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Feminism

Feminism is a significant component of modern western culture. At its heart, feminism is a global movement working toward the emancipation of women. The older term for this liberation movement – “women’s liberation” – expressed the fact that it is at heart a liberation movement directing its efforts toward achieving equality for women in modern society, especially through the removal of obstacles – including beliefs, values, and attitudes – which hinder that process. Of late, the movement has become increasingly heterogeneous, partly on account of a willingness to recognize a diversity of approaches on the part of women within different cultures and ethnic groupings. Thus the religious writings of black women in North America are increasingly coming to be referred to as “Black womanist theology.”

Feminism has come into conflict with Christianity (as it has with most religions) on account of the perception that religions treat women as second-class human beings, both in terms of the roles which those religions allocate to women, and the manner in which they are understood to image God. The writings of Simone de Beauvoir – such as *The Second Sex* (1945) – developed such ideas at length. A number of post-Christian feminists, including Mary Daly in her *Beyond God the Father* (1973) and Daphne Hampson in *Theology and Feminism* (1990), argue that Christianity, with its male symbols for God, its male savior figure, and its long history of male leaders and thinkers, is biased against women, and therefore incapable of being salvaged. Women, they argue, should leave its oppressive environment. Others, such as Carol Christ in *Laughter of Aphrodite* (1987) and Naomi Ruth Goldenberg in *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 reappraise the Christian past, giving honor and recognition to an army of faithful women, whose practice, defense, and proclamation of their faith they hitherto passed unannounced 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 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 guilt 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.

2. **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...
explored the manner in which the maleness of Jesus has been the subject of theological abuse, and suggests appropriate correctives. Two areas of especial importance may be noted.

First, the maleness of Christ has sometimes been used as the theological foundation for the belief that only the male human may adequately image God, or that only males provide appropriate role models or analogies for God. Second, the maleness of Christ has sometimes been used as the foundation for a network of beliefs concerning norms within humanity. It has been argued, on the basis of the maleness of Christ, that the norm of humanity is the male, with the female being somehow a second-rate, or less than ideal, human being. Thomas Aquinas, who describes women as nusheogotten males (apparently on the basis of an obsolete Aristophanic biology), illustrates this trend, which has important implications for issues of leadership within the church.

In responding to these points, feminist writers have argued that the maleness of Christ is a contingent aspect of his identity, on the same level as his being Jewish. It is a contingent element of his historical reality, not an essential aspect of his identity. Thus it cannot be allowed to become the basis of the domination of females by males, any more than it legitimates the domination of Gentiles by Jews, or plumbers by carpenters.

The relevance of the feminist critique of traditional theology will be noted at appropriate points during the course of this volume. We turn now to consider a major change in the cultural mood of the West, which became especially evident in the final two decades of the twentieth century, and seems certain to remain influential for the first decades of the twenty-first. The movement in question is loosely known as “postmodernism.”

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is generally taken to be something of a cultural sensibility without absolutes, fixed certainties or foundations, which takes delight in pluralism and divergence, and which aims to think through the radical “situatedness” of all human thought. In each of these matters, it may be regarded as a conscious and deliberate reaction against the totalization of the Enlightenment.

To give a full definition of postmodernism is virtually impossible. In part, this is because there is substantially less than total agreement on the nature of the “modernity” which it displaced and superseded. In fact, the word “postmodernism” itself might be argued to imply that “modernity” is sufficiently well defined and understood that—whatever it is—it may be said to have ended and been superseded. The problem is particularly acute in the case of literature, where “modernism” has always been a contested notion. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify its leading general feature, which is the deliberate and systematic abandonment of centralizing narratives.

The general differences between modernity and postmodernity have been summarized in terms of a series of stylistic contrasts, including the following, suggested by Ihab Hassan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modernism</th>
<th>Postmodernity</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Chance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hierarchy</td>
<td>Anarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centering</td>
<td>Dispersal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection</td>
<td>Combination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note how the terms gathered together under the “modernism” category have strong overtones of the ability of the thinking subject to analyze, order, control, and master. Those gathered together under the “postmodernism” category possess equally strong overtones of the inability of the thinking subject to master or control, with the result that things need to be left as they are, in all their glorious and playful diversity. This applies just as much to religions as to everything else.

It will thus be clear that there is an inbuilt precommitment to relativism or pluralism within postmodernism in relation to questions of truth. To use the jargon of the movement, one could say that postmodernism represents a situation in which the signifier has replaced the signified as the focus of orientation and value. In terms of the structural linguistics developed initially by Ferdinand de Saussure, and subsequently by Roman Jakobson and others, the recognition of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign and its interdependence with other signs marks the end of the possibility of fixed, absolute meanings.

According to de Saussure, a “sign” consists of three things: the signifier (the acoustic image of the spoken word as heard by the intended recipient of the message), the signified (the meaning which is evoked in the mind of this recipient through the stimulus of the signifier), and the unity of these two. For de Saussure, the unity of the signifier with the signified is a cultural convention. There is no universal or transcendent foundation which relates signifier and signified: it is arbitrary, reflecting the contingencies of cultural conditioning.

Developing such insights, writers such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard argued that language was ultimately arbitrary, whimsical, and capricious, and did not reflect any overarching absolute linguistic laws. It was thus arbitrary, incapable of disclosing meaning. Baudrillard argued that modern society was trapped in an endless network of artificial sign systems, which meant nothing, and merely perpetuated the belief systems of those who created them.

One aspect of postmodernism which illustrates this trend particularly well, while also indicating its obsession with texts and language, is deconstruction—the critical method which virtually declares that the identity and intentions of the author of a text are irrelevant to the interpretation of the text, prior to insisting that, in any case, no fixed meaning can be found in it. This movement arose primarily as a result...
of Jacques Derrida’s reading of the works of Martin Heidegger in the late 1960s. Two general principles can be seen as underlying this approach to the reading of texts.

1. Anything that is written will convey meanings which its author did not intend and could not have intended.
2. The author cannot adequately put into words what he or she means in the first place.

All interpretations are thus equally valid, or equally meaningless (depending upon your point of view). As Paul de Man, one of the leading American proponents of this approach, declared, the very idea of “meaning” smacked of fascism. This approach, which blossomed in post-Vietnam America, was given intellectual respectability by academics such as de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, Harold Bloom, and J. Hillis Miller. “Metanarratives” — that is, generalizing narratives which claimed to provide universal frameworks for the discernment of meaning — were to be rejected as authoritarian. Far from discerning meaning, such narratives imposed their own meanings in a fascist manner.

Theologically, the two following developments should be noted as being of especial importance. Although it is not clear what their long-term influence may be, they are likely to remain significant for the next two decades.

1. Biblical interpretation. Traditional academic biblical interpretation had been dominated by the historico-critical method. This approach, which developed during the nineteenth century, stressed the importance of the application of critical historical methods, such as establishing the Sinn im Leben, or “situation in life,” of gospel passages. It was challenged in the 1970s and 1980s through the rise of structuralism and poststructuralism.

A number of leading literary critics of the 1980s (such as Harold Bloom and Frank Kermode) ventured into the field of biblical interpretation, and challenged such ideas as “institutionally legitimized” or “scholarly respectable” interpretations of the Bible. The notion that there is a meaning to a biblical text — whether laid down by a church authority or by the academic community — is regarded with intense suspicion within postmodernism.

Among specific influences upon biblical interpretation, the following are of especial interest. Michel Foucault’s analysis of the power relationship between the interpreter and the community raised a cluster of important questions concerning the potentially repressive function of “authorized” biblical interpreters. The works of Jacques Derrida raised the question of how a range of conflicting readings of Scripture could be created by the differential interpretation of biblical texts. Jean-François Lyotard suggested that what he styled les grands récits, the great biblical narratives, did little more than perpetuate secular ideologies based loosely on those narratives. This raised the question of how the Bible can be interpreted in such a way as to challenge, rather than endorse, the assumptions of western capitalism (although the writings of Latin American liberation theologians — see below — suggest that this problem is considerably less serious than Lyotard’s rhetoric allows).

2. Systematic theology. Postmodernism is, by its very nature, hostile to the notion of “systematization” or any claims to have discerned “meaning.” Mark Taylor’s study Erring is an excellent illustration of the impact of postmodernism on systematic theology. The image of “erring” — rather than more traditional approaches to theological system-building — leads Taylor to develop an anti-systematic theology which offers polyvalent approaches to questions of truth or meaning. Taylor’s study represents an exploration of the consequences of Nietzsche’s declaration of the “death of God.” On the basis of this, Taylor argues for the elimination of such concepts as self, truth, and meaning. Language does not refer to anything, and truth does not correspond to anything.

Liberation theology

The term “liberation theology” could, in theory, be applied to any theology which is addressed to or deals with oppressive situations. In this sense, feminist theology could be regarded as a form of liberation theology, as the older term “women’s liberation” suggests. Equally, Black theology is unquestionably concerned with the issue of liberation. However, in practice, the term is used to refer to a quite distinct form of theology, which has its origins in the Latin American situation in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1968, the Roman Catholic bishops of Latin America gathered for a congress at Medellin, Colombia. This meeting — often known as CELAM II — set shock waves throughout the region by acknowledging that the church had often sided with oppressive governments in the region, and declaring that in future it would be on the side of the poor.

This pastoral and political stance was soon complemented by a solid theological foundation. In his Theology of Liberation (1971), the Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez introduced the characteristic themes that would become definitive of the movement, and which we shall explore presently. Other writers of note include the Brazilian Leonardo Boff, the Uruguayan Juan Luis Segundo, and the Argentinian José Míguez Bonino. This last is unusual in one respect, in that he is a Protestant (more precisely, a Methodist) voice in a conversation dominated by Roman Catholic writers.

The basic themes of Latin American liberation theology may be summarized as follows.

1. Liberation theology is oriented toward the poor and oppressed. “The poor are the authentic theological source for understanding Christian truth and practice” (Jon Sobrino). In the Latin American situation, the church is on the side of the poor: “God is clearly and unequivocally on the side of the poor” (Bonino). The fact that God is on the side of the poor leads to a further insight: the poor occupy a position of especial importance in the interpretation of the Christian
faith. All Christian theology and mission must begin with the “view from below,” with the sufferings and distress of the poor.

Liberation theology involves critical reflection on practice. As Gutiérrez puts it, theology is a “critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the word of God.” Theology is not, and should not be, detached from social involvement or political action. Whereas classical western theology regarded action as the result of reflection, liberation theology inverts the order: action comes first, followed by critical reflection. “Theology has to stop explaining the world, and start transforming it” (Bonizio). True knowledge of God can never be disinterested or detached, but comes in and through commitment to the cause of the poor. There is a fundamental rejection of the Enlightenment view that commitment is a barrier to knowledge.

At this point, the indebtedness of liberation theology to Marxist theory becomes evident. Many western observers have criticized the movement for this reason, seeing it as an unholy alliance between Christianity and Marxism. Liberation theologians have vigorously defended their use of Marx, on two major grounds. First, Marxism is seen as a “tool of social analysis” (Gutiérrez), which allows insights to be gained concerning the present nature of Latin American society, and the means by which the appalling situation of the poor may be remedied. Second, it provides a political program by which the present unjust social system may be dismantled, and a more equitable society created. In practice, liberation theology is intensely critical of capitalism and affirmative of socialism. Liberation theologians have noted Thomas Aquinas’ use of Aristotle in his theological method, and argued that they are merely doing the same thing – using a secular philosopher to give substance to fundamentally Christian beliefs. For, it must be stressed, liberation theology declares that God’s preference for and commitment to the poor is a fundamental aspect of the gospel, not some bolt-on option arising from the Latin American situation or based purely in Marxist political theory.

It will be clear that liberation theology is of major significance to recent theological debate. Two key theological issues may be considered as an illustration of its impact.

1. Biblical hermeneutics Scripture is read as a narrative of liberation. Particular emphasis is laid upon the liberation of Israel from bondage in Egypt, the prophets’ denunciation of oppression, and Jesus’ proclamation of the gospel to the poor and outcasts. Scripture is read, not from a standpoint of wishing to understand the gospel, but out of a concern to apply its liberating insights to the Latin American situation. Western academic theology has tended to regard this approach with some impatience, believing that it has no place for the considered insights of biblical scholarship concerning the interpretation of such passages.

2. The nature of salvation (see p. 434) Liberation theology has tended to equate salvation with liberation, and stressed the social, political, and economic aspects of salvation. The movement has laid particular emphasis upon the notion of “structural sin,” noting that it is society, rather than individuals, that is corrupted and requires redemption. To its critics, liberation theology has reduced salvation to a purely worldly affair, and neglected its transcendent and eternal dimensions.

Black theology

"Black theology" is a movement, especially significant in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, which concerned itself with ensuring that the realities of Black experience were represented at the theological level. The first major evidence of the move toward theological emancipation within the American Black community dates from 1964, with the publication of Joseph Washington’s Black Religion, a powerful affirmation of the distinctiveness of Black religion within the North American context. Washington emphasized the need for integration and assimilation of Black theological insights within mainstream Protestantism; however, this approach was largely swept to one side with the appearance of Albert Cleage’s Black Messiah. Cleage, pastor of the Shrine of the Black Madonna in Detroit, urged black people to liberate themselves from white theological oppression. Arguing that Scripture was written by black Jews, Cleage claimed that the gospel of a Black Messiah had been perverted by Paul in his attempts to make it acceptable to Europeans. Despite the considerable overstatements within the work, Black Messiah came to be a rallying point for black Christians, determined to discover and assert their distinctive identity.

The movement made several decisive affirmations of its theological distinctiveness during 1969. The "Black Manifesto" issued at the Inter-Religious Foundation for Community Organization meeting in Detroit, Michigan, placed the issue of the Black experience firmly on the theological agenda. The statement by the National Committee of Black Churchmen emphasized the theme of liberation as a central motif of Black theology:

Black Theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity. Black Theology is a theology of “blackness.” It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people.

Although there are obvious affinities between this statement and the aims and emphases of Latin American liberation theology, it must be stressed that, at this stage, there was no formal interaction between the two movements. Liberation theology arose primarily within the Roman Catholic church in South America, whereas Black theology tended to arise within black Protestant communities in North America.
The origins of the movement can be traced to the rise in black consciousness which was so distinctive a feature of American history in the 1960s. Three main stages can be distinguished within the development of the movement:

1 1966–70 During this developmental phase, Black theology emerged as a significant aspect of the civil rights struggle in general, and as a reaction against the dominance of whites in both seminaries and churches. At this stage, Black theology was developed within the black-led churches, and was not particularly academic in its outlook. The issues of primary importance centered on the use of violence to achieve justice, and the nature of Christian love.

2 1970–7 In this period of consolidation, the movement appears to have moved away from the churches to the seminaries, as the movement became increasingly accepted within theological circles. The focus of the movement shifted from issues of practical concern to more explicitly theological issues, such as the nature of liberation and the significance of suffering.

3 1977 onwards A new awareness of the development of liberation movements in other parts of the world, especially in Latin America, became of importance within Black theology. Alongside this new sense of perspective came a new commitment to serving black-led churches, and the fostering of fellowship and collaboration among those churches.

The most significant writer within the movement is generally agreed to be James H. Cone, whose *Black Theology of Liberation* (1970) appealed to the central notion of a God who is concerned for the black struggle for liberation. Noting the strong preference of Jesus for the oppressed, Cone argued that “God was Black” – that is, identified with the oppressed. However, Cone’s use of Barthian categories was criticized: why, it was asked, should a black theologian use the categories of a white theology in articulating the black experience? Why had he not made fuller use of black history and culture? In later works, Cone responded to such criticisms by making a more pervasive appeal to “the Black experience” as a central resource in Black theology. Nevertheless, Cone has continued to maintain a Barthian emphasis upon the centrality of Christ as the self-revelation of God (while identifying him as “the Black Messiah”), and the authority of Scripture in interpreting human experience in general.

Postliberalism

One of the most significant developments in theology since about 1980 has been a growing skepticism over the plausibility of a liberal worldview. The emergence of postliberalism is widely regarded as one of the most important aspects of western theology since 1980. The movement had its origins in the United States, and was initially associated with Yale Divinity School, and particularly with theologians such as Hans Frei, Paul Honder, David Kelsey, and George Lindbeck. While it is not strictly correct to speak of a “Yale school” of theology, there are nevertheless clear “family resemblances” between a number of the approaches to theology to emerge from Yale during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Since then, postliberal trends have become well established within North American and British academic theology. Its central foundations are narrative approaches to theology, such as those developed by Hans Frei, and the schools of social interpretation which stress the importance of culture and language in the generation and interpretation of experience and thought.

Building upon the work of philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre, postliberalism rejects both the traditional Enlightenment appeal to a “universal rationality” and the liberal assumption of an immediate religious experience common to all humanity. Arguing that all thought and experience is historically and socially mediated, postliberalism bases its theological program upon a return to religious traditions, whose values are inwardly appropriated. Postliberalism is thus *anti-foundationalist* (in that it rejects the notion of a universal foundation of knowledge), *communitarian* (in that it appeals to the values, experiences, and language of a community, rather than prioritizing the individual), and *historicist* (in that it insists upon the importance of traditions and their associated historical communities in the shaping of experience and thought).

The philosophical roots of this movement are complex. Within the movement, particular appreciation can be discerned for the style of approach associated with the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, as noted above, which places an emphasis on the relation between narrative, community, and the moral life. In this respect, postliberalism reintroduces a strong emphasis on the *particularity* of the Christian faith, in reaction against the strongly homogenizing tendencies of liberalism, in its all-encompassing attempt to make theory (that all religions are saying the same thing) and observation (that the religions are different) coincide.

Liberal critics of postliberalism have argued that it represents a lapse into a “ghetto ethic” or some form of “fideism” or “tribalism,” on account of its retreat from universal norms of value and rationality. Postliberals respond to their liberal critics by arguing that the latter seem unable to accept that the Enlightenment is over, and that any notion of a “universal language” or “common human experience” is simply a fiction, like – to use Hans-Georg Gadamer’s famous analogy – Robinson Crusoe’s imaginary island.

The most significant statement of the postliberal agenda remains George Lindbeck’s *Nature of Doctrine* (1984). Rejecting “cognitive–propositional” approaches to doctrine as premodern, and liberal “experiential–expressive” theories as failing to take account of both human experiential diversity and the mediating role of culture in human thought and experience, Lindbeck develops what he terms a “cultural–linguistic” approach which embodies the leading features of postliberalism.

The cultural–linguistic approach denies that there is some universal immediated human experience which exists apart from human language and culture. Rather, it stresses that the heart of religion lies in living within a specific historical religious
tradition, and interiorizing its ideas and values. This tradition rests upon a historically mediated set of ideas, for which the narrative is an especially suitable means of transmission.

Such ideas can be seen in an earlier work of importance to the emergence of postliberalism – Paul Holfner’s Grammar of Faith (1978). For Holfner, Christianity possesses a central grammar which regulates the structure and shape of Christian “language games.” This language is not invented or imposed by theology; it is already inherent within the biblical paradigms upon which theology is ultimately dependent. The task of theology is thus to discern these intrabiblical rules (such as the manner in which God is worshipped and spoken about), not to impose extrabiblical rules. For Holfner, one of liberalism’s most fundamental flaws was its attempts to “reconcept” or “restate” biblical concepts, which inevitably degenerated into the harmonization of Scripture with the spirit of the age. “Continuous redoing of the Scripture to fit the age is only a sophisticated and probably invisible bondage to the age rather than the desire to win the age for God.” Theology is grounded on the intrabiblical paradigm, which it is obliged to describe and apply as best it can. To affirm that theology has a regulatory authority is not to imply that it can regulate Scripture, but to acknowledge that a distinctive pattern of regulation already exists within the biblical material, which theology is to uncover and articulate.

Postliberalism is of particular importance in relation to two areas of Christian theology.

1 **Systematic theology** Theology is understood to be primarily a descriptive discipline, concerned with the exploration of the normative foundations of the Christian tradition, which are mediated through the scriptural narrative of Jesus Christ. Truth can be, at least in part, equated with fidelity to the distinctive doctrinal traditions of the Christian faith. This has caused critics of postliberalism to accuse it of retreating from the public arena into some kind of Christian ghetto. If Christian theology, as postliberalism suggests, is intrasystemic (that is, concerned with the exploration of the internal relationships of the Christian tradition), its validity is to be judged with reference to its own internal standards, rather than some publicly agreed or universal criteria. Once more, this has prompted criticism from those who suggest that theology ought to have external criteria, subject to public scrutiny, by which its validity can be tested.

2 **Christian ethics** Stanley Hauerwas is one of a number of writers to explore postliberal approaches to ethics. Rejecting the Enlightenment idea of a universal set of moral ideals or values, Hauerwas argues that Christian ethics is concerned with the identification of the moral vision of a historical community (the church), and with bringing that vision to actualization in the lives of its members. Thus ethics is intrasystemic, in that it concerns the study of the internal moral values of a community. To be moral is to identify the moral vision of a specific historical community, to appropriate its moral values, and to practice them within that community.

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The term “evangelical” dates from the sixteenth century, and was then used to refer to Catholic writers wishing to revert to more biblical beliefs and practices than those associated with the late medieval church. It was used especially in the 1520s, when the terms *évangélique* (French) and *evangelisch* (German) came to feature prominently in polemical writings of the early Reformation. The term is now used widely to refer to a transdenominational trend in theology and spirituality, which lays particular emphasis upon the place of Scripture in the Christian life. Evangelicalism now centers upon a cluster of four assumptions:

1. The authority and sufficiency of Scripture.
2. The uniqueness of redemption through the death of Christ upon the cross.
3. The need for personal conversion.
4. The necessity, propriety, and urgency of evangelism.

All other matters have tended to be regarded as adiaphora, “matters of indifference,” upon which a substantial degree of pluralism may be accepted.

Of particular importance is the evangelical willingness to be flexible over the question of ecclesiology, an issue which will be considered at a later stage in this work (p. 498). Historically, evangelicalism has never been committed to any particular theory of the church, regarding the New Testament as being open to a number of interpretations in this respect, and treating denominational distinctive as of secondary importance to the gospel itself. This most emphatically does not mean that evangelicals lack commitment to the church as the body of Christ; rather, it means that evangelicals are not committed to any one theory of the church. A corporate conception of the Christian life is not understood to be specifically linked with any one denominational understanding of the nature of the church. In one sense, this is a “minimalist” ecclesiology; in another, it represents an admission that the New Testament itself does not stipulate with precision any single form of church government, which can be made binding upon all Christians. This has had several major consequences, which are of central importance to an informed understanding of the movement.

1. Evangelicalism is transdenominational. It is not confined to any one denomination, nor is it a denomination in its own right. There is no inconsistency involved in speaking of “Anglican evangelicals,” “Presbyterian evangelicals,” “Methodist evangelicals,” or even, to judge by some very recent trends, “Roman Catholic evangelicals.” Evangelicalism often takes the form of a movement within a mainstream denomination, working for renewal or reformation.

2. Evangelicalism itself represents an ecumenical movement. There is a natural affinity among evangelicals, irrespective of their denominational associations, which arises from a common commitment to a set of shared beliefs and
Pentecostal and charismatic movements

One of the most significant developments in Christianity in the twentieth century has been the rise of charismatic and Pentecostal groupings, which affirm that modern Christianity can rediscover and reappropriate the power of the Holy Spirit, described in the New Testament and particularly in the Acts of the Apostles. The term “charismatic” derives from the Greek word charismata (“gifts,” and particularly “spiritual gifts”), which charismatic Christians believe to be accessible today. The related term “Pentecost” refers to the events which are described as having taken place on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–12), which charismatic Christians see as setting a pattern for the normal Christian life.

The modern rediscovery of spiritual gifts is linked with the movement known as Pentecostalism, generally regarded as the first modern movement to demonstrate clear charismatic inclinations. In his study of the development of charismatic movements in the twentieth century, C. Peter Wagner distinguishes three “waves” within the movement. The first wave was classic Pentecostalism, which arose in the early 1900s, and was characterized by its emphasis upon speaking in tongues. The second wave took place in the 1960s and 1970s, and was associated with the mainline denominations, including Roman Catholicism, as they appropriated spiritual healing and other charismatic practices. The third wave, exemplified by individuals such as John Wimber, places emphasis upon “signs and wonders.”

Although the charismatic movement can be argued to have long historical roots, its twentieth-century development is generally traced back to the ministry of Charles Fox Parham (1873–1929). In 1901 Parham set out the basic ideas which would become definitive for Pentecostalism, including the practice of “speaking in tongues” and the belief that the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” was a second blessing after the conversion of a believer. These ideas were developed and consolidated by Joseph William Seymour (1870–1922), a black pastor who presided over a major charismatic revival at the Azusa Street Mission in downtown Los Angeles during the years 1906–8. Most major North American Pentecostal groupings, such as the Assemblies of God, trace their origins back to this period.

The full impact of the charismatic movement, however, dates from the 1960s. The incident which brought it to public attention took place in Van Nuys, California, in 1959, when a local episcopal rector told his congregation that he had been filled with the Holy Spirit and had spoken in tongues. This led to widespread attention being focused on charismatic renewal within mainline churches in Europe, North America, and South Africa. The rapid rise of Pentecostal groupings in Latin America can also be traced back to this period.

The more recent “signs and wonders” movement, which places considerable emphasis on the importance of spiritual healing, has caused controversy. Some critics argue that it presents the gospel in terms which make no reference to repentance or forgiveness, charges which were pressed particularly forcefully after the 1990 Spiritual Warfare Conference at Sydney, Australia. Further controversy centers on the theology of healing itself. However, it is clear that a major movement is in the process of emerging, with the potential for articulating a distinctive theology of its own. The new awareness and experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the modern church has raised a series of debates over the nature of baptism of the Spirit, and which of the various “spiritual gifts” (charismata) are of greatest importance in relation both to personal faith and spirituality, and to the upbuilding of the church as a whole.

Theologies of the developing world

In some parts of the non-western world Christianity has been present for some considerable time. An excellent example is provided by India, where a significant Christian presence seems to have come into being in the fourth century. The issue of the relation of Christianity to Hinduism has always been of particular importance to the theological agenda in this region.

In other parts of the non-western world Christianity is a more recent arrival. As
the global expansion of Christianity continued in the modern period, Christianity became established in parts of the world in which it had previously been unknown. The spectacular growth of Christianity during the twentieth century in sub-Saharan Africa and Korea illustrates this trend, which runs counter to the western European experience of Christianity. Christianity continues to expand within southeast Asia, including mainland China, although communication difficulties and the hostile attitude of the authorities toward Christianity make it difficult to establish exactly what is happening in some situations. In such situations, a major item on the theological agenda is the relation of Christianity to the local culture, including other religions in the region.

In this concluding section of this survey, we shall explore some of the issues which have arisen in the developing world, as Christianity becomes of increasing importance. We shall focus on two very different situations: India, in which there has been a Christian theological tradition for some time, and southern Africa, in which such a tradition is still in the process of emerging.

**India**

Christianity became established in the Indian subcontinent at a relatively early stage. Traditionally, it is believed that the apostle Thomas founded the Indian Mar Thoma church in the first century; even allowing for a degree of pious exaggeration here, there are excellent reasons for believing that Christianity was an indigenous element of the Indian religious scene by the fourth century. European travelers reaching India by land prior to the opening of the ocean trading route by the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama in May 1498 regularly report the presence of Christians in the region.

The arrival of the Portuguese may be taken to signal the opening of a significant new period in Indian Christianity, in which indigenous Christian traditions were supplemented by imported versions of the gospel, each reflecting aspects of its European context. As time went on, Dutch, English, and French settlers moved into India, bringing their own versions of Christianity with them.

Initially, evangelization was seen as peripheral to the more serious business of trading. While missionary societies and individuals were able to operate in India without any major opposition, they nevertheless received no support from the British authorities. The East India Company, for example, was opposed to their activities, on the grounds that they might create ill-will among native Indians, and thus threaten the trade upon which it depended. However, the Charter Act (passed by the British parliament on July 13, 1813) gave British missionaries protected status, and a limited degree of freedom to carry out evangelistic work on the Indian subcontinent. It was inevitable that religious tensions would develop. In 1830 the Dharma Sabha was formed, apparently as a reaction against intrusive forms of westernization in Bengal. The uprising of 1857 (generally referred to as "the Indian Mutiny" by contemporary English writers) is often regarded as the outcome of this growing resentment at westernization.

It is therefore of considerable importance to explore the development of indigenous Indian approaches to Christianity, rather than note the expansion of theologies of essentially European provenance in the region. In its initial phases, such a theology tended to arise through Hindus assimilating Christianity to their own worldview. An excellent example of this tendency can be seen in the case of Rammohun Roy (1772–1833), who founded the Atmiya Sabha, a movement dedicated to the reform of Hinduism. His growing alienation from orthodox Hinduism (evident in his debate with Sabramaniam Sastri) led to an increasing interest in Christianity, which he came to regard as embodying a moral code which would be acceptable to right-thinking Hindus. In 1829 he founded the Brahmo Samaj, a theistic society which drew upon ideas derived from both Hinduism and Christianity; among the ideas derived from the latter was the practice of regular congregational worship, then unknown in Hindustan. Under his successor Devendranath Tagore, however, the Samaj moved in a more definitely Hindu direction. Aspects of Rammohun Roy's critique of orthodox Christology were soon to come under criticism from other Hindus who had converted to Christianity; for example, the Bengali writer Krishna Mohan Banerjee argued that there were close affinities between the Vedic idea of Purusha sacrifice and the Christian doctrine of atonement.

Keshub Chunder Sen (1838–84) developed an approach to Christian theology which rested upon the assumption that Christ brought to fulfillment all that was best in Indian religion. Unlike Rammohun Roy, however, Keshub embraced the doctrine of the Trinity with enthusiasm. He argued that although Brahman was indivisible and indescribable, it could nevertheless be considered in terms of its inner relations of Sat ("being"), Cit ("reason"), and Anasata ("bein"). These three relations were to be correlated with the Christian understanding of God the Father as "Being," God the Son as "Logos," and God the Holy Spirit as "comforter" or "bringer of joy and love." A related idea has been developed more recently by Raimundo Panikkar in his *Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, in which he argued for the hidden presence of Christ in Hindu practice, especially in relation to matters of justice and compassion.

A similar approach was developed by Brahmanabandhu Upadhyaya (1861–1907), based on an analysis of the relation of the Christian faith and its articulation in terms of non-Christian philosophical systems (as in Thomas Aquinas' use of Aristotelianism as a vehicle for his theological exposition). Why should Indian Christians not be at liberty to draw upon indigenous Indian philosophical systems, in undertaking a similar task? Why should not Vedanta be used in the expression of Christian theology, and the Vedas be regarded as the Indian Old Testament? Increasingly, the issue of an authentically Indian Christian theology came to be seen as linked with that of independence from Britain; theological and political self-determination came to be seen as inextricably linked.

The move toward independence resulted in Christianity finding itself in competition with two rival ideologies: Gandhism and Marxism. A particularly important participant in this debate is Madathiparamil Mammen Thomas (b. 1916),
From a Mar Thoma Christian background, M. M. Thomas has come to be regarded as a leading representative of an authentically Indian voice in modern theology.

The continuing exploration of the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism is likely to remain a significant feature of Indian Christian theology for some time. For example, the relation between the Christian doctrine of incarnation and the Hindu notion of *avatar* has emerged as a significant debate within Indian theology. At least five ways of approaching this question may be discerned within contemporary Indian Christian thought:

1. The cosmic Christ included all the various pluralities of religious experience, including Hinduism and other religions in the Indian context.
2. Christ is the ultimate goal of the religious quest of Hinduism.
3. Hinduism is related to Christianity as its Old Testament Scriptures, thus playing a role similar to Judaism.
4. Christianity is totally incompatible and discontinuous with Hinduism.
5. The Hindu context gives rise to a specifically Indian form of Christianity.

**Africa**

Christianity was first brought to sub-Saharan Africa through missionaries, chiefly from England. From the outset there was a strong association between Christianity and western interests, both commercial and political. In a famous speech at Cambridge in 1857, the British missionary David Livingstone (1818–73) declared his intention to return to Africa to “make an open path for commerce and Christianity.” Most European missionaries had little knowledge of African culture, and as a result were often insensitive to the local situation, failing to realize the importance of interacting with local belief systems. As a result, “African theology” was simply European theology carried out in Africa, without any real interaction with the local culture.

At Africa began to emerge from its colonial past in the 1960s and 1970s, there was increasing interest in the reappraisal of African culture and values, which were regarded as having been suppressed by the European colonial powers. One of the most important developments since the 1970s has been the emergence of indigenous African Christian theologians, such as the Kenyan John Mbiti and the Ghanaian Kwame Bediako, who are concerned to develop authentically African theological paradigms rather than capitulate to western theological norms. For example, western theologians have often been dismissive of critical traditional African views, such as the importance attached to ancestors. African Christians refuse to adopt such dismissive attitudes, and argue for the need to take such views seriously, exploiting their apologetic potential and Christianizing them from within. The Tanzanian theologian Charles Nyamita provides an example of such an approach in his *Christ as Our Ancestor* (1984).

The interaction with traditional African culture and religions is thus of foundational importance in southern Africa. Yet in the recent past the agenda of Christian theolog...
Further Reading

The bibliography which follows is more detailed than in other chapters, given the particular interest many students have in the more recent aspects of Christian theology. The material presented is categorized under “Individual Theologians” and “Theological Movements since the Enlightenment.”

Individual Theologians

There are numerous study aids available for those wishing to pursue details of individual theologians during the modern period. The following works are of fundamental importance.


For specialist studies of nineteenth-century Christian theology and theologians, see:  
Nineteenth-Century  

For valuable surveys of twentieth-century writers, see:  

For further details of many theologians active in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see:  

Theological Movements since the Enlightenment

Black Theology


The Charismatic Movement and Pentecostalism


Eastern Orthodoxy


Evangelicalism


David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (eds), The Evangelicals (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975).
Feminism

Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Christology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983).

Liberalism and Modernism

J. Gresham Machen, Christianity and Liberalism (1923; reprinted Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).
George Rupp, Culture Protestantism: German Liberal Theology at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1977).


Liberation Theology


Narrative Theology

David E. Ford, Barth and God's Story (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1985).
James W. McClendon, Jr, Biographic as Theology (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974).
Roman Catholicism


Thomas F. O’Meara, Romantic Ideations and Roman Catholicism (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1982).


Regional Theologies


— Emerging Voices in Global Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995).


