From 1700 onward, Christian theology moved away from a western European context to become a global phenomenon. A number of stages may be discerned in this development. First, the colonization of North America by western Europeans, especially from Scandinavia, Germany, and England, led to the various schools of Protestant theology – Lutheran, Reformed, and Anabaptist – becoming firmly settled in a North American context. Jonathan Edwards (1703–58), closely linked with the religious revival generally known as the Great Awakening (c. 1726–45), is unquestionably the most significant theologian to have operated in such a context. Later waves of immigration, especially from Ireland and Italy, led to Roman Catholic theology becoming of increasing significance.

The establishment of seminaries by various denominations (such as Princeton Theological Seminary by the Presbyterians) consolidated the importance of the United States of America as a leading center of Christian theological teaching and research. However, it was not until the middle of the twentieth century that America came to assume global significance in theological discussions; until that point, German and British theology tended to dominate, partly on account of the continuing immigration of European theologians into the United States. Such theologians, who had trained in European contexts, tended to maintain a European emphasis in their teaching and orientation.

Elsewhere, expansion continued. The enormous impact of Christian missions in Australasia, India, the Far East, and sub-Saharan Africa led to Christian theological seminaries, high schools, and universities becoming established in these regions, and gradually divesting themselves of their western European roots. The development of "local theologies" has become an issue of increasing importance in such
regions, particularly as the perceived “Eurocentrism” of much Christian theologizing has been subjected to considerable critical comment on the part of native writers.

This is especially the case in Latin America, where there appears to be a growing reaction against the Roman Catholicism exported to the region with the conquistadores. The rise of liberation theology (see pp. 115–17), with its characteristic emphasis upon the importance of praxis, the prioritization of the situation of the poor, and the orientation of theology toward political liberation, has proved incapable of staunching a severe loss of individuals from the Roman Catholic church. The chief beneficiaries of this trend appear to be evangelicals and charismatics (see pp. 121–3) in the region.

One of the most prominent features of western theology during the modern period has been the intellectual hegemony of German-language theology. The German-speaking lands of Europe, above all Germany and northern Switzerland, have long been the source of a rich and fertile theological tradition. Two leading figures of the Reformation, Martin Luther and Huldrych Zwingli, are witnesses to the importance of this tradition to the development of modern western theology. Since the Enlightenment, the prominence of the German-language tradition has become even more firmly established; a list of the leading theologians of the modern western tradition—excluding Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Jurgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Karl Rahner, and Paul Tillich—has an unquestionably Germanic ring to it.

In recent years, however, this situation has changed. A new generation of German-language theologians of truly global significance has not emerged to succeed writers such as Bultmann, Moltmann, Pannenberg and Rahner. Instead, there has been a steady increase in the significance of English-language theology, especially that originating from the United States of America. With the increasing role played by English as the lingua franca of the world (the parallel with Latin in the Middle Ages being of significance), it seems likely that this development will be consolidated, at least in the opening years of the new millennium.

The idea of “modernity,” like just about every other term used in this work, is difficult to define. What is characteristic of the “modern” period? When did it begin? And has it now ended? In one sense, “modern” could be understood to mean “most recent,” in which case it makes no sense to speak of the “end of modernity.” However, for many historians, “modernity” refers to a quite definite outlook, typical of much of western thought since the early eighteenth century, which is characterized by a confidence in humanity’s ability to think for itself. Perhaps the classic expression of this attitude is to be found in the Enlightenment, with its emphasis upon the competence of unaided human reason to make sense of the world—excluding those aspects of that world traditionally reserved for theologians.

The modern period is of enormous importance to the theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It establishes the context within which many recent developments and debates are set, and gave rise to many movements which are a continuing presence within today’s church and academy. For this reason, the present chapter devotes substantially more space to the analysis of movements of importance within the period under consideration than has been allocated in earlier chapters. We begin by considering the movement which has dominated the intellectual agenda of the period—the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment

The English term “Enlightenment” passed into general circulation only in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The German term die Aufklärung (which literally means “the clearing up”) and the French term les lumières (“the lights”) date from the eighteenth century, but do not convey much information about the nature of the movement in question. “Enlightenment” is a loose term, defying precise definition, embracing a cluster of ideas and attitudes characteristic of the period 1720–80, such as the free and constructive use of reason in an attempt to demolish old myths which were seen to have bound individuals and societies to the oppression of the past. If there is any common element underlying the movement, it perhaps lies more in how those who were sympathetic to its outlook thought than in what they thought.

The term “Age of Reason,” often used as a synonym for the Enlightenment, is misleading. It implies that reason had been hitherto ignored or marginalized. Yet, as we saw earlier, the Middle Ages was just as much an “Age of Reason” as the Enlightenment; the crucial difference lay in the manner in which reason was used, and the limits which were understood to be imposed upon it. Nor was the eighteenth century consistently rational in every aspect. In fact, the Enlightenment included a remarkable variety of anti-rational movements, such as Mesmerism and Masonic rituals. Nevertheless, an emphasis upon the ability of human reason to penetrate the mysteries of the world is rightly regarded as a defining characteristic of the Enlightenment.

The term “rationalism” should also be used with caution when referring to the Enlightenment. In the first place, it should be noted that the term is often used in an uncritical and inaccurate way, designating the general atmosphere of optimism, grounded in a belief in scientific and social progress, which pervades much of the writing of the period. This use of the term is confusing and should be avoided. Rationalism, in its proper sense, is perhaps best defined as the doctrine that the external world can be known by reason. and reason alone. This doctrine, which is characteristic of earlier writers such as Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, and Wolff, was subjected to intense criticism during the later eighteenth century, as the influence of John Locke’s empiricist epistemology became widespread. Kant, often portrayed as an exponent of the sufficiency of pure reason, was in reality acutely aware of its limitations. The theory of knowledge developed in the Critique of Pure Reason (1781) may be regarded as an attempt to synthesize the insights of pure rationalism (which relies upon reason alone) and pure empiricism (which appeals to experience
Protestantism recognized the importance of higher education in the training of its ministers. The foundation of the Genevan Academy and Harvard College are obvious illustrations of this point. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the Lutheran and Reformed churches in Germany established university faculties of theology as a means of ensuring a constant supply of well-educated clergy. During the eighteenth century, political protest was largely stifled in Germany; the only means by which radicalism could express itself was intellectual.

The German universities thus became centers of revolt against the Old Regime. As a result, Protestant university theologians tended to align themselves with the Enlightenment, where the more conservative church leadership tended to side with the Old Regime. Radicalism was thus able to express itself theologically, at the level of ideas. Although apparently unable to achieve any significant social, political, or ecclesiastical change, radicalism was able to mount a significant challenge to the ideas which undergirded the churches. Protestant theology was thus significantly affected by the methods of the Enlightenment, whereas Roman Catholic theology was not.

4. The varying local impact of the Enlightenment. It must be stressed that the Enlightenment was not a chronologically uniform movement. Although well established in western central Europe by the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment cannot really be said to have taken hold in Russia or the countries of southern Europe (such as Spain, Italy, or Greece) until the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. These countries were the strongholds of Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy. In consequence, theologians of their churches did not feel under pressure to respond to the intellectual forces which were of such major significance in regions historically associated with Protestantism.

The Enlightenment critique of Christian theology: A general overview

The Enlightenment criticism of traditional Christianity was based upon the principle of the omnipotence of human reason. A number of stages in the development of this belief may be discerned. First, it was argued that the beliefs of Christianity were rational, and thus capable of standing up to critical examination. This type of approach may be found in John Locke's *Irenicallness of Christianity* (1695), and within the early Wollishan school in Germany. Christianity was a reasonable supplement to natural religion. The notion of divine revelation was thus maintained.

Second, it was argued that the basic ideas of Christianity, being rational, could be derived from reason itself. There was no need to invoke the idea of divine revelation. According to this idea, as it was developed by John Toland in *Christianity not Mysteries* (1696) and by Matthew Tindal in *Christianity as Old as Creation* (1730), Christianity was essentially the re-publication of the religion of nature. It did not transcend natural religion, but was merely an example of it. All so-called "revealed religion" was actually nothing other than the reconfirmation of what can be known
through rational reflection on nature. "Revelation" was simply a rational reaffirmation of moral truths already available to enlightened reason.

Third, the ability of reason to judge revelation was affirmed. As critical reason was emancipated, it was argued that it was supremely qualified to judge Christian beliefs and practices, with a view to eliminating any irrational or superstition elements. This view, associated with Hermann Samuel Reimarus in Germany and the *philosophes* in France, placed reason firmly above revelation, and may be seen as symbolized by the enthronement of the Goddess of Reason in the cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris in 1793.

The Enlightenment was primarily a European and American phenomenon, and thus took place in cultures in which the most numerically significant form of religion was Christianity. This historical observation is of importance: the Enlightenment critique of religion in general was often particularized as a criticism of Christianity in general. It was Christian doctrines which were subjected to a critical assessment of unprecented vigor. It was Christian sacred writings - rather than those of Islam or Hinduism - which were subjected to an unprecedented critical scrutiny, both literary and historical, with the Bible being treated "as if it were any other book" (Benjamin Jowett). It was the life of Jesus of Nazareth which was subjected to critical reconstruction, rather than that of Mohammed or the Buddha.

The Enlightenment attitude to religion was subject to a considerable degree of regional variation, reflecting a number of local factors peculiar to different situations. One of the most important such factors is Pietism, perhaps best known in its English and American form of Methodism. As noted earlier, this movement placed considerable emphasis upon the experiential aspects of religion - see, for example, John Wesley's notion of "experimental religion" (note that Wesley uses the word "experimental" to mean "experiential"). This concern for religious experience served to make Christianity relevant and accessible to the experiential situation of the masses, contrasting sharply with the intellectualism of, for example, Lutheran orthodoxy, which was perceived to be an irrelevance. Pietism forged a strong link between Christian faith and experience, thus making Christianity a matter of the heart, as well as of the mind.

As noted earlier, Pietism was well established in Germany by the end of the seventeenth century, whereas the movement developed in England only during the eighteenth century, and in France not at all. The Enlightenment thus preceded the rise of Pietism in England, with the result that the great evangelical revivals of the eighteenth century significantly blunted the influence of rationalism upon religion. In Germany, however, the Enlightenment followed after the rise of Pietism, and thus developed in a situation which had been significantly shaped by religious faith, even if it would pose a serious challenge to the received forms and ideas of that faith. (Interestingly, English Deism began to become influential in Germany at roughly the same time as German Pietism began to exert influence in England.) The most significant intellectual forces in the German Enlightenment were thus directed toward the reshaping (rather than the rejection or demolition) of the Christian faith.

In France, however, Christianity was widely perceived as both oppressive and irrelevant, with the result that the writers of the French Enlightenment - often referred to simply as *les philosophes* - were able to advocate the total rejection of Christianity as an archaic and discredited belief system. In his *Treatise on Tolerance*, Voltaire argued that English Deism had compromised itself, permitting religion to survive where it ought to have been eradicated totally.

The Enlightenment critique of Christian theology: Specific issues

Having outlined the general principles of the Enlightenment challenge to traditional Christian thought, it is now appropriate to explore how these issues impact on specific matters. The rational religion of the Enlightenment found itself in conflict with six major areas of traditional Christian theology.

1. **The possibility of miracles**


Much traditional Christian apologists concerning the identity and significance of Jesus Christ was based upon the "miraculous evidences" of the New Testament culminating in the resurrection. The new emphasis upon the mechanical regularity and orderliness of the universe, perhaps the most significant intellectual legacy of Newtonianism, raised doubts about the New Testament accounts of miraculous happenings. Hume's *Essay on Miracles* (1748) was widely regarded as demonstrating the evidential impossibility of miracles. Hume emphasized that there were no contemporary analogues of New Testament miracles, such as the resurrection, thus forcing the New Testament reader to rely totally upon human testimony to such miracles. For Hume, it was axiomatic that no human testimony was adequate to establish the occurrence of a miracle, in the absence of a present-day analogue: Reimarus and G. E. Lessing denied that human testimony to a past event (such as the resurrection) was sufficient to make it credible if it appeared to be contradicted by present-day direct experience, no matter how well documented the original event may have been. Similarly, Diderot declared that if the entire population of Paris were to assure him that a dead man had just been raised from the dead, he would not believe a word of it.

This growing skepticism concerning the "miraculous evidences" of the New Testament forced traditional Christianity to defend the doctrine of the divinity of Christ on grounds other than miracles - which, at the time, it proved singularly incapable of doing. Of course, it must be noted that other religious claims miraculous evidences were subjected to equally great skeptical criticism by the Enlightenment: Christianity happened to be singled out for particular comment on account of its religious domination of the cultural milieu in which the Enlightenment developed.

2. **The notion of revelation**


The concept of revelation was of central importance to traditional Christian theology. While many Christian theologians (such as Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin)
recognized the possibility of a natural knowledge of God, they insisted that this required supplementation by supernatural divine revelation, such as that witnessed to in Scripture. The Enlightenment witnessed the development of an increasingly critical attitude to the very idea of supernatural revelation. In part, this new critical attitude was also due to the Enlightenment depreciation of history.

For Lessing, there was an “ugly great ditch” between history and reason (see pp. 383–6). Revelation took place in history, but of what value were the contingent truths of history in comparison with the necessary truths of reason? The philosophes in particular asserted that history could at best confirm the truths of reason, but was incapable of establishing those truths in the first place. Truths about God were timeless, open to investigation by human reason but not capable of being disclosed in “events” such as the history of Jesus of Nazareth.

The doctrine of original sin

The idea that human nature is in some sense flawed or corrupt, expressed in the orthodox doctrine of original sin, was vigorously opposed by the Enlightenment. Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau criticized the doctrine as encouraging pessimism with regard to human abilities, thus impeding human social and political development and encouraging laissez-faire attitudes. German Enlightenment thinkers tended to criticize the doctrine on account of its historical origins in the thought of Augustine of Hippo, dating from the fourth and fifth centuries, which they regarded as debarring it from permanent validity and relevance.

The rejection of original sin was of considerable importance, as the Christian doctrine of redemption rested upon the assumption that humanity required to be liberated from bondage to original sin. For the Enlightenment, it was the idea of original sin itself which was oppressive, and from which humanity required liberation. This intellectual liberation was provided by the Enlightenment critique of the doctrine.

The problem of evil

The Enlightenment witnessed a fundamental change in attitude toward the existence of evil in the world. For the medieval period, the existence of evil was not regarded as posing a threat to the coherence of Christianity. The contradiction implicit in the existence both of a benevolent divine omnipotence and of evil was not regarded as an obstacle to belief, but simply as an academic theological problem. The Enlightenment saw this situation change radically: the existence of evil metamorphosed into a challenge to the credibility and coherence of Christian faith itself. Voltaire’s novel Candide was one of many works to highlight the difficulties caused for the Christian worldview by the existence of natural evil (such as the famous Lisbon earthquake). The term “theodicy” coined by Leibniz, derives from this period, reflecting a growing recognition that the existence of evil was assuming a new significance within the Enlightenment critique of religion.

The status and interpretation of Scripture

Within orthodox Christianity, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, the Bible was still widely regarded as a divinely inspired source of doctrine and morals, to be differentiated from other types of literature. The Enlightenment saw this assumption called into question, with the rise of the critical approach to Scripture. Developing ideas already current within Deism, the theologians of the German Enlightenment developed the thesis that the Bible was the work of many hands, at times demonstrating internal contradiction, and that it was open to precisely the same method of textual analysis and interpretation as any other piece of literature. These ideas may be seen in developed forms in works by J. A. Ernesti (1761) and J. J. Semler (1771). The effect of these developments was to weaken still further the concept of “supernatural revelation” and call into question the permanent significance of these foundational documents of the Christian faith.

The identity and significance of Jesus Christ

A final area in which the Enlightenment made a significant challenge to orthodox Christian belief concerns the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Two particularly important developments may be noted: the origins of the “quest of the historical Jesus” (see pp. 386–96) and the rise of the “moral theory of the atonement” (pp. 425–9).

Both Deism and the German Enlightenment developed the thesis that there was a serious discrepancy between the real Jesus of history and the New Testament interpretation of his significance. Underlying the New Testament portrait of the supernatural redeemer of humanity lurked a simple human figure, a glorified teacher of common sense. While a supernatural redeemer was unacceptable to Enlightenment rationalism, the idea of an enlightened moral teacher was not.

This idea, developed with particular rigor by Reimarus, suggested that it was possible to go behind the New Testament accounts of Jesus and uncover a simpler, more human Jesus, who would be acceptable to the new spirit of the age. And so the quest for the real and more credible “Jesus of history” began. Although this pursuit would ultimately end in failure, the later Enlightenment regarded the quest as holding the key to the credibility of Jesus within the context of a rational natural religion. Jesus’ moral authority resided in the quality of his teaching and religious personality, rather than in the unacceptable orthodox suggestion that he was God incarnate.

The second area in which the ideas of orthodoxy concerning Jesus were challenged concerned the significance of his death. For orthodoxy, Jesus’ death on the cross was interpreted from the standpoint of the resurrection (which the Enlightenment was not prepared to accept as an historical event) as a way in which God was able to forgive the sins of humanity. During the Enlightenment this “theory of the atonement” was subjected to increasing criticism, as involving arbitrary and unacceptable hypotheses such as that of original sin.
Jesus' death on the cross was now reinterpreted in terms of a supreme moral example of self-giving and dedication, intended to inspire similar dedication and self-giving on the part of his followers. Where orthodox Christianity tended to treat Jesus' death (and resurrection) as possessing greater inherent importance than his religious teaching, the Enlightenment marginalized his death and denied his resurrection, in order to emphasize the quality of his moral teaching.

Theological Movements since the Enlightenment

It will be clear from the above that the Enlightenment had a major impact upon Christian theology, raising a series of critical questions concerning its sources, methods, and doctrines. However, despite its continuing influence over the modern period, the Enlightenment is generally regarded as having reached the zenith of its impact around the time of the French Revolution. A series of developments since then have moved Christian theology away from the agenda of the movement, even if its influence can still be discerned at points. In what follows, we shall consider major developments within Christian theology since the time of the Enlightenment.

In the course of discussing these movements, the contributions of several major theologians will be considered. In particular, the following should be noted: F. D. E. Schleiermacher (Romanticism); Karl Barth (neo-orthodoxy); Paul Tillich (liberal Protestantism). However, the modern period includes a galaxy of stars, and we do not propose to single out any individual writers for special discussion.

Romanticism

In the closing decade of the eighteenth century, increasing misgivings came to be expressed concerning thefail quality of rationalism. Reason, once seen as a liberator, came increasingly to be regarded as spiritually enslaving. These anxieties were not expressed so much within university faculties of philosophy, as within literary and artistic circles, particularly in the Prussian capital, Berlin, where the brothers Friedrich and August William Schlegel became particularly influential.

“Romanticism” is notoriously difficult to define. The movement is perhaps best seen as a reaction against certain of the central themes of the Enlightenment, most notably the claim that reality can be known to the human reason. This reduction of reality to a series of rationalized simplicities seemed, to the Romantics, to be a culpable and crude misrepresentation. Where the Enlightenment appealed to the human reason, Romanticism made an appeal to the human imagination, which was capable of recognizing the profound sense of mystery which arises from realizing that the human mind cannot comprehend even the finite world, let alone the infinity beyond this. This ethos is expressed well by the English poet William Wordsworth, who spoke of the human imagination in terms of transcending the limitations of human reason, and reaching beyond its bounds to sample the infinite through the finite. Imagination, he wrote.

Is but another name for absolute power
And deepest insight, amplitude of mind,
And Reason in her most exalted mood.

Romanticism thus found itself equally unhappy with both traditional Christian doctrines and the rationalistic moral platitudes of the Enlightenment: both failed to do justice to the complexity of the world, in an attempt to reduce the “mystery of the universe” – to use a phrase found in the writings of August William Schlegel – to neat formulations.

A marked limitation of the competence of reason may be discerned in such sentiments. Reason threatens to limit the human mind to what may be deduced; the imagination is able to liberate the human spirit from this self-imposed bondage, and allow it to discover new depths of reality – a vague and tantalizing “something,” which can be discerned in the world of everyday actualities. The infinite is somehow present in the finite and may be known through feeling and the imagination. As John Keats put it, “I am certain of nothing except the holiness of the heart’s affections, and the truth of the imagination.”

The reaction against the aridity of reason was thus complemented by an emphasis upon the epistemological significance of human feelings and emotions. Under the influence of Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), German Romanticism came to develop two axioms concerning das Gefühl. (This German term is perhaps best translated as “feeling” or “sentiment,” though neither conveys the full range of meanings associated with the original. For this reason, it is often left untranslated; readers disliking the use of foreign-language terms can, however, replace it with “feeling.”) First, “feeling” has to do with the individual subjective thinker, who becomes aware of his or her subjectivity and inward individuality. Rationalism may have made its appeal to individual reason, Romanticism retained the emphasis upon the individual, but supplanted a concern with reason by a new interest in the imagination and personal feeling. The Enlightenment looked inward to human reason; Romanticism looked inward to human feelings, seeing in these “the way to all mysteries” (Novalis).

Second, “feeling” is oriented toward the infinite and eternal, and provides the key to these higher realms. It is for this reason, Novalis declares, that the Enlightenment proscribed the imagination and feeling as “heretical,” in that they offered access to the “magical idealism” of the infinite; by its wooden appeal to reason alone, the Enlightenment attempted to suppress knowledge of these higher worlds through an appeal to the abilities of philosophy. Human subjectivity and inwardness were now seen as a mirror of the infinite. A new emphasis came to be placed upon music as a “revelation of a higher order than any morality or philosophy” (Bettina von Arnim).
The development of Romanticism had considerable implications for Christianity in Europe. Those aspects of Christianity (especially Roman Catholicism) which rationalism found distasteful came to captivate the imaginations of the Romantics. Rationalism was seen to be experientially and emotionally deficient, incapable of meeting real human needs that were traditionally addressed and satisfied by Christian faith. As F. R. de Chateaubriand remarked of the situation in France in the first decade of the nineteenth century, “there was a need for faith, a desire for religious consolation, which came from the very lack of that consolation for so long.” Similar sentiments can be instanced from the German context in the closing years of the eighteenth century.

That rationalism had failed to undermine religion is clear from developments in England, Germany, and North America. The new strength evident in German Pietism and English evangelicalism in the eighteenth century is evidence of the failure of rationalism to provide a cogent alternative to the prevailing human sense of personal need and meaning. Philosophy came to be seen as sterile, academic in the worst sense of the word, in that it was detached from both the outer realities of life and the inner life of the human consciousness.

It is against this background of growing disillusionment with rationalism, and a new appreciation of human “feeling,” that the contribution of Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834) is to be seen. Schleiermacher capitalized on this interest in feeling. He argued that religion in general, and Christianity in particular, was a matter of feeling or “self-consciousness.” His major work of systematic theology, The Christian Faith (1821; revised 1834), is an attempt to show how Christian theology is related to a feeling of “absolute dependence.” The structure of The Christian Faith is complex, centering on the dialectic between sin and grace. The work is organized in three parts. The first deals with the consciousness of God, concentrating upon such matters as creation. The second part handles the consciousness of sin and its implications, such as an awareness of the possibility of redemption. The final part considers the consciousness of grace, and deals with such matters as the person and work of Christ. In this way, Schleiermacher is able to argue that “everything is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth.”

Schleiermacher’s contribution to the development of Christian theology is considerable, and will be examined in depth at the appropriate points in this volume. However, our attention now turns to a movement which, although not strictly theological – indeed, it could be termed a-theological or even anti-theological – has had a major impact upon modern western theology. The movement in question is Marxism.

Marxism

Marxism, probably one of the most significant worldviews to emerge during the modern period, has had a major impact upon Christian theology during the last century. The collapse of Marxism as a state ideology in eastern Europe during the final years of the twentieth century has led to a marked reduction in its impact. However, its influence lingers in late twentieth century theological discussion, especially in Latin American liberation theology and certain “theologies of hope,” such as that set out in the 1960s by Jürgen Moltmann. It is therefore important to understand something of this movement, and its implications for Christian theology.

Marxism may be regarded as the body of ideas associated with the German writer Karl Marx (1818–83). Until recently, the term also referred to a state ideology, characteristic of a number of states in eastern Europe and elsewhere, which regarded Christianity and other religions as reactionary, and adopted repressive measures to eliminate them.

The notion of materialism is fundamental to Marxism. This is not some metaphysical or philosophical doctrine which affirms that the world consists only of matter. Rather, it is an assertion that a correct understanding of human beings must begin with material production. The way in which human beings respond to their material needs determines everything else. Ideas, including religious ideas, are responses to material reality. They are the superstructure which is erected upon a socioeconomic substructure. In other words, ideas and belief systems are a response to a quite definite set of social and economic conditions. If these are radically altered (for example, by a revolution), the belief systems which they generated and sustained will pass away with them.

This first idea flows naturally into the second: the alienation of humanity. A number of factors bring about alienation within the material process, of which the two most significant are the division of labor and the existence of private property. The former causes the alienation of the worker from his or her product, whereas the second brings about a situation in which the interests of the individual no longer coincide with that of society as a whole. As productive forces are owned by a small minority of the population, it follows that societies are divided along class lines, with political and economic power being concentrated in the hands of the ruling class.

If this analysis is correct, Marx believed, then, that the third conclusion naturally followed: capitalism—the economic order just described—was inherently unstable, due to the tensions arising from productive forces. As a result of these internal contradictions, it would break down. Some versions of Marxism present this breakdown as happening without any need for assistance. Others present it as the result of a social revolution, led by the working class. The closing words of the Communist Manifesto (1848) seem to suggest the latter: “Workers have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to gain. Workers of the world, unite!”

So how do these ideas relate to Christian theology? In his 1844 political and economic manuscripts, Marx develops the idea that religion in general (he does not distinguish the individual religions) is a direct response to social and economic conditions. “The religious world is but the reflex of the real world.” There is an obvious and important allusion here to Feuerbach’s critique of religion, which we shall consider in a later section. Marx argues that “religion is just the imaginary sun
which seems to man to revolve around him, until he realizes that he himself is the center of his own revolution.” In other words, God is simply a projection of human concerns. Human beings “look for a superhuman being in the fantasy reality of heaven, and find nothing there, but their own reflection.”

But why should religion exist at all? If Marx is right, why should people continue to believe in such a crude illusion? Marx’s answer centers on the notion of alienation. “Humans make religion; religion does not make humans. Religion is the self-consciousness and self-esteem of people who either have not found themselves or who have already lost themselves again.” Religion is the product of social and economic alienation. It arises from that alienation, and at the same time encourages that alienation by a form of spiritual intoxication which renders the masses incapable of recognizing their situation, and doing something about it. Religion is a comfort, which enables people to tolerate their economic alienation. If there were no such alienation, there would be no need for religion.

Materialism affirms that events in the material world bring about corresponding changes in the intellectual world. Religion is thus the result of a certain set of social and economic conditions. Change those conditions, so that economic alienation is eliminated, and religion will cease to exist. It will no longer serve any useful function. Unjust social conditions produce religion, and are in turn supported by religion. “The struggle against religion is thus indirectly a struggle against the world of which religion is the spiritual fragrance,” Marx thus argues that religion will continue to exist, as long as it meets a need in the life of alienated people. “The religious reflex of the real world can . . . only then vanish when the practical relations of everyday life offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellow men and to nature.” In other words, a shake-up in the real world is needed to get rid of religion. Marx thus argues that when a non-alienating economic and social environment is brought about through communism, the needs which gave rise to religion will vanish. And with the elimination of those material needs, spiritual hunger will also vanish.

In practice, Marxism had virtually no influence until the period of World War I. This can be put down partly to some disagreements within the movement, and is partly due to the lack of any real opportunities for political expansion. The internal problems are especially interesting. The suggestion that the working class could liberate itself from its oppression, and bring about a political revolution, soon proved to be illusory. It rapidly became clear that Marxists, far from being drawn from the ranks of the politically conscious working class, were actually depressingly middle class (like Marx himself). Aware of this problem, Lenin developed the idea of a “vanguard party.” The workers were so politically naive that they needed to be led by professional revolutionaries, who alone could provide the overall vision and practical guidance that would be needed in bringing about and sustaining a world revolution.

The Russian Revolution gave Marxism the break it so badly needed. However, although Marxism established itself in a modified form (Marxism-Leninism) within the Soviet Union, it proved unsuccessful elsewhere. Its successes in eastern Europe after World War II can be put down mainly to military strength and political destabilization. Its successes in Africa were largely due to the seductive appeal of Lenin’s carefully devised concept of “imperialism,” which allowed alienated elements in certain African and Asian countries to put their backwardness down to ruthless and systematic exploitation by the external agency of western capitalism, rather than to any inherent deficiencies.

The economic failure and political stagnation which resulted when such countries experimented with Marxism in the 1970s and 1980s soon led to disillusionment with this new philosophy. In Europe, Marxism found itself locked into a spiral of decline. Its chief advocates increasingly became abstract theoreticians, detached from working-class roots, with virtually no political experience. The idea of a socialist revolution gradually lost its appeal and its credibility. In the United States and Canada, Marxism had little, if any, social appeal in the first place, although its influence upon the academic world was more noticeable. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 resulted in a noticeable cooling in enthusiasm for Marxism within western intellectual circles.

However, Marx’s ideas have found their way, suitably modified, into modern Christian theology. Latin American liberation theology can be shown to have drawn appreciatively on Marxist insights, even if the movement cannot really be described as “Marxist.” We shall consider liberation theology in a later section (see pp. 115–17).

**Liberal Protestantism**

Liberal Protestantism is unquestionably one of the most important movements to have arisen within modern Christian thought. Its origins are complex. However, it is helpful to think of it as having arisen in response to the theological program set out by F. D. E. Schleiermacher, especially in relation to his emphasis upon human “feeling” (see pp. 97–8) and the need to relate Christian faith to the human situation. Classic liberal Protestantism had its origins in the Germany of the mid-nineteenth century, amid a growing realization that Christian faith and theology alike required reconstruction in the light of modern knowledge. In England, the increasingly positive reception given to Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selection (popularly known as the “Darwinian theory of evolution”) created a climate in which some elements of traditional Christian theology (such as the doctrine of the seven days of creation) seemed to be increasingly untenable. From its outset, liberalism was committed to bridging the gap between Christian faith and modern knowledge.

Liberalism’s program required a significant degree of flexibility in relation to traditional Christian theology. Its leading writers argued that reconstruction of belief was essential if Christianity were to remain a serious intellectual option in the modern world. For this reason, they demanded a degree of freedom in relation to
the doctrinal inheritance of Christianity on the one hand, and traditional methods of biblical interpretation on the other. Where traditional ways of interpreting Scripture, or traditional beliefs, seemed to be compromised by developments in human knowledge, it was imperative that they should be discarded or reinterpreted to bring them into line with what was now known about the world.

The theological implications of this shift in direction were considerable. A number of Christian beliefs came to be regarded as seriously out of line with modern cultural norms; these were dealt with in two ways:

1. They were abandoned, as resting upon outdated or mistaken presuppositions. The doctrine of original sin is a case in point; this was put down to a misunderstanding of the New Testament in the light of the writings of Augustine, whose judgment on these matters had become clouded by his over-involvement with a heretical sect (the Manichees).

2. They were reinterpreted, in a manner more conducive to the spirit of the age. A number of central doctrines relating to the person of Jesus Christ may be included in this category, including his divinity (which was reinterpreted as an affirmation of Jesus exemplifying qualities which humanity as a whole could hope to emulate).

Alongside this process of doctrinal reinterpretation (which continued in the “history of dogma” movement; see pp. 366–7) may be seen a new concern to ground Christian faith in the world of humanity—above all, in human experience and modern culture. Sensing potential difficulties in grounding Christian faith in an exclusive appeal to Scripture or the person of Jesus Christ, liberalism sought to anchor that faith in common human experience, and interpret it in ways that made sense within the modern worldview.

Liberalism was inspired by the vision of a humanity which was ascending upward into new realms of progress and prosperity. The doctrine of evolution gave new vitality to this belief, which was nurtured by strong evidence of cultural stability and progress in western Europe in the late nineteenth century. Religion came increasingly to be seen as relating to the spiritual needs of modern humanity and giving ethical guidance to society. The strongly ethical dimension of liberal Protestantism is especially evident in the writings of Albrecht Benjamin Ritschl.

For Ritschl, the idea of the “kingdom of God” was of central importance. Ritschl tended to think of this as a static realm of ethical values, which would underride the development of German society at this point in its history. History, it was argued, was in the process of being divinely guided toward perfection. Civilization is seen as part of this process of evolution. In the course of human history, a number of individuals appear who are recognized as being the bearers of special divine insights. One such individual was Jesus. By following his example and sharing in his inner life, other human beings are able to develop. The movement showed enormous and unbounded optimism in human ability and potential. Religion and culture were, it was argued, virtually identical. Later critics of the movement dubbed it "culture Protestantism" (Kulturprotestantismus), on account of their belief that it was too heavily dependent upon accepted cultural norms.

Many critics of the movement—such as Karl Barth in Europe and Reinhold Niebuhr in North America—regarded liberal Protestantism as based upon a hopelessly optimistic view of human nature. They believed that this optimism had been destroyed by the events of World War I, and that liberalism would henceforth lack cultural credibility. This has proved to be a considerable misjudgment. At its best, liberalism may be regarded as a movement committed to the restatement of Christian faith in forms which are acceptable within contemporary culture. Liberalism has continued to see itself as a mediator between two unacceptable alternatives: the mere restatement of traditional Christian faith (usually described as "traditionalism" or "fundamentalism") by its liberal critics, and the total rejection of Christianity. Liberal writers have been passionately committed to the search for a middle road between these two stark alternatives.

Perhaps the most developed and influential presentation of liberal Protestantism is to be found in the writings of Paul Tillich (1886–1965), who rose to fame in the United States in the late 1950s and early 1960s, toward the end of his career, and who is widely regarded as the most influential American theologian since Jonathan Edwards. Tillich's theological program can be summarized in the term "correlation." By the "method of correlation" Tillich understands the task of modern theology to be to establish a conversation between human culture and Christian faith. Tillich reacted with alarm to the theological program set out by Karl Barth, seeing this as a misguided attempt to drive a wedge between theology and culture. For Tillich, existential questions—such as "ultimate questions," as he often terms them—are thrown up and revealed by human culture. Modern philosophy, writing, and the creative arts point to questions which concern humanity. Theology then formulates answers to these questions, and by doing so it correlates the gospel to modern culture. The gospel must speak to culture, and it can do so only if the actual questions raised by that culture are heard. For David Tracy of the University of Chicago, the image of a dialogue between the gospel and culture is controlling, that dialogue involves the mutual correction and enrichment of both gospel and culture. There is thus a close relation between theology and apologetics, in that the task of theology is understood to be that of interpreting the Christian response to the human needs disclosed by cultural analysis.

The term “liberal” is thus probably best interpreted as applying to "a theologian in the tradition of Schleiermacher and Tillich, concerned with the reconstruction of belief in response to contemporary culture," in which form it describes many noted modern writers. However, it must be noted that the term “liberal” is widely regarded as imprecise and confusing The British theologian John Macquarrie notes this point with characteristic clarity:

What is meant by “liberal” theology? If it means only that the theologian to whom the adjective is applied has an openness to other points of view, then liberal theologians are found in all schools of thought. But if “liberal” becomes itself a party label, then it usually turns out to be extremely liberal.
In fact, one of the more curious paradoxes of recent Christian theology is that some of the most dogmatic of its representatives actually lay claim to be liberals! Liberalism, in the traditional and honorable sense of the word, carries with it an inalienable respect for and openness to the views of others; as such, it ought to be a fundamental element of every branch of Christian theology (including neo-orthodoxy and evangelicalism, to be discussed shortly). However, the term has now come to have a developed meaning, often carrying with it overtones of suspicion, hostility, or impatience toward traditional Christian formulations and doctrines. This can be seen clearly in the popular use of the term, which often includes ideas such as the denial of the resurrection or of the uniqueness of Christ.

Liberalism has been criticized on a number of points, of which the following are representative.

1. It tends to place considerable weight upon the notion of a universal human religious experience. Yet this is a vague and ill-defined notion, incapable of being examined and assessed publicly. There are also excellent reasons for suggesting that “experience” is shaped by interpretation to a far greater extent than liberalism allows.

2. Liberalism is seen by its critics as placing too great an emphasis upon transient cultural developments, with the result that it often appears to be uncritically driven by a secular agenda.

3. It has been suggested that liberalism is too ready to surrender distinctive Christian doctrines in an effort to become acceptable to contemporary culture.

Liberalism probably reached its zenith in North America during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Although continuing to maintain a distinguished presence in seminaries and schools of religion, it is now widely regarded as a waning force both in modern theology and in church life in general. The weaknesses of liberalism have been seized upon by critics within the postliberal school, to be considered shortly. Much the same criticism can be directed against a movement known loosely as “modernism,” to which we may now turn.

Modernism

The term “modernist” was first used to refer to a school of Roman Catholic theologians operating toward the end of the nineteenth century, which adopted a critical attitude to traditional Christian doctrines, especially those relating to Christology and soteriology. The movement fostered a positive attitude toward radical biblical criticism, and stressed the ethical, rather than the more theological, dimensions of faith. In many ways, modernism may be seen as an attempt by writers within the Roman Catholic church to come to terms with the outlook of the Enlightenment, which it had, until that point, largely ignored.

“Modernism” is, however, a loose term, and should not be understood to imply the existence of a distinctive school of thought, committed to certain common methods or indebted to common teachers. It is certainly true that most modernist writers were concerned to integrate Christian thought with the spirit of the Enlightenment, especially the new understandings of history and the natural sciences which were then gaining the ascendancy. Equally, some drew inspiration from writers such as Maurice Blondel (1861–1949), who argued that the supernatural was intrinsic to human existence, or Henri Bergson (1859–1941), who stressed the importance of intuition over intellect. Yet there is not sufficient commonality among the French, English, and American modernists, nor between Roman Catholic and Protestant modernism, to allow the term to be understood as designating a rigorous and well-defined school.

Among Roman Catholic modernist writers, particular attention should be paid to Alfred Loisy (1857–1940) and George Tyrrell (1861–1909). During the 1890s, Loisy established himself as a critic of traditional views of the biblical accounts of creation, and argued that a real development of doctrine could be discerned within Scripture. His most significant publication, L’Evangile et l’Église (“The gospel and the church”), appeared in 1902. This important work was a direct response to the views of Adolf von Harnack, published two years earlier as What is Christianity?, on the origins and nature of Christianity. Loisy rejected Harnack’s suggestion that there was a radical discontinuity between Jesus and the church; however, he made significant concessions to Harnack’s liberal Protestant account of Christian origins, including an acceptance of the role and validity of biblical criticism in interpreting the gospels. As a result, the work was placed upon the list of prohibited books by the Roman Catholic authorities in 1903.

The British Jesuit writer George Tyrrell followed Loisy in his radical criticism of traditional Catholic dogma. In common with Loisy, he criticized Harnack’s account of Christian origins in Christianity at the Crossroads (1909), dismissing Harnack’s historical reconstruction of Jesus as “the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well.” The book also included a defense of Loisy’s work, arguing that the official Roman Catholic hostility to the book and its author has created a general impression that it is a defense of Liberal Protestant against Roman Catholic positions, and that “modernism is simply a protestantizing and rationalizing movement.”

In part, this perception may be due to the growing influence of modernist attitudes within the mainstream Protestant denominations. In England, the Churchmen’s Union was founded in 1898 for the advancement of liberal religious thought; in 1928, it altered its name to the Modern Churchmen’s Union. Among those especially associated with this group may be noted Hastings Rashdall (1858–1924), whose Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology (1919) illustrates the general tenor of English modernism. Drawing somewhat uncritically upon the earlier writings of liberal Protestant thinkers such as Ritschl, Rashdall argued that the theory of the atonement associated with the medieval writer Peter Abelard was more acceptable to modern thought forms than traditional theories which made an appeal to the notion of a substitutionary sacrifice. This strongly moral or exemplarist theory of
the atonement, which interpreted Christ’s death virtually exclusively as a demonstration of the love of God, made a considerable impact upon English, and especially Anglican, thought in the 1920s and 1930s. Nevertheless, the events of World War I and the subsequent rise of fascism in Europe in the 1930s, undermined the credibility of the movement. It was not until the 1960s that a renewed modernism or rationalism became a significant feature of English Christianity.

The rise of modernism in the United States follows a similar pattern. The growth of liberal Protestantism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was widely perceived as a direct challenge to more conservative evangelical standpoints. Newman Smyth’s Pasing Protestantism and Coming Catholicism (1908) argued that Roman Catholic modernism could serve as a mentor to American Protestantism in several ways, not least in its critique of dogma and its historical understanding of the development of doctrine. The situation became increasingly polarized through the rise of fundamentalism in response to modernist attitudes.

World War I ushered in a period of self-questioning within American modernism which was intensified through the radical social realism of writers such as H. R. Niebuhr. By the mid-1930s, modernism appeared to have lost its way. In an influential article in The Christian Century of December 4, 1935, Harry Emerson Fosdick declared the need “to go beyond modernism.” In his Realistic Theology (1934), Walter Marshall Horton spoke of the rout of liberal forces in American theology. However, the movement gained new confidence in the postwar period, and arguably reached its zenith during the period of the Vietnam War.

However, we must now turn back to the opening of the twentieth century, to consider an earlier reaction against liberalism, which is especially associated with the name of Karl Barth: neo-orthodoxy.

Neo-Orthodoxy

World War I witnessed a growing disillusionment with, although not a final rejection of, the liberal theology which had come to be associated with Schleiermacher and his followers. A number of writers argued that Schleiermacher had, in effect, reduced Christianity to little more than religious experience, thus making it a human-centered rather than a God-centered affair. The war, it was argued, destroyed the credibility of such an approach. Liberal theology seemed to be about human values – and how could these be taken seriously, if they led to global conflicts on such a massive scale? By stressing the “otherness” of God, writers such as Karl Barth (1886–1968) believed that they could escape from the doomed human-centered theology of liberalism.

These ideas were given systematic exposition by Barth in the Church Dogmatics (1936–69), probably the most significant theological achievement of the twentieth century. Barth did not live to finish this enterprise, so that his exposition of the doctrine of redemption is incomplete. The primary theme which resonates throughout the Dogmatics is the need to take seriously the self-revelation of God in Christ through Scripture. Although this might seem to be little more than a reiteration of themes already firmly associated with Calvin or Luther, Barth brought a degree of creativity to his task which firmly established him as a major thinker in his own right.

The work is divided into five volumes, each of which is further subdivided. Volume I deals with the Word of God – for Barth, the source and starting point of Christian faith and Christian theology alike. Volume II deals with the doctrine of God, and volume III with the doctrine of the creation. Volume IV deals with the doctrine of reconciliation (or, perhaps one might say, atonement; the German term Versöhnung can mean both), and the incomplete volume V with the doctrine of redemption.

Apart from the predictable (and relatively non-informative) “Barthianism,” two terms have been used to describe the approach associated with Barth. The first of these terms is “dialectical theology,” which takes up the idea, found especially in Barth’s 1939 commentary on Romans, of a “dialectic between time and eternity,” or a “dialectic between God and human.” The term draws attention to Barth’s characteristic insistence that there is a contradiction or dialectic, rather than a continuity, between God and humanity. The second term is “neo-orthodoxy,” which draws attention to the affinity between Barth and the writings of the period of Reformed orthodoxy, especially during the seventeenth century. In many ways, Barth can be regarded as entering into dialogue with several leading Reformed writers of this period.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Barth’s approach is his “theology of the Word of God.” According to Barth, theology is a discipline which seeks to keep the proclamation of the Christian church faithful to its foundation in Jesus Christ, as he has been revealed to us in Scripture. Theology is not a response to the human situation or to human questions, it is a response to the Word of God, which demands a response on account of its intrinsic nature.

Neo-orthodoxy became a significant presence in North American theology during the 1930s, especially through the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr and others, which criticized the optimistic assumptions of much liberal Protestant social thinking of the time.

Neo-orthodoxy has been criticized at a number of points. The following are of especial importance:

1. Its emphasis upon the transcendence and “otherness” of God leads to God being viewed as distant and potentially irrelevant. It has often been suggested that this leads to extreme skepticism.

2. There is a certain circularity to the claim of neo-orthodoxy to be based only upon divine revelation, in that this cannot be checked out by anything other than an appeal to that same revelation. In other words, there are no recognized external reference points by which neo-orthodoxy’s truth claims can be verified. This has led many of its critics to suggest that it is a form of fideism – that is to say, a belief system which is impervious to any criticism from outside its own boundaries.
3 Neo-orthodoxy has no helpful response to those who are attracted to other religions, which it is obliged to dismiss as distortions and perversions. Other theological approaches are able to account for the existence of such religions, and place them in relation to the Christian faith.

Roman Catholicism

It is widely accepted that the most significant developments in modern Roman Catholic theology have their origins in the period immediately preceding the Second Vatican Council (1962–5). It would be unfair to inscribe the words “not much happened” against the history of Roman Catholic theology during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nevertheless, the conditions which the Roman Catholic church encountered in Europe during this period were not particularly suitable for theological reflection. In predominantly Protestant northern Europe, the church often found itself being placed on the defensive, so that polemical rather than constructive theology was of paramount importance. This was even the case during the nineteenth century, when Bismarck launched his Kulturkampf (“Culture War”) against the German Roman Catholic church. Yet secularizing forces were also of major importance. The French Revolution and its aftermath posed a powerful challenge to the church, once more placing it on the defensive.

Yet there were also theological reasons for this lack of creativity. Roman Catholicism had been deeply influenced by the ideas of Bossuet, particularly his emphasis on the constancy of the Catholic tradition (see p. 81). Theology was frequently understood in terms of the faithful repetition of the legacy of the past, a trend encouraged by the First Vatican Council (1869–70). One development of particular importance in this respect was Pius XI’s death in 1939, and Pius XII’s decision to confer a privileged status on the writings of Thomas Aquinas, in effect (if not in intention) establishing Aquinas as normative in matters of theology.

Nevertheless, definite anticipations of the trend toward theological renewal can be discerned in the nineteenth century. German Roman Catholicism was deeply touched by the rise of the idealism of the Romantic movement, which reawakened interest in many aspects of Catholic faith and practice, including its experiential aspects. This new interest in experience can be seen in the rise of the Catholic Theological School during the 1830s, when writers such as Johann Sebastian von Drey (1777–1853) and Johann Adam Möhler (1796–1838) began to place an emphasis on the idea of tradition as the living voice of the church. John Henry Newman (1801–90), who was initially an Anglican, also provided a major injection of confidence and theological acumen into later nineteenth-century Catholic theology, even if his influence has arguably been greater in the twentieth century than in his own. Perhaps the most important of his contributions to the development of Catholic theology relate to the areas of the development of doctrine and the role of the laity in the church.

Signs of a major revival in Roman Catholic theology can be seen after World War II (1939–45). One of the most important themes is that of the retrieval of the patristic and medieval heritage of Catholicism, evident in the writings of Henri de Lubac and Yves Congar. The Second Vatican Council promoted interest in the discussion of the nature and role of the church and sacraments, and also established a more positive environment in which Catholic theologians could operate. The writings of Hans Küng, Piet Schoonenberg, and Edward Schillebeeckx illustrate the new vitality within Catholic theology since the Council.

The two most significant theologians to emerge within twentieth-century Roman Catholicism are universally agreed to be Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–88) and Karl Rahner (1904–84). Von Balthasar’s chief work, published over the period 1961–9, is entitled Herrlichkeit (“The Glory of the Lord”). It sets out the idea of Christianity as a response to God’s self-revelation, laying special emphasis upon the notion of faith as a response to the vision of the beauty of the Lord.

One of Karl Rahner’s most impressive achievements is the rehabilitation of the essay as a tool of theological construction. The most significant source for Rahner’s thought is not a substantial work of dogmatic theology, but a relatively loose and unstructured collection of essays published over the period 1954–84, and known in English as Theological Investigations. These essays, which extend over sixteen volumes in the original German (Schriften zur Theologie) and twenty volumes in the still incomplete English edition, bring out the way in which a relatively unsystematic approach to theology can nevertheless give rise to a coherent theological program. Perhaps the most important aspect of Rahner’s theological program is his “trascendential method,” which he saw as a Christian response to the secular loss of the transcendence of God. Whereas earlier generations attempted to meet this challenge through liberal or modernist accommodationist strategies, Rahner argued that the recovery of a sense of the transcendental could only be achieved through a reappropriation of the classical sources of Christian theology, especially Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Rahner’s particular approach involves the fusion of Thomism with central aspects of German idealism and existentialism.

A document of major importance appeared in 1994. The Catechism of the Catholic Church represents a lucid summary of some of the major themes of modern Roman Catholic thought, updated in the light of the Second Vatican Council. This work represents a convenient summary of contemporary Roman Catholic thinking, and will be cited on occasion in the course of this book.

Eastern Orthodoxy

The Byzantine tradition continued to develop after the fall of Byzantium (see pp. 55–6), although in modified forms. With the fall of Constantinople to Islamic invaders, the main centers of eastern Christian thought shifted to Russia, and especially the cities of Kiev and Moscow. Writers such as A. S. Khomyakov (1804–60) and Vladimir Soloviev (1853–1900) did much to develop the intellectual foundations of Russian Orthodox theology during the nineteenth century. The repressive
religious policies associated with the Russian Revolution, however, made it impossible for theological education to continue in the homeland of Orthodoxy. Various Russian émigré writers, such as Georges Florovsky (1893–1979) and Vladimir Lossky (1903–58), continued to develop the tradition in exile. Although the collapse of the Soviet Union has opened the way for the re-establishment of a vigorous tradition of Russian Orthodox theology and spirituality in its homeland, it is likely that the Russian diaspora (from the Greek word for “dispersion,” often used to refer to groups of people exiled from their homeland) will continue to be of major importance in this respect, particularly in the United States.

Greece was finally liberated from Turkish rule in the 1820s, thus opening the way to a renewal of this theological tradition within Orthodoxy. However, this renewal did not really get off the ground until the 1960s. Indeed, much Greek theological writing in the nineteenth century shows a considerable degree of dependence on Western ideas, largely alien to Greece itself. Since then, writers such as John Zizioulas and Christos Yannaras have provided a major stimulus to the recovery of the distinctive ideas of the Eastern Christian tradition. Despite the growing importance of Greek diasporas in cities such as New York and Melbourne, it seems likely that Greece itself will continue to provide a major theological influence within Orthodoxy in the future.

Changing of the Gods (1979), argue that women may find religious emancipation by recovering the ancient goddess religions (or inventing new ones), and abandoning traditional Christianity altogether.

Yet the feminist evaluation of Christianity is far from as monolithically hostile toward Christianity as these writers might suggest. Feminist writers have stressed how women have been active in the shaping and development of the Christian tradition, from the New Testament onward, and have exercised significant leadership roles throughout Christian history. Indeed, many feminist writers have shown the need to re-appraise the Christian past, giving honor and recognition to an army of faithful women, whose practice, defense, and proclamation of their faith had hitherto passed unnoticed by much of the Christian church and its (mainly male) historians.

The most significant contribution of feminism to Christian thought may be argued to lie in its challenge to traditional theological formulations. These, it is argued, are often patriarchal (that is, they reflect a belief in domination by males) and sexist (that is, they are biased against women). The following areas of theology are especially significant in this respect.

1. The maleness of God (see pp. 265–7) The persistent use of male pronouns for God within the Christian tradition is a target of criticism by many feminist writers. It is argued that the use of male pronouns is at least as logical as the use of their male counterparts, and that it is often patriarchal (that is, they reflect a belief in domination by males) and sexist (that is, they are biased against women). The following areas of theology are especially significant in this respect.

2. The nature of sin Many feminist writers have suggested that notions of sin as pride, ambition, or excessive self-esteem are fundamentally male in orientation. This, it is argued, does not correspond to the experience of women, who tend to experience sin as lack of pride, lack of ambition, and lack of self-esteem. Of particular importance in this context is the feminist appeal to the notion of non-competitive relationships, which avoids the patterns of low self-esteem and passivity which have been characteristic of traditional female responses to male-dominated society. This point is made with particular force by Judith Plaskow in Sex, Sin and Grace (1980), a penetrating critique of Reinhold Niebuhr’s theology from a feminist perspective.

3. The person of Christ (see pp. 345–79) A number of feminist writers, most notably Rosemary Radford Ruether in Sexism and God-Talk, have suggested that Christology is the ultimate ground of much sexism within Christianity. In her Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology (1990), Elizabeth Johnson has