Two of these views are the hypothetical necessity and consequent absolute necessity. The hypothetical necessity view sees the need for atonement in comparative grace. That there were other means that God could have used to save humanity but He chose the path of vicarious sacrifice because this is the way by which grace is more marvelously attained. The consequent absolute necessity states that the absolute necessity of atonement arose from divine love, justice and holiness. God decrees to save humanity therefore it became necessary that this decree must come to pass. Since the justice and holiness of God demands that sin must be covered and removed, the vicarious death of Christ was the only option. You also learned of the various biblical passages that support the differing conceptions on the nature, necessity and extent of atonement. You must note that what you learnt in this Unit and Module are basic ideas about the doctrine of salvation. In fact, the contents of this Module are introductory. You will take a 300 level course completely devoted to the doctrine of salvation. This will be CTH 322 Pneumatology and Soteriology. You should expect a more detailed discussion of the doctrine of salvation in that course.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. What is atonement?
2. State and discuss the nature of atonement.
3. Argue with biblical support, whether or not Christ died for “all”?
4. What should a person do in order to receive grace?
5. Is there any possibility of salvation outside the Church? Why and why not?

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UNIT 3 THE ORDER OF SALVATION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
 - 3.1 Explanation of the Concept Order of Salvation
 - 3.2 The Order of Application of Salvation
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

You learnt in the previous Unit about atonement. You learned that the aspect of the work of Christ that atonement describes is the payment of the penalty for our sins. In this present Unit, you will learn how this work of Christ is applied to the individual Christian. How does one get to benefit from the accomplished work of Christ? If you are to use the description of evangelicals to explain the main concerns of this Unit you would say that the Unit deals with how the Holy Spirit applies the work of Jesus Christ to individual Christians. Granted that Christ died for the elect as some particularists maintain, how does the accomplishment of that death become the fulfillment of the promises of grace to the life of the individual elect? Furthermore, if the righteousness of Christ is imputed – credited – to the life of believers, how does this take place? Atonement is redemption accomplished and the Order of Salvation deals with redemption applied to the life of the believers. This is how John Murray and many other evangelical theologians describe it. Do not forget that in this Unit you are dealing with the application of the work of Christ to the believers.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After a careful study of this unit you should be able to:

- Explain the meaning of the order of salvation
- Enumerate and discuss key elements and stages in the order of salvation

- Relate what you have studied in this Unit to previous Units you have studied.

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 Explanation of the Concept of the Order of Salvation

The order of salvation with which we are concerned in this Unit attest to the fact that God is God of order. When Paul mentioned to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 10:44) that everything should be done in an orderly manner he was reminding them of the nature of God as God of orderliness. If this is the case, it is not out of place to think that in His application of the saving work of Christ to believers God could do it in an orderly manner. It took planning for God to save humanity. That planning was necessitated by the inevitability of order in accomplishing purposeful goals including salvation of the entire earth and all that is in it. In discussing the order of the application of salvation to the individual lives of believers we are explaining the process and the various stages through which this noble goal is accomplished. You cannot presuppose that an orderly God would prefer to adopt people unto salvation as sons and daughters before calling them to come to faith. The process of coming to faith does not in any way simultaneously involve glorification which we all know is a fate believers contemplate will come at the end of the age. Order of salvation therefore denotes the process that the atoning work of Christ is applied to the life of Christians.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

What is the main concern of this Unit?

3.2 The Order of Application of Salvation

A careful study of biblical records of the process of redemption as it is applied to believers reveals that a number of events and stages are involved. These events and stages are distinct in their inherent nature, each serving a particular purpose until believers will come to full benefit of the work accomplished by Christ. You should note however, that the process of application of salvation is never finally completed in a believer's life time on earth. Therefore, you should begin to think right from the onset that the process commenced from the call to come to faith and is not fully completed until the believer is glorified with Christ. In this section you will learn of all the events that are involved in the process in the order in which

they take place. They are: Effectual Calling, Regeneration, Repentance and Faith, Justification, Adoption, Sanctification, Perseverance, Union with Christ; and finally, glorification. There are however some disagreements on the actual order of some of these events. For example: while others would want to list conversion (repentance and faith) next to effectual calling there are others who think that regeneration should come first. Details of some of these contentions are to be studied in CTH322 Pneumatology and Soteriology.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Attempt a description of the concept of the order of salvation

Effectual Calling

It is a common belief that salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2). Once we are willing to accept that salvation is a definitive act of the part of God we are not in any difficult to abrogate to Him the power to initiate salvation. If this is the case, you will notice that the first act of salvation will be for the same author and initiator of salvation to take the first step in the process of making salvation available to the one to whom salvation is being applied. This first step is to call such a person to repentance and faith, since salvation is received by the sinner through faith. The qualification “effectual” in the concept of effecting calling sets apart two distinct types of callings. First, there is a universal call of the gospel for all who want to believe to come to faith. Secondly, there is a call arising from the special grace and justifiable love of God to particular and specific believers which they cannot resist. This second type of calling is effectual in the sense that the one so called favorably respond to the gospel call. The universal call of the gospel now becomes an opportunity and event for those so effectually called to come to respond to faith. You should refer to the previous Units in this Module where limited atonement was discussed as the view of salvation maintained by Calvinists and other particularists. Those are the ones who are at home with the view of select people effectually responding to the universal call of the gospel such that they come to faith due to predestination. Others who already rejected the doctrine of election and predestination will consistently reject the idea of effectual calling of some. In any case, biblical evidences such as Mathew 22:14 where it is explicitly written that many are called but few are chosen seems to suggest that there is effectual calling and universal call where not all that listen to the call respond to it. Why make the call to them anyway, if it has not been given to them to come to faith? Particularists would refer such questions to the argument of Paul in Romans 1, where he says that the gospel is made

available to the unregenerate mind who cannot know God to leave such a mind without excuse. But whether one subscribes to the view that some are effectually called while others are universally called but not chosen or not, the point here is that in the application of salvation it is the effectual call to respond to the gospel that is first.

Regeneration

You have seen in the preceding discussion that salvation is of the Lord. You also learnt that it is the Lord that take the initial step in applying salvation to people through the agency of the Holy Spirit by effectually calling such persons to faith. Granted the above, it becomes necessary to explore what it is that enables those that are co-called to respond to the call. Paul is quite explicit on a number of things regarding salvation especially the inability of any person to come to this saving grace independently of God. In Romans 8:8 he states categorically that unbelievers cannot please God. This is a clear indication that it is impossible for any fallen being to effectually respond to the gospel call no matter the manner through which the call is made. The very nature of the unbelievers is enmity with God and this was clearly discussed under the doctrine of sin. So if it is God that makes the effectual call, according to His divine purpose, it is the Lord that is under consequent absolute necessity to accomplish what He has initiated. In doing this, God puts into people a spiritual and moral change that enables them to effectually respond to the gospel call of salvation. It is the Lord who gives a new heart to an unregenerate person in such a way that he/she necessarily responds to the gospel call of salvation (Ezekiel 36:26). It seems logical, then, to conclude that regeneration immediately precedes effectual calling since it is by regeneration that one is able to respond to the gospel call so made. Do not forget that Karl Rahner and Jack Mahoney in their works that you read in Module 1 deny any possibility of moral depravity in humanity as a result of Adam's sin. To them therefore, it is nonsensical to think that people are not in any way able to come to respond to the gospel on their own except they are moved by God. You may have similar uneasiness regarding this doctrine. If this is the case you may be thinking that it is best to consider regeneration as the first step and event in the process of application of salvation since people can be agents of their own salvation. You can further explore other arguments and test them over against scriptural passages used to support such arguments. In this way, you will be on your way to becoming a theologian yourself!

Self-Assessment Exercise #3

Relate Regeneration to Effectual Calling and Repentance and Faith

Repentance and Faith

The purpose of regeneration proceeding effectual calling is to enable the one so called to favorably respond to the gospel call so as to come to salvation. It is therefore unthinkable that after being regenerate, the condition requisite for a believer to please God, the regenerate fails to come to faith. Repentance itself involves two-fold turning: it is turning away from sin and turning towards God. And this is what is afterwards described as conversion. Conversion is an event whereby a sinner turns away from sin and come to a believing (saving) knowledge of Christ. A person who comes to Christ is said to have believed in Jesus and hence, to have come to faith. We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). This faith comes through regeneration. Thus, regeneration is the salvation event that enables a person to repent and come to faith.

Justification

Justification is the process whereby God declares a sinner righteous. It is a gracious pronouncement on the part of God that we are no longer culpable or liable to punishment as a result of sin. You learned in your study of the doctrine of sin that sin involves pollution of the sinner and liability of the sin to punishment by death. But you also learned that atonement involves covering and removal of that sin so that the sinner is no longer polluted. But what about the liability to punishment because the sinner lacks the basic moral exhibition required by the law? This is where justification comes to play. You must note that the justification that we are concerned with here is justification by faith through the imputed righteousness of Christ. We are declared righteous forensically on the basis of no good works of ours, but that the requirement of the law arising from the grace and justice of God for one to be free was met by Christ. Faith in Christ then becomes the basis upon which we are so declared. This is precisely what Paul has in mind when he says that as a result of been justified by faith through Christ's righteousness we have peace with God (Rom. 5). Again, you should refer to the arguments under the discussion of the doctrine of sin for contrary views of Pelagians and Armenians. Since this justification is by faith, it is logical to think that justification follows repentance and faith in the application of redemption to the life of the sinner. More debates on this are contained in the Course CTH 322 Pneumatology and Soteriology.

Adoption

One of the effects of sin you studied in the previous Module was divine disfavor. One of the effects of justification is to reverse the situation of the sinner by God. The sinner is now declared a sinless person. Since sin was the event during which the sinner lost favor with God, its absence in humanity in that sense of it brings favor back to the sinner. After justification, the sinner is once again adopted as son or daughter of the Creator with all the attending benefits and privileges of an heir in God's household. John makes this clear when he states that as many as received Christ, Christ gave them the power to become the children of God (v.12 compare the preceding v. 11). The requisite condition for adoption of the repentant sinner is justification. He or she must be first declared to be innocent and therefore righteous before coming into God's arms. The concept of adoption in itself carries with it an import that the person so adopted was previously not a child of God. Prior to adoption, Israel was rejected as a result of sin. God said to them "you are not my people" as we see in the name of one of the children of Hosea, *Lo Amin*. Your sins I shall remember no more and I shall write my laws in the hearts of my own people" was God's words to the same Israel in Jeremiah 31 in anticipation of Israel's justification in the New Covenant. This means that adoption logically follows the justification.

Sanctification

Sanctification is a process of cleansing. What is the purpose of this cleansing? The purpose of sanctification is to return humanity back to the state of being in the image of the Creator. If sin was the event in the life of the human race that puts people at logger head with God, its continued presence in the life of the adopted child of God is inconceivable. The overall purpose of the effectual call and regeneration is that the repented sinner no longer sins or at least no longer lives under the servitude of sin. I John 1:9 states clearly that the children of God do not sin because the seed of God that is Christ lives in them.

Sanctification is both definitive – in terms of the achievement of the passive obedience of Christ – and progressive in terms of continued daily cleansing of the believer. While the former is a once for all act on the part of God the latter is a progressive act on the part of the believer. After adoption as children of God the ones so adopted must remain in faith until they attain the glorified state of the children when Christ returns. This is progressive sanctification.

Self-Assessment Exercise #4

Why is sanctification necessary after one is justified?

Perseverance

It is on the basis of the need arising from perseverance of faith that the sanctification of the believer is necessary. Thus, in the order of the application of salvation, perseverance of the saints comes after sanctification. One of the contentious areas concerning the doctrine of salvation is the point of perseverance of the saints. Does it mean that once one is appointed on to salvation, no matter what happens, the person shall remain in faith until Christ's return? For the Calvinist and particularists, if it is God that had predestined people to salvation He must accomplish that purpose. By accomplishing this purpose, God must put in place all the enabling circumstances for the ones effectually called to faith to remain in faith. If this is the contention, there is reason to think as Paul did that for those whom God calls and justifies He also sanctified. If God has gone to such an extent of sanctifying them so that they remain in His favor, there is no reason to think that God will not continue to make good His plan to save those so called by giving them the Spirit to persevere to the end. Therefore, Paul adds that for those He sanctified, He also gave them the power to persevere until they are glorified (Rom. 8:29-31). Since the return of Christ is a mystery known unto God alone, it is through perseverance that those who are actually children of God are known. Certainly, perseverance is the only sure way that the adopted children of God will experience their glorification. Perseverance of the saints therefore precedes their glorification.

Glorification

The whole purpose of beginning the process of application of the accomplished work of salvation to the individual life of believers is glorification. In other words, the process of application of salvation that begins with effectual calling is consummated in the glorification of the children of God. This glorification is the final state of being that believers will enter in a sanctified state of life. When will this take place? I Corinthians 15 and I Thessalonians 5 all attest to the fact that glorification will follow the final resurrection of believers. It is an aspect of grand events marking the end of ages. Unlike adoption and other redemptive events in the life of individual believers, glorification of believers shall take place all at the same time. There is no further event to follow glorification since all

events marking the application of salvation are geared towards the attainment of glorification of the believer with Christ. At this point, all believers, dead and living, shall be raised or transformed in their newness of life free of corruption as a result of sin. They will be glorified in their perfect state and shall reign with Christ forever. This is the purpose of salvation, namely; that believers are glorified. Glorification therefore is the final stage in the application of the work accomplished on the cross by Christ.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In all that God does, He does so according to plan. In His plan of salvation God has put in place a process that will bring to fruition His initial desire for humankind. After Christ paid the penalty for the sins of fallen humans and consequently met the requirement of the law arising from the justice and holiness of God, it was left for this work to be made available to the actual receiving of salvation by those for whom it was meant. It is at that point that we raised the question of how the redemptive work of Christ became that of the sinners. You can now conveniently conclude that God first called people to accept the gospel and by so doing became regenerate people capable of repentance and faith. Those who come unto faith are also justified and sanctified in that order until they attain glorification.

5.0 SUMMARY

You have come to the end of this Module that deals with the doctrine of salvation. In this entire Module, you learnt about the meaning of salvation, the medium of salvation, the doctrine of atonement and now, in this last Unit, you studied how the work of salvation done by Christ is applied to the individual lives of the believers. In the next Module you will be exposed to the doctrine of the church and of the Last Things. You are already introduced to an aspect of some of the events that shall take place at the end of the age, namely; glorification of believers. Thus, you will notice that all the doctrines of the Christian church are interrelated and bound together with one another. In your study of the next Module, you should make frantic efforts to link its contents with the rest of the discussions in this Course Material. I wish you a happy study of the next Module but make sure that you do all your assignments in this Module before proceeding to study the next Module.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. What is order of salvation?
2. How is a sinner justified?
3. Explain the relationship, if any, between regeneration and effectual calling.
4. What in your own opinion will make someone to fall off from the grace after been justified by God?
5. What is the order of application of salvation, if any?

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Ecclesiology – is done in the course CTH 325 Ecclesiology. This Unit is therefore a basic introduction to the study of Ecclesiology.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit is designed in such a way that after a careful study, you should be able to:

- Define Ecclesiology
- Show the Relationship between Ecclesiology and Eschatology
- State some of the implications of the doctrines of Ecclesiology on the study of other doctrines

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is Ecclesiology?

Ecclesiology is the study of doctrine of the church. The word *ecclesia* in Greek is rendered “church” in English language. In the Old Testament, the closest word for the church is *qahal* “an assembly”. If you put the Hebrew and the Greek names for the church together, you will define the church as an assembly of believers. However, in ordinary usage, you will hear people say to each other: “I am going to church”, others say “we are building a new church”. Sometimes denominations are also called “churches” (Clowney, 1995). None of these ordinary usages is completely out of place. This is because they all say something about the gathering of people for the purpose of worship. The various images of the church can serve as a guide to your understanding of the church, especially as an institution.

Biblical Images of the Church

There are images of the church that you can find in the Bible. Take time and look at some of the passages listed alongside these images. This will help you to better evaluate diverging views about the church.

1. The People of God. The first biblical image that you will find in the Bible is the people of God. In Numbers 14:8 and Deuteronomy 32:9-10, Israel as a nation is referred to as the people of God. Paul also makes reference to the image of the church as the people of God in 2 Corinthians 6:16. The church according to these passages, among others, is a gathering of people that God is pleased with. It is

an assembly of God's own people. This means that where the people of God exist, there is the church of God. In this sense, there is no specific geographical location where you can find the church. People's homes, markets, villages, towns, mega cities and many other places where God's people gather, there is the church. It is possible to claim on the basis of what is said here that there is church without a church building in so far as there are people of God.

2. The Body of Christ. Of all the biblical images of the church, the body of Christ stands more prominent. There is hardly any Christian community the world over that does not see the church as the body of Christ. The entire purpose of the church is to link God's people to Himself. The command of John 14 gives us some insights as to how people can come to God. The only way to the father is through Christ. The designation the body of Christ expresses the organic connection between Christ and the church. This is Christ's own body that He protects and cares for. Anything that will harm the church will harm Christ because the institution of the church carries the image of His own body. Passages like I Corinthians 12:27; Colossians 1:27; Galatians 2:20 among others clearly speak of the church as the body of Christ. The body has several parts. The parts of the body are individual members of the body where ever they are. The individuals are given divergent gifts for the purpose of building up the body (Eph. 4).
3. The Temple of the Holy Spirit. Just as the hearts of believers are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, so the church as the body of Christ is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. If all members of the church are parts of the body of Christ, and the Holy Spirit dwells in their hearts individually, it follows therefore that the church is a place, a house, where the Holy Spirit lives. I Corinthians 6:19 and I Corinthians 3:16-17 all speak of the body of Christ as the temple of the Holy Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit is the agent of both conversion and sanctification on the part of the believers, the dwelling of the Spirit in the body of Christ sanctifies the body.

You may find in other places in Scripture other images for the church. But you will be amazed that they speak of the church as all or some of the images mentioned here. In CTH 322 (Ecclesiology) you will learn about the development of the church from the Old Testament to the New Testament era. You will then notice how these images flow through the entire period of the church.

Self-Assessment Exercise #1

Identify and discuss images of the church you found in the Bible.

3.2 Relationship between Ecclesiology and Other Doctrines

Christianity is an organized religion just like other world religions. The doctrines of Christianity were carefully developed in such a way that Christians could see them logically flowing from the Bible. Your study of the other doctrines so far was to prepare you for the study of the church and the last things called eschatology. Who are the members of the church? It is God's own people. Who is the owner and head of the church? It is Christ. Who is the author of salvation of the people that are members of this church? It is God. Who sanctifies the church? It is the Holy Spirit. What is the purpose and actual mission of the church on earth? The purpose is for the church to nurture and maintain believers so that they may persevere until their glorification at the second coming of Christ (I Thessalonians 5). You will notice there is a continuum from God to the call of human beings to their final glorification at the end of the age. If you miss the doctrine of the church you will find it difficult to understand any of the other doctrines.

The centrality of the church in Christian life was greatly emphasized in the Roman Catholic Church more than any other denomination on earth before Vatican Council II. Before then, it was explicitly stated that out of the church there is no salvation. Salvation is actually taught in the church. The doctrines of the church are also learned not outside but within the corridors of the church. A wrong view of the church will lead to a wrong view of other doctrines of Christianity especially the doctrines of sin and salvation.

Self-Assessment Exercise #2

State, if any, the relationship between Ecclesiology and other doctrines you have studied in this Course.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The church is an Assembly of God's own people. The study of the church and its numerous properties, functions, government and mission is called in Christian theology, Ecclesiology. The church is often seen as the people of God, the body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Since it is within the church that everything about the Christian faith is visibly active,

its doctrine is not only central in Christian faith, but it is also organically connected to the study of all the other doctrines.

5.0 SUMMARY

You are introduced in this Unit to the study of the doctrine of the church. The church is defined as the body of Christ, the gathering of God's own people and where the Holy Spirit dwells. You also learned that the doctrine of the church is central in Christian theology. It is within the church that all doctrines are developed and taught. Review this introductory part very carefully as it is a guide to the study of the entire module.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. What is ecclesiology?
2. Define the church in your own words
3. What are the images of the church
4. Is the study of the church necessary? Why or why not?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT2 THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH

CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Apostolicity
 - 3.2 Unity
 - 3.3 Discipline of Erring Members
 - 3.4 Faithful Observance of Sacraments
 - 3.5 Propagation of the Gospel
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

You learned in the previous Unit some of the biblical images of the church. The images are identified to illumine your understanding of the institution of the church. In this Unit, you will learn some of the key features inherent in the church that could help you identify a true church. These are called marks of a true church. All reformed churches – Presbyterian, Dutch reformed, Congregational, Christian reformed among others – subscribe to these marks of a true church. Other denominations do not but there are many evangelical churches that use these marks to distinguish between a true church and a false church. Whatever is your own belief of a true and a false church, the purpose of this Unit is to introduce to you what some Christian groups see as church.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this Unit, you will be equipped to:

- Identify a true church
- Discuss the marks of a true church
- Evaluate the marks of a true church

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Apostolicity

One of the features that some Christian groups identified as a mark of a true church is apostolicity. What this means is that you should be able to trace the historical origin of the church to apostolic succession. The reason why the Catholic Church insists that the Pope is the earthly head of the church is this apostolic succession. Their argument is that Jesus Christ based on Peter's confession, appointed Peter to head and build the church on His behalf (Matt16:18). Although not every Christian church contends that Peter was so appointed by Christ in that regard, a number of mainline denominations agree that indeed a true church must have apostolic roots. If it is impossible to trace the origin of a church to the Catholic and apostolic church, then the church is an innovation of men or women here on earth for reasons and goals not clear to others.

3.2 Unity

There is hardly a Christian community that officially objects to the view that unity is a mark of a true Christian church. If there is anything that Christ was seriously concerned about just before His departure on earth it was the unity of believers. In what came to be known as high-priestly prayer in John 17, Jesus prayed so passionately for the church – the body of Christ – to be one. Unity is one of the things that mark a true church.

3.3 Discipline of Erring Members

Paul insists that everything in the church must be done in orderly manner (I Cor. 14:40). Discipline is what maintains order and diligence in a church. If members of the church who err are not disciplined, the church might become a body of evil-doers. But remember, you learned that the church is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. There is no way the Holy Spirit will continue to dwell in a place where sin or evil prevails. In this way, a church that faithfully disciplines erring members will keep its own purity. So, discipline is identified as a mark of a true Christian church.

3.4 Faithful Observance of Sacraments

For the Roman Catholic Church there are seven sacraments. For many other denominations, there are only two sacraments. Whatever the number of

sacraments a church observes is not the issue for debate here. What the issue here is, is that a church should faithfully observe the sacraments. Sacraments are signs and seal of the covenant of grace that God has put in place to convince us that our sins are forgiven. In your study of the doctrine of salvation in CTH 322 (Pneumatology and Soteriology), you will learn that there are doctrines of the church that actually teach that these sacraments are agents of salvation. This means that they convey automatically, salvation to the part-taker. This is to show the extent to which sacraments are important in a life of a church. Due to this importance, their faithful observance has been identified as a mark of a true church.

3.5 Preaching of the Word

If there is a church that cannot preach the word of God faithfully, not just to the members, but also to the rest of the world, it is difficult to think of it as a body of Christ. The most important reason for believers to assemble at a place at a given time is to listen to God. If a church exists that does not communicate the message of God as it is intended by the biblical writers, it is difficult to distinguish that church from any other gathering. For this reason, faithful preaching of the word is identified as one of the key marks of a true church.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Identify and discuss the marks of a true church

4.0 CONCLUSION

There are features that mark a true church. Some of these features are apostolicity, unity, and discipline; propagation of the gospel and observance of sacraments. A careful study of the marks of a true church will help you to differentiate between a true and a false church.

5.0 SUMMARY

You have learned in this Unit the marks of a true church. You also learned that not all Christian denominations subscribe to all or some of these sacraments. You also noticed that there is no uniformity among Christian churches on the number of sacraments that the church must observe. However, it is important that the sacraments as instituted by Christ be

observed by a church that prides as a body of Christ. Again, in CTH 325, (Ecclesiology), you will study each of these marks in a great detail.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. What are the marks of the church?
2. Why must sacraments be observed?
3. What is meant by apostolicity of the church?
4. Relate unity to discipline as marks of a church

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 3 THE INITIATORY RITE OF THE CHURCH

CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Meaning of Baptism
 - 3.2 The Mode of Baptism
 - 3.3 The Differing Views on the Purpose of Baptism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

You learned in the previous Unit about the marks of a true church. In this Unit, you will learn how members are admitted into the church-fold. You learned that the church is a body of Christ, a community of believers. This Unit is concerned with the process of how one becomes a member of this body of Christ or community of the believers. In African Traditional Religion (ATR), one is initiated into membership of a particular religious group. In Christianity too, there is initiation. The initiatory rite of the church is Christian baptism. You will learn about the meaning of Christian baptism, the mode of baptism and some of the different views on the efficacy or what baptism does in the life of a believer in this Unit.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the study of this Unit, you will be able to:

- Successfully define Christian baptism
- Clearly state and explain modes of Christian baptism
- Meaningfully discuss the efficacy of baptism
- Evaluate differing conceptions of the purpose of Christian baptism

Self-Assessment Exercise #1

What do you think is the main concern of this Unit?

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is Baptism?

That the church was commissioned to baptize is not in dispute. There are comparing reasons in Mathew 28:19 to believe that this task was given to the church by her head, Jesus Christ. Therefore, nearly all Christian churches practice baptism as a rite of initiating people into the body of believers. You learned in Unit 2 that one of the marks of a true church is faithful observance of the sacraments. Baptism and the Eucharist (Holy Communion) are the sacraments acceptable to all the Christian churches. What precisely is the meaning of baptism? The word baptism is from the Greek word *baptizo* meaning to wash, to baptize. As an initiatory rite of the church, baptism is the act of washing a person.

3.2 The Mode of Baptism

After the brief definition of baptism, the next question you will be exposed to is: how is one baptized? It is agreeable to almost all the Christian churches that baptism is initiatory rite of the church, and that it was instituted by Christ the head of the church. But the churches have not agreed on its mode. The contention is whether or not dipping as was done in the New Testament by John the Baptist is the only mode of baptism acceptable to Christ or sprinkling of water is as good a mode as dipping. There are churches that will re-baptize a person that was previously baptized through sprinkling. But there are many others that do not re-baptize regardless of the mode that was used (Clowney, 1995).

When Jesus gave the command to make disciples from all the nations of the world and to baptize them He unfortunately did not specify the mode to use. But He did not fall short of prescribing a formula for Christian baptism. This formula is “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” – a Trinitarian formula. The churches are left to demonstrate their ability to infer from Scripture and come up with the “right” mode of baptism. In the exercise of this ability, others came to the conclusion that since John the Baptist use the mode of dipping to baptize Jesus, the most accurate mode of Christian baptism is by dipping people into water. The others who use sprinkling do so perhaps for the purpose of convenience. But they also argue that there is no compelling reason to

believe that baptism is effective only when the mode of dipping is used. In other words, they do not think that the efficacy of baptism lies with the mode or the doing of the act, but with the agency of baptism, namely; the Holy Spirit. Details of the debate about the mode of baptism will be treated in the Course CTH 325 (Ecclesiology).

3.3 Differing Views on the Purpose of Baptism

When one is baptized, what happens to him or her? What is the effect of Christian baptism on the object of baptism? Does it convey grace automatically? Is one baptized into salvation? Is there such a thing as baptismal regeneration? If baptism is a means of grace, how does it convey this grace? Does it convey grace automatically? If not, why the command to be baptized? These are the chains of questions posed by the act of baptism. You will find below some of the ways people have seen the reason and purpose of baptism.

Sign and Seal of Covenant

For the most part, Christians believe that baptism is the sign and seal of the covenant of grace that God has made with us. It is a visible sign that God has indeed forgiven our sins. So that, even if we fall into any temptation we should not be discouraged to return to the grace of God since baptism is a sign and seal of an everlasting covenant that God has made with us. Article 33 of the Belgic Confession, a Confession of continental Dutch reformed churches alongside with Heidelberg Catechism and Canons of Dort explain it clearly that baptism is the sign and seal of covenant of grace (cf. Erickson, 1985 p.1093). To the reformed churches, baptism is the rite that brings people into faith and justification. But justification is not the purpose of baptism. In other words, by baptism, the partaker does not receive grace automatically. They refer to Mark 16:16 where it is explicitly stated that the person who believes and is baptized will be saved. But the one who does not believe will not be saved.

Baptism as a Means of Saving Grace

The sacramentalists, as Erickson (1985) calls them, attached more importance to baptism than the Reformed and Presbyterian Christians. To them, baptism like the Holy Eucharist is a “means by which God imparts saving grace; it results in the remission of sins” (Pieper, 1953 p 264; see Erickson, 1985 p.1090). Here, the view is that baptism conveys grace automatically. The Latin expression here is that baptism conveys grace *ex*

opere operato i.e almost automatically. Romans 6:1-11 speaks of the union with Christ in His death and resurrection. Baptism is the bond of this union. At baptism, we are united with Christ in His death and resurrection. To the Sacramentalists then, baptism is a means of salvation.

Baptism as a Token of Salvation

This view sees baptism as an external manifestation of an inward salvation. It is an external and visible testimony to the congregation that one is converted (Erickson, 1985 p. 1096). The view does not understand baptism as a sacrament but an ordinance of Christ since it was instituted by Him as you earlier learnt. It means that one would have to first receive regeneration and then convince the church of his or her change of heart in order for the church to then bear witness to that conversion by baptizing such a person.

Self-Assessment Exercise #2

Discuss the reasons for differing conceptions regarding the efficacy of baptism.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Baptism means cleansing. There are various understandings about the precise efficacy of baptism. While some contend that baptism is a sacrament that serves as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace that God made with us, others see it as a means of salvation. Also, there are believers that do not think baptism is a sacrament. To them, sacrament is simply a way to telling the church that you are a regenerate Christian, and the act of baptism simply serve the purpose of public declaration of regeneration of a believer.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this Unit, you have learned about the sacrament of baptism as an initiatory act of the church. It is clear that the Reformed and Presbyterian churches see baptism as a sign and seal of covenant without any inherent efficacy of conveying grace automatically, so to speak, to the beneficiary. You also learnt about the mode of baptism. Baptism is done either by dipping the receiver into water or by sprinkling water on the receiver. Here too, you note that churches disagree as to the most biblical mode of baptism. There is however, a universal agreement that baptism is an ordinance of Christ, and that the church is commanded to practice it. There

are other debates concerning baptism. Like who should be baptized? Some Christians object to infant baptism, saying that the infants are not in a position to renounce their sins and show visible signs of conversion or acceptance of the gospel, the requisite conditions for baptism. Others linked baptism to circumcision and argue that infants too are in the covenant ignorantly. This is just an example of some of the other debates concerning baptism that are not covered here. In CTH 325 Ecclesiology course, sufficient attention will be given to those other debates. It is expected that you will be prepared through the study of other related courses for a detailed discussion of some of the discourses on baptism.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is Christian baptism?
2. Discuss the acceptable mode for Christian baptism
3. Why baptize?
4. What in your own opinion is the solution to the problem of differing views on the efficacy (purpose) of baptism?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 4 CHURCH POLITY

CONTENT

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Episcopal
3.2	Presbyterian
3.3	Congregational
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignments
7.0	References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

You learned in the last Unit about the marks of a true church. If there are marks of a true church there has to be people of authority within the church to make sure that these marks are kept. For example: discipline is one of the marks of a true church and there has to be elders or people appointed by the church and given some powers to enforce discipline in the church. Once you are engaged in the study of how the church operates you are dealing with matters of church polity. In this Unit, you will study the various forms of church government practiced by churches.

Self-Assessment Exercise #1

What do you hope to learn in this Unit?

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the study of this Unit you should be able to:

- Identify types of church government
- Discuss the government of the church
- Analyze types of church government

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Episcopal

One of the systems of church governance is that of Episcopal. An *episcopus* is a bishop. In this form of church government, the bishop is the overall head of the church with Christ the ultimate ruler of the church. Powers and decision making is concentrated at the cathedral, the seat of the bishop. The bishop delegates some powers to the priests and elders to exercise. Such powers like administration of sacraments, preaching of the word, evangelism, fund raising and other things of a similar status are exercised at the local church council but major decisions even on these matters are taken by the bishop. Due to the main concentration of powers for the administration of church on the *episcopus*, the bishop, this system of church polity is called Episcopal system of church government.

3.2 Presbyterian

The Presbyterian system of church polity distributes power to many offices in the church. A presbyter is an elder. Hence, the system places main decision making on the council of elders. However, there are matters of doctrine, policy, among others, that the council of elders at the local church level cannot conclude without referring to a higher body. For this system of administration, next to council of elders is the presbytery. The Classis is the Christian reformed name for a Presbytery. The presbytery consists of elders (both teaching and ruling) from local church councils within an ecclesiastical province or location. The final decision to be taken at the highest level too is never taken by one person or office. This highest body is General Assembly sometimes called the Synod. The membership of the synod too comprise of elders from presbyteries/classes. In the Presbyterian system, both ministers and lay appointed elders are elders. But the ministers are teaching elders while the lay appointed elders are ruling elders. The lay elders are elected and ordained or installed into office. For other churches, there is a fix term for elders, but to others, it is a life-long ordination except where a disciplinary action is taken against an elder, requiring that he or she resigns or be removed.

Self-Assessment Exercise #2

What is the difference between Episcopal system of church government and the Presbyterian system?

3.3 Congregational

This system of church government is the most democratic. The local church or congregation is autonomous and does not necessarily owe any form of subordination to any other church, office, or authority. Power is concentrated in the members of the congregation. The individual members of the congregation are entitled to contribute to decision making over affairs of the church. In this sense, it is the most democratic form of church polity.

Apart from the above systems of church government, there are others who do not specifically adopt any form of church polity. Erickson (1985) calls this group non-government (p.1082). In the reformation period in church history, there were groups such as the Quakers, meaning friends, who reject any claim that the church should assume any specific structure or form. A non-structural church has no business operating a form of church administration. In the present day church also, there are church groups that do not have any particular form of church administration. In CTH 325 Ecclesiology, you will be exposed to more discussions on the government of the church and the reasons why churches chose one system of administration and not the others. Such detailed discussions involve exegesis of original text that a 200 Level student is ready to do.

4.0 CONCLUSION

There are different forms of church polity. Although all churches agree that God is the overall head of the church, there are differences of opinion on to whom and how God rules the church (Erickson, 1985). This difference of opinion on through who God governs the church is what gives rise to various systems of church governments.

5.0 SUMMARY

You learned in this Unit three systems of church government. You noticed that in the Episcopal system of church government powers are concentrated on one person or office. In the Presbyterian system, however, power is shared among three levels with ruling elders playing key roles. Congregational system of administration decentralizes power and vests the power to take decisions in members of the congregation. In this sense, all members of the congregation are elders. But not all churches practice a

particular form of church polity. There are churches that object to any form of church administration.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. What is church polity?
2. Discuss the three systems of church government you have learned
3. Why is the congregational system of parish administration said to be the most democratic?
4. What in your own opinion is the best system of church government? Give reasons for your answer.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 5 ESCHATOLOGY: THREE VIEWS ON THE MILLENIUM

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
 - 3.1 The Crux of the Discourse on the Millennium
 - 3.2 Premillennialism
 - 3.3 Postmillennialism
 - 3.4 Amillennialism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

You learned in the previous Units about the church as an institution. Questions like what is the church? What are the marks of a true church? How does one become a member of the church? How is the church governed? All these questions were discussed in the previous Units. This Unit introduces you to the doctrine of the last things commonly known as *eschatology*.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Crux of the Discourse on the Millennium

Eschatology as a theological concept concerns itself with the “last things” (*eschatos*). Strimple (1999) remarks that the New Testament speaks of the “last days”, “in the last times” (Heb. 1:1-2) and “in these last times” (1 Pet. 1:20), as aspects of the redemptive history that was ushered in through “Christ’s resurrection and exaltation” (p. 83). These include the glorious outpouring of the Holy Spirit on believers at the Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21). These eschatological events are believed to have been prophesied in the Old Testament. For this reason, eschatological theologians like Strimple do not hesitate to conclude as follows: “the whole of God’s redemptive revelation is structured in terms of promise (Old Testament) and fulfillment (New Testament), and therefore, a fully adequate summary

of biblical eschatology must consider the teaching of the entire Bible!” (p. 83).

However, different Christian theological traditions allocate different times to, and describe the manner in which, the various events that are believed to precede, accompany and proceed the second coming of Christ, will take place. The New Testament describes the end of the age as the “last time” or “last days”. In other words, what actually constitutes the “last days” or “end of the age” is the concern of this Unit. The answer to this question by different theological traditions is mostly based on a tradition’s interpretation of scriptural passages that speak of the “coming ages”, the “return of Christ”, the “last days”, and “the new heavens and the new earth”.

Among the different understandings and interpretations of the eschatological passages in the New Testament are the views on the *millennium*. The views that there is or there is not a one thousand year period at the end of the ages, when Christ shall reign with believers on earth, in a glorious nature, after which the final judgment and the eternal state of both believers and the wicked will take place. While some theologians believe that such a millennial kingdom will definitely take place, others contend that neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament speak of such a kingdom. Among those who concede that a millennial kingdom awaits believers on earth, there is a difference of opinion, as to when and how this kingdom will take place. Therefore, there are three major views about the eschatological kingdom. For your easy understanding of these views, one representative theologian is selected for each of the three views on the millennium. The three views are: *Premillennialism*, *Postmillennialism* and *Amillennialism*.

Self-Assessment Exercise #1

Discuss the debate about the millennium?

3.2 Premillennialism

Blaising (1999) is a major view on Premillennialism. He has given us a clue as to how the premillennial view of the future is to be understood. According to Blaising, “we can fill in the picture of Premillennialists’ belief about the future by asking how they relate the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the eternal destinies’ of the saved and the lost to the Second Coming and the Millennium” (p. 157).

Premillennialists insist that the second coming of Christ is *prior to* a millennial kingdom. This means that Christ will return to earth at the end of the coming age to reign with believers for a period of one thousand years. Concerning the resurrection from the dead, Premillennialism believes that Christ will at His second coming raise the dead in “two stages”. First, believers only will be raised from the dead to join living believers on earth and they will both reign with Christ in a glorious kingdom that will last for a thousand years. During these years, there will be a universal acceptability of the gospel; prosperity and peace shall reign. Secondly, the rest of the dead (unbelievers) will be raised after the one thousand years shall pass, then the “final judgment” will be “instituted” (Blaising 1999, p. 157). For the Premillennialists, the one thousand year reign of Christ with believers after the first resurrection marks the beginning of the promised eschatological blessings of the faithful at the “end of the age”. The exclusion of the wicked in the first resurrection and, subsequently, in the millennial kingdom will mark the beginning of anguish for the unbelievers (the wicked).

In the light of the above view of the future and its accompanying events, Premillennialists assign, specifically, a time frame within which each of the eschatological events will take place. This is based on their interpretation and understanding of apparent listing of the order the events of the future will take place in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18. Some Premillennialists believe that the second coming will also take place in phases. Specifically, while some Premillennialists contend that the “rapture” of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 will occur either *prior to* (Pretribulationists) a period of great tribulations, others believe the second coming will take place during the tribulation (Midtribulationists). There are also tribulation Premillennialists who maintain that the Second Coming of Christ will take place after the great tribulation has come and gone (Posttribulationists). There are many Premillennialists who do not have a view of the future when a great tribulation, or as the American theologian, Blaising (1999) puts it, “a period of apocalyptic woe and distress” (p. 158). Whatever different opinions that exist among Premillennialists, the focus of Premillennialism is clearly stated by Blaising (1999). According to Blaising, “Premillennial view focuses especially on the sequence of events to accompany Christ’s return followed by a millennial kingdom as well as the exceptional meaning of that millennium... (Rev. 19:11-20)” (p. 159). Such is the premillennial view of the future.

In what follows, you will learn about another view of the future. The focus of this view is also on the sequence of events to accompany the second coming of Christ and the eternal destiny of both the wicked and the

believers. Since the previous discussion was on the sequence of the events that will take place before the millennial kingdom, it is logical to follow this with a discussion of the view that Christ will return after the millennium kingdom. This view is *Postmillennialism*.

3.3 Postmillennialism

Like Premillennialism, Postmillennialism believes in a future millennial kingdom as an eschatological event that will accompany the second coming of Christ and the eternal destiny of the believers and the lost. The major difference, as you will learn, lies in the *sequence* that these eschatological events will take place in relation to the millennium kingdom: when will the second coming of Christ take place: is it before or after the millennial kingdom? While Premillennialism believes Christ will return to establish a millennial kingdom for believers, Postmillennialism contends that the return of Christ will take place after the glorious reign of peace, prosperity and universal acceptability of the gospel in order to bring more souls into the kingdom. The Postmillennialism's main argument is captured in its description by one of the leading and representative voices of Postmillennialism, the American Kenneth Gentry Jr. (1999).

Gentry describes Postmillennialism as follows:

Postmillennialism expects the proclaiming of the Spirit-blessed gospel of Jesus Christ to win the vast majority of human beings to salvation in the present age. Increasing gospel success will gradually produce a time in the history prior to Christ's return in which faith righteousness, peace and prosperity will prevail in the affairs of people and of nations. After an extensive era of such conditions the Lord will return visibly, bodily, and in great glory, ending history with the general resurrection and the great judgment of all human kind (p. 14).

Furthermore, Postmillennialism contends, on the basis of its strong conviction that Christ will return and the final grand "eschatological finale" inaugurated only after a millennial kingdom, that redemptive history is "His story" (Gentry 1999, p. 14). For Postmillennialism, unlike Premillennialism, there is only one resurrection from the dead. This resurrection of the dead and the wicked shall take place at the second coming as part of grand eschatological finale. But this will take place only after a glorious period of one thousand years described above. The last major view on the millennium rejects Premillennial and Postmillennial views of the future. This view is called *Amillennialism*.

Self-Assessment Exercise #2

From what you have learnt so far, when will Christ return?

3.4 Amillennialism

As mentioned earlier, the amillennial view of the date of the return of Christ and the final consummation of God's promise to glorify believers is spearheaded by Robert B. Strimple. He began his argument for Amillennialism as follows: "the whole of God's redemptive revelation is structured in terms of promise (Old Testament) and fulfillment (New Testament), and therefore a fully adequate summary of biblical eschatology must consider the teaching of the entire Bible" (p.83).

Strimple then proceeded to show how various Old Testament prophecies and imageries are fulfilled in the New Testament era without leaving any room for a possibility of an earthly millennium of neither the Premillennial nor Postmillennial type. To Strimple, why the Old Testament does not speak of any earthly millennium, the New Testament rules out any possibility for such a millennium. This means that the whole idea of pre and post millennial eschatology is remote to biblical revelation. Does it mean that the Pre and Post millennialists got their views from some sort of human imaginations?

Strimple affirms that the Old Testament speaks of glories periods in the life of the church, when there will be worldwide peace and righteousness, a time that the Jerusalem temple worship will be restored, sacrifices offered to God and priesthood in the likes of Levitical ordinances restored (p.84). Does this mean that the Postmillennialists and the Premillennialists have a point after all? Strimple's contention is that they insist those Old Testament passages must be understood literally. Strimple insists that once it is taken that "what is in the Old Testament concealed is in the New Testament revealed" the Old Testament passages used to support an earthly millennium will be understood differently. He maintains that all the sacrifices, ceremonies, feasts among other things in the Old Testament were types of the sacrifice to be offered by Christ (Heb. 9:17-23). In this way, all the prophecies concerning the glorious reign of peace and the restoration of Levitical ordinances were either fulfilled when Christ came and died on the Cross or are part of the great "eschatological finale", when Christ will return (p.86-129). If this is the case, there is no time difference between the numerous events to accompany the second coming of Christ.

4.0 CONCLUSION

There are three views concerning the millennium. Two of the views are based on a literal interpretation of passages from both the Old and New Testaments that speak of a thousand year kingdom where peace and prosperity shall reign. The last view rules out completely, any possibility that such a millennium will be realized and therefore looks at such prophecies and glorious periods, as either already fulfilled, when Christ came and died on earth, or as part of grand events, to accompany the return of Christ.

5.0 SUMMARY

You have learned in this last Unit, three views of eschatology. The Premillennial view insists that there is still coming ahead of the church era, a period of glories kingdom with Christ as the king reigning with all the believers. The life span of this kingdom is one thousand years. It is after this period that Christ shall then return for final judgment and eternal glory for believers and eternal punishment for the wicked. The Postmillennialists insist Christ will return only after the millennium. Amillennialists do not see Scripture promising any future earthly millennium and therefore rules out any possibility that such will occur.

With this, you have come to the end of this Course. Congratulations! You will fully appreciate your study of this Course when you commence your study of the other courses referred to in this Course. Make sure that you revise the contents of this Course carefully before examination. Once you have carefully revised your work, you will do excellently well in your examinations. I wish you all the best in your studies.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the Premillennial view of eschatology
2. What is the major difference between Postmillennialism and Premillennialism?
3. Evaluate the Amillennial view of the events to accompany the second coming of Christ.
4. What view of eschatology will you adopt? Why?

7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHR READINGS

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