

In an age which has become increasingly suspicious of the idea of "power," it is perhaps refreshing to be reminded that talk about "God almighty" does not necessarily imply that God is a tyrant, but that God chooses to stand alongside people in their powerlessness – a major theme in interpretations of the cross of Christ, to which we shall return in a later chapter (pp. 319–35).

GOD'S ACTION IN THE WORLD

In what sense can God be said to be present and active within the world? A number of models have been developed to articulate the richness of the Christian understanding of this matter, and are probably best regarded as complementary rather than competitive. In what follows, we shall explore several approaches to this important question.

Deism: God acts through the laws of nature

In an earlier section (pp. 143–4), we noted how the Newtonian emphasis upon the mechanical regularity of the universe was closely linked with the rise of the movement known as "Deism." The Deist position can be summarized very succinctly as follows. God created the world in a rational and ordered manner, which reflected God's own rational nature, and endowed it with the ability to develop and function without the need for any continuing divine presence or interference. Alexander Pope's celebrated epitaph for Isaac Newton brings out the popular understanding of the scientist's importance.

Nature and Nature's Law lay hid in Night
God said, let Newton be, and all was light.

This viewpoint, which became especially influential in the eighteenth century, regarded the world as a watch, and God as the watchmaker. God endowed the world with a certain self-sustaining design, such that it could subsequently function without the need for continual inter-

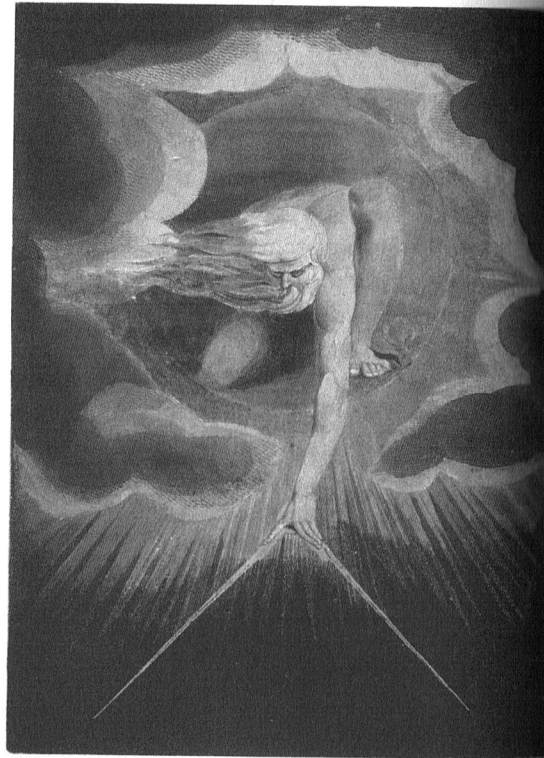


Figure 9.2 William Blake's watercolor *Ancient of Days* (1794), which portrays God in a deistical manner. Note how God is represented as the designer and creator of the world, holding a pair of calipers as a symbol of accurate design.

vention. It is thus no accident that William Paley chose to use the image of a watch and watchmaker as part of his celebrated defense of the existence of a creator God.

So how does God act in the world, according to Deism? The simple answer to this question is that God does *not* act in the world. Like a watchmaker, God endowed the universe with its regularity (seen in the "laws of nature"), and set its mechanism in motion. Having provided the impetus to set the system in motion, and establishing the principles which govern that motion, there is nothing left for God to do. The world is to be seen as a large-scale watch, which is completely autonomous and self-sufficient. No action by God is necessary.

Inevitably, this led to the question of whether God could be eliminated completely from the

Newtonian worldview. If there was nothing left for God to do, what conceivable need was there for any kind of divine being? If it can be shown that there are self-sustaining principles within the world, there is no need for the traditional idea of "providence" – that is, for the sustaining and regulating hand of God to be present and active throughout the entire existence of the world.

The Newtonian worldview thus encouraged the view that, although God may well have created the world, there was no further need for divine involvement. The discovery of the laws of conservation (for example, the laws of conservation of momentum) seemed to imply that God had endowed the creation with all the mechanisms that it required in order to continue. It is this point that the astronomer Pierre-Simon Laplace (1749–1827) was making in his famous comment concerning the idea of God as a sustainer of planetary motion: "I have no need of that hypothesis."

A more activist understanding of the manner in which God acts in the world is due to Thomas Aquinas and modern writers influenced by him, which focuses on the use of secondary causes.

Thomism: God acts through secondary causes

A somewhat different approach to the issue of God's action in the world can be based on the writings of the leading medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas (c.1225–1274). Aquinas's conception of divine action focuses on the distinction between primary and secondary causes. According to Aquinas, God does not work directly in the world, but through secondary causes.

The idea is best explained in terms of an analogy. Suppose we imagine a pianist, who is remarkably gifted. She possesses the ability to play the piano beautifully. Yet the quality of her playing is dependent upon the quality of the piano with which she is provided. An out-of-tune piano will prove disastrous, no matter how expert the player. In our analogy, the pianist is the primary cause, and the piano the secondary cause, for a perform-

ance of, for example, a Chopin nocturne. Both are required; each has a significantly different role to play. The ability of the primary cause to achieve the desired effect is dependent upon the secondary cause which has to be used.

Aquinas uses this appeal to secondary causes to deal with some of the issues relating to the presence of evil in the world. Suffering and pain are not to be ascribed to the direct action of God, but to the fragility and frailty of the secondary causes through which God works. God, in other words, is to be seen as the primary cause, and various agencies within the world as the associated secondary causes.

For Aristotle (from whom Aquinas draws many of his ideas), secondary causes are able to act in their own right. Natural objects are able to act as secondary causes by virtue of their own nature. This view was unacceptable to theistic philosophers of the Middle Ages, whether Christian or Islamic. For example, the noted Islamic writer al-Ghazali (1058–1111) held that nature is completely subject to God, and it is therefore improper to speak of secondary causes having any independence. God causes things directly. If lightning sets a tree on fire, the fire is not caused by the lightning, but by God. God is thus to be seen as the primary cause who alone is able to move other causes. In the view of many historians of science, this approach to divine causality (often known as "occasionalism") is unhelpful to the development of the natural sciences, as it downplays the regularity of actions and events within nature, and their apparent "law-like" nature.

Aquinas thus argues that God is the "unmoved mover," the prime cause of every action, without whom nothing could happen at all. Yet he allows that God can act *indirectly*, through secondary causes. The theistic interpretation of secondary causes thus offers the following account of God's action in the world. God acts indirectly in the world through secondary causes. A great chain of causality can be discerned, leading back to God as the originator and prime mover of all that happens in the world. Yet God does not act *directly* in

the world, but through the chain of events which God initiates and guides.

Aquinas's approach leads to the idea of God initiating a process which develops under divine guidance. God, so to speak, *delegates* divine action to secondary causes within the natural order. For example, God might move a human will from within so that someone who is ill receives assistance. Here an action which is God's will is carried out *indirectly* by God – yet, according to Aquinas, we can still speak of this action being “caused” by God in some meaningful way.

A related approach was developed by the British philosophical theologian Austin Farrer (1904–68). This account of divine action is often termed “double agency.” According to Farrer, every action which takes place in the world includes a causal role for one or more agents or objects in the world (the “secondary” causes) and a distinct role for God as the “primary” cause of what occurs. We could therefore speak of an ordered nexus of created causes and effects which are ultimately dependent upon divine agency. Two different orders of efficacy can be distinguished: a “horizontal” order of created causes and effects, and a “vertical” order through which God establishes and sustains the former.

An approach which is clearly related to this, but differing radically at points of significance, can be found in the movement known as “process thought,” to which we now turn.

Process theology: God acts through persuasion

The origins of “process thought” are generally agreed to lie in the writings of the Anglo-American philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), especially his important work *Process and Reality* (1929). Reacting against the rather static view of the world associated with traditional metaphysics (expressed in ideas such as “substance” and “essence”), Whitehead conceived reality as a process. The world, as an organic whole, is something dynamic, not static; something which *happens*. Reality is made up of

building blocks of “actual entities” or “actual occasions”, and is thus characterized by becoming, change, and event.

All these “entities” or “occasions” (to use Whitehead's original terms) possess a degree of freedom to develop, and be influenced by their surroundings. It is perhaps at this point that the influence of biological evolutionary theories can be discerned: like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955), Whitehead is concerned to allow for development within creation, subject to some overall direction and guidance. This process of development is thus set against a permanent background of order, which is seen as an organizing principle essential to growth. Whitehead argues that God may be identified with this background of order within the process. Whitehead treats God as an “entity,” but distinguishes God from other entities on the grounds of imperishability. Other entities exist for a finite period; God exists permanently. Each entity thus receives influence from two main sources: previous entities and God.

Causation is thus not a matter of an entity being coerced to act in a given manner: it is a matter of *influence* and *persuasion*. Entities influence each other in a “dipolar” manner – mentally and physically. Precisely the same is true of God, as for other entities. God can only act in a persuasive manner, within the limits of the process itself. God “keeps the rules” of the process. Just as God influences other entities, so God is also influenced by them. God, to use Whitehead's famous phrase, is “a fellow-sufferer who understands.” God is thus affected and influenced by the world.

Process thought thus redefines God's omnipotence in terms of persuasion or influence within the overall world-process. This is an important development, as it explains the attraction of this way of understanding God's relation to the world in relation to the problem of evil. Where the traditional free-will defense of moral evil argues that human beings are free to disobey or ignore God, process theology argues that the individual components of the world are likewise free to ignore divine attempts to influence or persuade

them. They are not bound to respond to God. God is thus absolved of responsibility for both moral and natural evil.

The traditional free-will defense of God in the face of evil is persuasive (although the extent of that persuasion is contested) in the case of moral evil – in other words, evil resulting from human decisions and actions. But what of natural evil? What of earthquakes, famines, and other natural disasters? Process thought argues that God cannot force nature to obey the divine will or purpose for it. God can only attempt to influence the process from within, by persuasion and attraction. Each entity enjoys a degree of freedom and creativity, which God cannot override.

While this understanding of the persuasive nature of God's activity has obvious merits, not least in the way in which it offers a response to the problem of evil (as God is not in control, God cannot be blamed for the way things have turned out), critics of process thought have suggested that too high a price is paid. The traditional idea of the transcendence of God appears to have been abandoned, or radically reinterpreted in terms of the primacy and permanency of God as an entity within the process. In other words, the divine transcendence is understood to mean little more than that God outlives and surpasses other entities.

Whitehead's basic ideas have been developed by a number of writers, most notably Charles Hartshorne (1897–2000), John B. Cobb (born 1925), and Schubert Ogden (born 1928). Hartshorne modified Whitehead's notion of God in a number of directions, perhaps most significantly by suggesting that the God of process thought should be thought of more as a person than an entity. This allows him to meet one of the more significant criticisms of process thought: that it compromises the idea of divine perfection. If God is perfect, how can he change? Is not change tantamount to an admission of imperfection? Hartshorne redefines perfection in terms of a receptivity to change which does not compromise God's superiority. In other words, God's ability to be influenced by other entities does not mean that God is reduced to their level.

God surpasses other entities, even though he is affected by them.

Process thought has no difficulty in speaking of “God's action within the world,” offering a framework within which this action can be described in terms of “influence within the process.” Nevertheless, the specific approach adopted causes anxiety to traditional approaches to the doctrine of God. For traditional theists, the God of process thought seems to bear little relation to the God described in the Old or New Testament.

For many commentators, the real strengths of process theology lie in its insights into the origin and nature of suffering within the world. Those strengths are best appreciated through an analysis of the various alternatives on offer within the Christian tradition concerning suffering – an area of theology which has come to be known as “theodicy,” to which we shall presently turn. But, first, we must explore the doctrine of creation, which sets the backdrop to these important discussions.

GOD AS CREATOR

The doctrine of God as creator has its foundations firmly laid in the Old Testament (for example, Genesis 1, 2). In the history of theology, the doctrine of God the creator has often been linked with the authority of the Old Testament. The continuing importance of the Old Testament for Christianity is often held to be grounded in the fact that the God of which it speaks is the same God to be revealed in the New Testament. The creator God and the redeemer God are one and the same. In the case of Gnosticism, a vigorous attack was mounted on both the authority of the Old Testament and the idea that God was creator of the world.

Development of the doctrine of creation

The theme of “God as creator” is of major importance within the Old Testament. Attention has often focused on the creation narratives found in

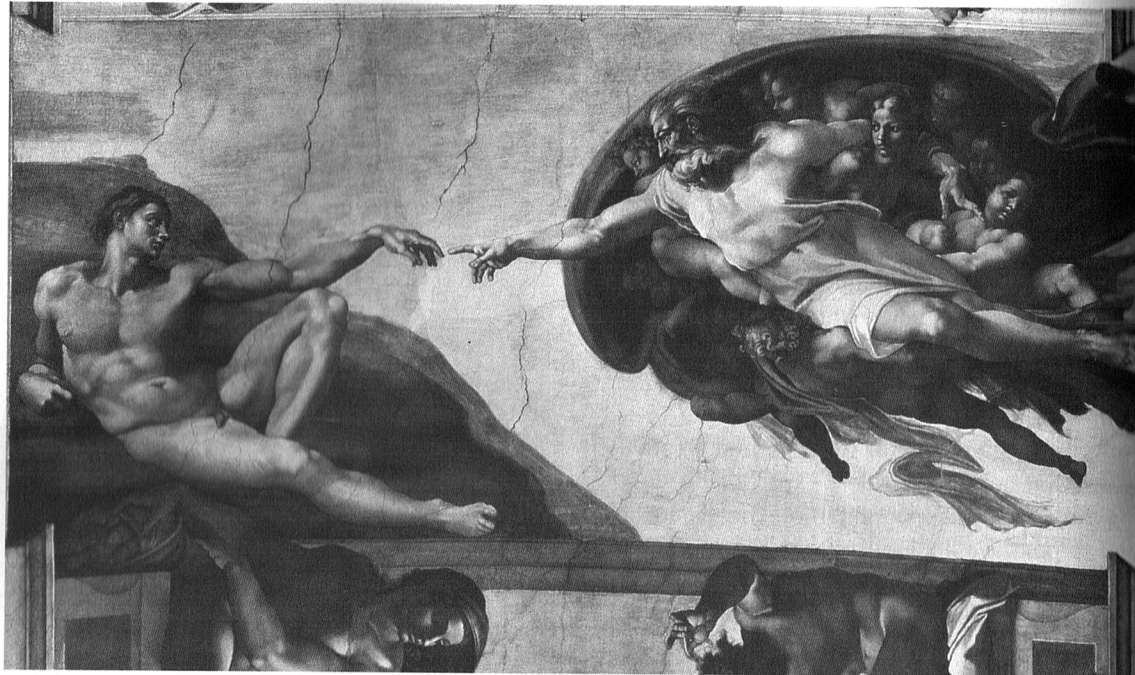


Figure 9.3 Michelangelo's fresco *Creation of Adam* (c.1511) in the Sistine Chapel. Note how God is depicted in traditional male form, superimposed upon a backdrop which has the shape of a human brain. This may be an attempt by Michelangelo to portray the "mind of God," expressed in the rationality of the created order.

the first two chapters of the book of Genesis, with which the Old Testament canon opens. However, it must be appreciated that the theme is deeply embedded in the wisdom and prophetic literature in the Old Testament. For example, Job 38: 1–42: 6 sets out what is unquestionably the most comprehensive understanding of God as creator to be found in the Old Testament, stressing the role of God as creator and sustainer of the world.

It is possible to discern two distinct, though related, contexts in which the notion of "God as creator" is encountered: first, in contexts which reflect the praise of God within Israel's worship, both individual and corporate; and, second, in contexts which stress that the God who created the world is also the God who liberated Israel from bondage, and continues to sustain Israel in the present.

The doctrine of creation plays a different role within the three main bodies of writings within

the Old Testament – the historical, prophetic, and wisdom writings. In the historical books, the doctrine of creation is often used to combat the nature religion of Canaan, which held that various nature divinities (such as the Canaanite "El") needed to be propitiated in order to secure a good harvest. Within the prophetic writings, particularly those of the exilic age, the doctrine is used to affirm the universal sovereignty of the God of Israel. The God who made the whole world is ruler of that world – including nations such as Babylonia, who were presently oppressing Israel. The gods of Babylon were merely local creations, lacking the power and authority of the God of Israel. The doctrine of creation thus became the foundation of the hope of liberation. Within the wisdom writings, particularly Job and Proverbs, the doctrine of creation is linked to the acquisition of wisdom. The wise are able to find and discern wisdom within the

created world, and order their lives in accord with its precepts.

Of particular interest for our purposes is the Old Testament theme of "creation as ordering," and the manner in which the critically important theme of "order" is established on, and justified with reference to, cosmological foundations. It has often been pointed out how the Old Testament portrays creation in terms of an engagement with, and victory over, forces of chaos. This "establishment of order" is generally represented in two different ways:

- 1 Creation is an imposition of order on a formless chaos. This model is especially associated with the image of a potter working clay into a recognizably ordered structure (e.g., Genesis 2: 7; Isaiah 29: 16, 64: 8; Jeremiah 18: 1–6).
- 2 Creation concerns conflict with a series of chaotic forces, often depicted as a dragon or another monster (variously named Behemoth, Leviathan, Nahar, Rahab, Tannim, or Yam) who must be subdued (Job 3: 8, 7: 12, 9: 13, 40: 15–41: 11; Psalm 74: 13–15; Isaiah 27: 1).

It is clear that there are parallels between the Old Testament account of God engaging with the forces of chaos and Ugaritic and Canaanite mythology. Nevertheless, there are significant differences at points of importance, not least in the Old Testament's insistence that the forces of chaos are not to be seen as divine. Creation is not to be understood in terms of different gods warring against each other for mastery of a (future) universe, but in terms of God's mastery of chaos and ordering of the world.

Perhaps one of the most significant affirmations which the Old Testament makes is that *nature is not divine*. The Genesis creation account stresses that God created the moon, sun, and stars. The significance of this point is too easily overlooked. Each of these celestial entities was worshiped as divine in the ancient world. By asserting that they were created by God, the Old Testament is insisting that they are subordinate to God, and have no intrinsic divine nature.

Having briefly introduced some aspects of the concept of creation, particularly within a Jewish or Christian context, we may now pass on to consider some of its aspects in a more theological manner.

Creation and the rejection of dualism

The central issue relating to the doctrine of creation which had to be debated in the first period of Christian theology was that of *dualism*. The classic example of this is found in some of the forms of Gnosticism, so forcefully opposed by Irenaeus of Lyons, which argued for the existence of two gods: a supreme god, who was the source of the invisible spiritual world, and a lesser deity who created the world of visible, material things. A similar outlook is associated with Manichaeism, a Gnostic worldview which Augustine of Hippo found attractive as a young man. This approach is strongly dualist, in that it sets up a fundamental tension between the spiritual realm (which is seen as being good) and the material realm (which is seen as being evil).

For Gnosticism, in most of its significant forms, a sharp distinction was to be drawn between the God who redeemed humanity from the world and a somewhat inferior deity (often termed "the demiurge") who created that world in the first place. The Old Testament was regarded by the Gnostics as dealing with this lesser deity, whereas the New Testament was concerned with the redeemer God. As such, belief in God as creator and in the authority of the Old Testament came to be interlinked at an early stage. The doctrine of creation affirmed that the material world was created good by God, despite its subsequent contamination by sin.

The dualist notion of a good realm of the invisible and spiritual, and an evil realm of the visible and material is excluded by the Council of Nicea (325), whose creed opened with an affirmation of faith in "God, the Father, the almighty, the maker of all things seen and unseen." This was reinforced by the Synod of Toledo (400), which was explicit in its rejection of dualism:

If anyone says and believes that this world and all its instruments have not been created by the almighty God, let him be anathema [...] If anyone says or believes that the world has been made by a god other than the one of whom it is written, "In the beginning, God created heaven and earth" (Genesis 1: 1), let him be anathema.

This view was further reinforced by Leo I in a letter of 447, in which he defined "true faith" as consisting of the belief that "the substance of all spiritual and physical creatures is good, and that there is no nature of evil. For God, the creator of all things, has not made anything that is not good."

It was, however, Augustine of Hippo who provided the definitive statement of a nondualist theology, which had such a major impact on western thought. The fundamental principles underlying this unitary vision of reality can be summarized as follows:

- 1 Everything that exists owes that existence to God. There is no alternative source or origin of existence.
- 2 Everything that exists was created good by a good God.
- 3 The evil that exists within the world is not to be thought of as something positive and real, possessing its own distinct substance. Rather, it is to be thought of as a "lack of goodness" (*privatio boni*).
- 4 Evil does not derive its origin from God, but from humanity's use of its God-given freedom.

The Apostles' creed opens with a declaration of faith in God as "maker of heaven and earth," thus affirming the divine creation of both the spiritual and material realms. During the Middle Ages, forms of dualism once more made their appearance, particularly in the views of the Cathari and Albigenses, who taught that matter is evil, and was created *ex nihilo* by the devil. Against such views, the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and the Council of Florence (1442) taught explicitly that God created a good creation out of nothing.

Earlier in this section, we commented on one aspect of Augustine's views on creation. Yet Augustine is of such importance to the development of the doctrine of creation that his contribution requires further discussion and comment.

Augustine of Hippo's doctrine of creation

In his work *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis* (401–15), Augustine of Hippo (354–430) set out to provide a doctrine of creation based on what he regarded as a reliable interpretation of the Genesis creation accounts. Augustine argues that God brought everything into existence in a single moment of creation. Yet the created order is not static, in that God has endowed it with the capacity to develop. Augustine uses the image of a dormant seed as an analogy for this process. God embeds seeds (more technically, *rationes seminales*, "seed-bearing reasons") within the original created order, which will grow and develop at the right time. There is a clear analogy here with the idea of the *logos spermatikos*, the "seed-bearing reason," widely used by Greek-speaking Christian writers to illuminate the doctrine of creation (pp. 10, 175).

Earlier Christian writers had noted how the first Genesis creation narrative spoke of the earth and the waters "bringing forth" living creatures, and had drawn the conclusion that this pointed to God endowing the natural order with a capacity to generate living things. Augustine took this idea further. God created the world complete with a series of dormant powers, which were actualized at appropriate moments through divine providence.

Augustine argues that Genesis 1: 12 implies that the earth has received the power or capacity to produce things by itself: "Scripture has stated that the earth brought forth the crops and the trees causally, in the sense that it received the power of bringing them forth." Where some might think of creation in terms of God's insertion of new kinds of plants and animals ready-made into an already existing world, Augustine rejects this as inconsistent with the

overall witness of Scripture. Rather, God must be thought of as creating in that very first moment the potencies for all the kinds of living things that would come later, including humanity.

Augustine's interpretation of Genesis does not limit God's creative action to the primordial act of origination. God is, Augustine insists, still working within the world, directing its continuing development and unfolding its potential. He argues that God's work of creation includes both the initial origination of the world and its subsequent development. There are two "moments" in creation: a primary act of origination, and a continuing process of providential guidance. Creation is thus not a completed past event. God must be recognized to be working even now, in the present, sustaining and directing the unfolding of the "generations that he laid up in creation when it was first established."

This means that the first Genesis creation account describes the instantaneous bringing into existence of primal matter, including causal resources for further development. The second Genesis account explores how these causal possibilities emerged and developed from the earth. Taken together, the two Genesis creation accounts declare that God made all things simultaneously, while envisaging that the various kinds of living things make their appearance gradually over time – as they were meant to by their creator.

For Augustine, God created a universe that was deliberately designed to develop and evolve. The blueprint for that evolution is not arbitrary, but is programmed into the very fabric of creation. God's providence superintends the continuing unfolding of the created order. Augustine's image of the "seed" implies that the original creation contained within it the potentialities for all the living kinds that would subsequently emerge. This does not mean that God created the world incomplete or imperfect because "what God originally established in causes, he subsequently fulfilled in effects." This process of development, Augustine declares, is governed by fundamental laws, which reflect the will of their creator: "God has established fixed laws governing the produc-

tion of kinds and qualities of beings, and bringing them out of concealment into full view."

The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*

Christianity initially took root and then expanded in the eastern Mediterranean world of the first and second centuries, which was dominated by various Greek philosophies. The general Greek understanding of the origins of the world could be summarized as follows. God is not to be thought of as having *created* the world. Rather, God is to be thought of as an architect, who ordered pre-existent matter. Matter was already present within the universe, and did not require to be created; it needed to be given a definite shape and structure. God was therefore thought of as the one who fashioned the world from this already existing matter. Thus, in one of his dialogues (*Timaeus*), Plato developed the idea that the world was made out of pre-existent matter, which was fashioned into the present form of the world.

This idea was taken up by most Gnostic writers, who were here followed by a few early Christian theologians such as Theophilus of Antioch and Justin Martyr. They professed a belief in pre-existent matter, which was shaped into the world in the act of creation. In other words, creation was not "from nothing [*ex nihilo*]"; rather, it was to be seen as an act of construction, on the basis of material which was already to hand, as one might construct an igloo out of snow, or a house from stone. The existence of evil in the world was thus to be explained on the basis of the intractability of this pre-existent matter. God's options in creating the world were limited by the poor quality of the material available. The presence of evil or defects within the world are thus not to be ascribed to God, but to deficiencies in the material from which the world was constructed.

However, the conflict with Gnosticism forced reconsideration of this issue. In part, the idea of creation from pre-existent matter was discredited by its Gnostic associations; in part, it was called into question by an increasingly sophisticated reading of the Old Testament creation narratives. Reacting

against this Platonist worldview, several major Christian writers of the second and third centuries argued that *everything* had to be created by God. There was no pre-existent matter; everything required to be created out of nothing. Irenaeus argued that the Christian doctrine of creation affirmed the inherent goodness of creation, which contrasted sharply with the Gnostic idea that the material world was evil.

Tertullian, writing in the third century, emphasized the divine decision to create the world. The existence of the world is itself due to God's freedom and goodness, not to any inherent necessity arising from the nature of matter. The world depends on God for its existence. This contrasted sharply with the Aristotelian view that the world depended on nothing for its existence, and that the particular structure of the world was intrinsically necessary. Augustine of Hippo defended and explored the implications of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* at several points in his writings, as noted earlier.

Yet not all Christian theologians adopted this position at this early stage in the emergence of the Christian tradition. Origen, perhaps one of the most Platonist of early Christian writers, clearly regarded the doctrine of creation from pre-existent matter to have some merit. By the end of the fourth century, however, most Christian theologians had rejected the Platonist approach, even in the form associated with Origen, and argued for God being the creator of both the spiritual and material worlds.

Implications of the doctrine of creation

The doctrine of God as creator has several major implications, of which some may be noted here.

1 A distinction must be drawn between God and the creation. Creation is not itself divine; it is a divine creation, which is ontologically distinct from its creator. God exists necessarily; the created order exists contingently. A major theme of Christian theology from the earliest of times has been to resist the temptation to merge the creator

and the creation. The theme is clearly stated in Paul's letter to the Romans, the opening chapter of which criticizes the tendency to reduce God to the level of the world. According to Paul, there is a natural human tendency, as a result of sin, to serve "created things rather than the creator" (Romans 1: 25). A central task of a Christian theology of creation is to distinguish God from the creation, while at the same time to affirm that it is God's creation.

2 Creation implies God's authority over the world. A characteristic biblical emphasis is that the creator has authority over the creation. Humans are thus regarded as part of that creation, with special functions within it. The doctrine of creation leads to the idea of *human stewardship of the creation*, which is to be contrasted with a secular notion of *human ownership of the world*. The creation is not ours; we hold it in trust for God. Human beings are meant to be the stewards of God's creation, and are responsible for the manner in which they exercise that stewardship. This insight is of major importance in relation to ecological and environmental concerns because it provides a theoretical foundation for the exercise of human responsibility toward the planet.

3 The doctrine of God as creator implies the original goodness of creation. Throughout the first biblical account of creation, we encounter the affirmation: "And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1: 10, 18, 21, 25, 31). (The only thing that is "not good" is that Adam is alone. Humanity is created as a social being, and is meant to exist in relation with others.) There is no place in Christian theology for the Gnostic or dualist idea of the world as an inherently evil place. As we noted earlier in this chapter, even though the world is fallen through sin, it remains God's good creation and is capable of being redeemed.

This is not to say that the creation is presently perfect. An essential component of the Christian doctrine of sin is the recognition that the world has departed from the trajectory upon which God placed it in the work of creation. It has become

deflected from its intended course. It has fallen from the glory in which it was created. The world as we see it is not the world as it was intended to be. The existence of human sin, evil, and death are themselves tokens of the extent of the departure of the created order from its intended pattern. For this reason, most Christian reflections on redemption include the idea of some kind of restoration of creation to its original integrity, in order that God's intentions for his creation might find fulfillment. Affirming the goodness of creation also avoids the suggestion, unacceptable to most theologians, that God is responsible for evil. The constant biblical emphasis upon the goodness of creation is a reminder that the destructive force of sin is not present in the world by God's design or permission.

4 Creation as recounted in the book of Genesis implies that human beings are created in the image of God. This insight, central to any Christian doctrine of human nature, will be discussed at greater length later (pp. 348–9); it is, however, of major importance as an aspect of the doctrine of creation itself. "You made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you" (Augustine of Hippo). With these words, the importance of the doctrine of creation for a proper understanding of human experience (pp. 146–50), nature, and destiny is established.

Models of God as creator

The manner in which God acts as creator has been the subject of intense discussion within the Christian tradition. A number of models of, or ways of picturing, the manner in which God is to be thought of as creating the world have been developed, each of which casts some light on the complex and rich Christian understanding of the notion of "creation."

Emanation

This term was widely used by early Christian writers to clarify the relation between God and the world. Although the term is not used by either

Plato or the third-century neo-Platonist philosopher Plotinus, many patristic writers sympathetic to the various forms of Platonism saw it as a convenient and appropriate way of articulating Platonic insights. The image that dominates this approach is that of light or heat radiating from the sun, or a human source such as a fire. This image of creation (hinted at in the Nicene creed's phrase "light from light") suggests that the creation of the world can be regarded as an overflowing of the creative energy of God. Just as light derives from the sun and reflects its nature, so the created order derives from God, and expresses the divine nature. There is, on the basis of this model, a *natural* or *organic* connection between God and the creation.

However, the model has weaknesses, of which two may be noted. First, the image of a sun radiating light, or a fire radiating heat, implies an involuntary emanation, rather than a conscious decision to create. The Christian tradition has consistently emphasized that the act of creation rests upon a prior decision on the part of God to create, which this model cannot adequately express.

This naturally leads on to the second weakness, which relates to the impersonal nature of the model in question. The idea of a personal God, expressing a personality both in the very act of creation and the subsequent creation itself, is difficult to convey by this image. Nevertheless, the model clearly articulates a close connection between creator and creation, leading us to expect that something of the identity and nature of the creator is to be found in the creation. Thus, the beauty of God – a theme which was of particular importance in early medieval theology, and which has emerged as significant again in the later writings of Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–88) – would be expected to be reflected in the nature of the creation.

Construction

Many biblical passages portray God as a master builder, deliberately constructing the world (for example, Psalm 127: 1). The imagery is powerful, conveying the ideas of purpose, planning,

and a deliberate intention to create. The image is important because it draws attention to both the creator and the creation. In addition to bringing out the skill of the creator, it also allows the beauty and ordering of the resulting creation to be appreciated, both for what it is in itself, and for its testimony to the creativity and care of its creator.

However, the image has a deficiency, which relates to a point made in connection with Plato's dialogue, *Timaeus*. This portrays creation as involving pre-existent matter. Here, creation is understood as giving shape and form to something which is already there – an idea which, we have seen, causes at least a degree of tension with the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. The image of God as a builder would seem to imply the assembly of the world from material which is already to hand, which is clearly at odds with the notion of creation out of nothing.

Nevertheless, despite this difficulty, it can be seen that the model expresses the insight that the character of the creator is, in some manner, expressed in the natural world, just as that of an artist is communicated or embodied in his or her work. In particular, the notion of "ordering" – that is, the imparting or imposing of a coherence or structure to the material in question – is clearly affirmed by this model. Whatever else the complex notion of "creation" may mean within a Christian context, it certainly includes the fundamental theme of ordering – a notion which is especially significant in the creation narratives of the Old Testament.

Artistic expression

Many Christian writers, from various periods in the history of the church, speak of creation as the "handiwork of God," comparing it to a work of art which is beautiful in itself, as well as expressing the personality of its creator. This model of creation as the "artistic expression" of God as creator is particularly well expressed in the writings of the eighteenth-century North American theologian Jonathan Edwards, as we noted earlier (p. 163).

The image is profoundly helpful as it supplements a deficiency of both the two models noted above – namely, their impersonal character. The image of God as artist conveys the idea of personal expression in the creation of something beautiful. Once more, the potential weaknesses need to be noted; for example, the model could easily lead to the idea of creation from pre-existent matter, as in the case of a sculptor with a statue carved from an already existing block of stone. However, the model offers us at least the possibility of thinking about creation from nothing, as with the author who writes a novel, or the composer who creates a melody and harmony. These lines of thought were creatively developed by Dorothy L. Sayers (1893–1957) in her *Mind of the Maker* (1941), which proposed parallels between the divine act of creation and the human writing of a book. It also encourages us to seek the self-expression of God in the creation, and gives added theological credibility to a natural theology (see pp. 158–62). There is also a natural link between the concept of creation as "artistic expression" and the highly significant concept of "beauty."

Creation and Christian approaches to ecology

In the closing decades of the twentieth century there was growing interest in the way in which the world is valued by human beings. Some writers have argued that the exploitative attitude to nature, typical of the twentieth century, is a direct result of the Christian doctrine of creation. An excellent example of this is provided by an influential 1967 essay by historian Lynn White Jr. (1907–87), who argued that the Judeo-Christian idea of humanity having dominion or authority over creation has led to the view that nature exists to serve human needs, thus legitimating a highly exploitative attitude. Christianity, he argued, thus bears a substantial burden of guilt for the modern ecological crisis.

In particular, White argued that Christianity was to blame for the emerging ecological crisis on

account of its use of the concept of the "image of God," found in the Genesis creation account (Genesis 1: 26–7), as a pretext for justifying human exploitation of the world's resources. The book of Genesis, he argued, legitimated the notion of human domination over the creation, leading to its exploitation. Despite its historical and theological superficiality, White's essay had a profound impact on the shaping of popular scientific attitudes toward Christianity in particular, and religion in general.

With the passage of time, a more informed evaluation of White's essay has gained the ascendancy. The argument is now recognized to be seriously flawed. A closer reading of the Genesis text indicated that such themes as "humanity as the steward of creation" and "humanity as the partner of God" are indicated by the text, rather than that of "humanity as the lord of creation." Far from being the enemy of ecology, the doctrine of creation affirms the importance of human responsibility toward the environment.

In a widely read study, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (1986), the noted Canadian theologian Douglas John Hall stressed that the biblical concept of "domination" was to be understood specifically in terms of "stewardship," no matter what kind of interpretation might be placed on the word in a secular context. To put it simply: the Old Testament sees creation as the possession of humanity; it is something that is to be seen as entrusted to humanity, which is responsible for its safekeeping and tending. Similar lines of thought can be found in other religions, with discernible differences of emphasis and grounding; the Assisi Declaration (1986) on the ecological importance of religion may be seen as marking the recognition of this significant point.

A doctrine of creation can thus act as the basis for an ecologically sensitive ethic. For example, the environmentalist Calvin B. DeWitt has argued that four fundamental ecological principles can readily be discerned within the biblical narratives, reflecting the Christian doctrine of creation.

- 1 The "earthkeeping principle": just as the creator keeps and sustains humanity, so humanity must keep and sustain the creator's creation.
- 2 The "sabbath principle": the creation must be allowed to recover from human use of its resources.
- 3 The "fruitfulness principle": the fecundity of the creation is to be enjoyed, not destroyed.
- 4 The "fulfillment and limits principle": there are limits set to humanity's role within creation, with boundaries set in place which must be respected.

A further contribution has been made by Jürgen Moltmann, noted for his concern to ensure the theologically rigorous application of Christian theology to social, political, and environmental issues. In his 1985 work *God in Creation*, Moltmann argues that the exploitation of the world reflects the rise of technology, and seems to have little to do with specifically Christian teachings. Furthermore, he stresses the manner in which God can be said to indwell the creation through the Holy Spirit, so that the pillage of creation becomes an assault on God. On the basis of this analysis, Moltmann is able to offer a rigorously trinitarian defense of a distinctively Christian ecological ethic.

THEODICIES: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

A major problem which concerns the doctrine of God centers on the existence of evil in the world. How can the presence of evil or suffering be reconciled with the Christian affirmation of the goodness of the God who created the world? Traditionally, the problem of evil is framed in a four-step argument:

- 1 God is good.
- 2 A good God would not permit suffering or evil.
- 3 Yet suffering and evil are observed in the world.
- 4 Therefore a good God does not exist.

This fourth statement could either be interpreted as implying that there is no God, or that God is not good.

Some approaches to *theodicy* – the technical term widely used to refer to an intellectual defense of God's goodness or existence in the face of the presence of evil and suffering – rest on redefining the categories in which the dilemma is stated. For example, something might initially be thought to be "evil," yet closer examination discloses that it is able to bring about a good that was not initially suspected. Others explore the complex interaction between goodness and evil. Something that is good can, if abused or misused, lead to evil. This lies at the heart of the traditional free-will account of evil, which sees evil as the result of human misuse of its God-given freedom. Alternatively, it might be argued that good can only ultimately develop from a context in which evil is present – an argument which lies at the heart of John Hick's "vale of soul-making" theodicy, which we shall consider below.

In what follows, we shall explore some of the options available within the Christian tradition, and offer a brief assessment of their merits.

Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130–c.200)

Irenaeus represents a major element within Greek patristic thought, which regards human nature as a potentiality, rather than a fully developed actuality. Human beings are created with certain capacities for growth toward maturity and perfection. They are called to achieve perfection, rather than being perfect already. This process of growth and development requires contact with, and experience of, good and evil if truly informed decisions are to be made. If we are to be good, we need to know its opposite. This tradition tends to view the world as a "vale of soul-making" (to use a term taken from the English poet John Keats, 1795–1821), in which an encounter with evil is seen as a necessary prerequisite for spiritual growth and development.

God made humanity to be master of the earth and of all which was there. [...] Yet this could only take place when humanity had attained its adult stage. [...] Yet humanity was little, being but a child. It had to grow and reach full maturity. [...] God prepared a place for humanity which was better than this world [...] a paradise of such beauty and goodness that the Word of God constantly walked in it, and talked with humanity; prefiguring that future time when he would live with human beings and talk with them, associating with human beings and teaching them righteousness. But humanity was a child; and its mind was not yet fully mature; and thus humanity was easily led astray by the deceiver.

This view is not developed fully in the writings of Irenaeus. In the modern period, it has found an able exponent in the British philosopher of religion John Hick (born 1922), who is widely regarded as the most influential and persuasive exponent of such an approach. In his *Evil and the God of Love* (1966), Hick emphasized that human beings are created incomplete. In order for them to become what God intends them to be, they must participate in the world. God did not create human beings as automatons, but as individuals who are capable of responding freely to God. Unless a real choice is available between good and evil, the biblical injunctions to "choose good" are meaningless. Good and evil are thus necessary presences within the world, in order that informed and meaningful human development may take place.

The argument is obviously attractive, not least on account of its emphasis upon human freedom. It also resonates with the experience of many Christians, who have found that God's grace and love are experienced most profoundly in situations of distress or suffering. However, criticism has been directed against one aspect of this approach in particular. The objection is often raised that it appears to lend dignity to evil, by allocating it a positive role within the purposes of God. If suffering is seen simply as a means of advancing the spiritual development of humanity, what are we to make of those events – such as Hiroshima or Auschwitz – which destroy those who encounter

them? This approach, to its critics, seems merely to encourage acquiescence in the presence of evil in the world, without giving any moral direction or stimulus to resist and overcome it.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430)

The distinctive approach adopted by Augustine has had a major impact upon the western theological tradition. By the fourth century, the problems raised by the existence of evil and suffering had begun to become something of a theological embarrassment. Gnosticism – including its variant form, Manichaeism, with which Augustine became fascinated as a young man – had no difficulty in accounting for the existence of evil. It arose from the fundamentally evil nature of matter. The entire purpose of salvation was to redeem humanity from the evil material world, and transfer it to a spiritual realm which was uncontaminated by matter.

As noted earlier, a central aspect of many Gnostic systems was the idea of a demiurge – that is, a demigod who was responsible for forging the world, in its present form, out of pre-existent matter. The sorry state of the world was put down to the inadequacies of this demigod. The redeemer god was thus regarded as being quite distinct from the creator demigod.

Augustine, however, could not accept this approach. It might offer a neat solution to the problem of evil, yet the intellectual price paid was far too high. For Augustine, creation and redemption were the work of one and the same God. It was therefore impossible to ascribe the existence of evil to creation, for this merely transferred blame to God. For Augustine, God created the world good, meaning that it was free from the contamination of evil. So where does evil come from? Augustine's fundamental insight here is that evil is a direct consequence of the misuse of human freedom. God created humanity with the freedom to choose good or evil. Sadly, humanity chose evil; as a result, the world is contaminated by evil.

This, however, did not really resolve the problem, as Augustine himself appreciated. How could humans choose evil if there was no evil to choose? Evil had to be an option within the world if it were to be accessible to human choice. Augustine therefore located the origin of evil in satanic temptation, by which Satan lured Adam and Eve away from obedience to their creator. In this way, he argued, God could not be regarded as being responsible for evil.

Still the problem was not resolved. For where did Satan come from if God created the world good? Augustine traces the origin of evil back by another step. Satan is a fallen angel, who was originally created good, like all the other angels. However, this particular angel was tempted to become like God, and assume supreme authority. As a result, he rebelled against God, and thus spread that rebellion to the world. But how, Augustine's critics asked, could a good angel turn out to be so bad? How are we to account for the original fall of that angel? The problem had simply been pushed back by a stage, not resolved.

Karl Barth (1886–1968)

Thoroughly dissatisfied with existing approaches to evil, Karl Barth called for a complete rethinking of the entire issue. Barth, who was particularly concerned with the Reformed approach to the issue of providence, believed that a central theological flaw had developed in relation to the notion of the omnipotence of God. He argued that the Reformed doctrine of providence had become virtually indistinguishable from that of Stoicism. (In passing, we may note that many scholars of the Reformation make precisely this point in relation to Zwingli's doctrine of providence, which appears to be based upon the Stoic writer Seneca to a far greater extent than upon the New Testament!) For Barth, the notion of the omnipotence of God must always be understood in the light of God's self-revelation in Christ.

On the basis of this principle, Barth argued that there was a need for a "radical rethinking of the

whole issue." He suggested that the Reformed doctrine of omnipotence rested largely upon logical deduction from a set of premises about God's power and goodness. Barth, whose theological program is distinguished by its "Christological concentration," argued for a more Christological approach. Barth thus rejected *a priori* notions of omnipotence in favor of a belief in the triumph of God's grace over unbelief, evil, and suffering. A confidence in the ultimate triumph of the grace of God enables believers to maintain their morale and hope in the face of a world which is seemingly dominated by evil. Barth himself had Nazi Germany in mind as he developed this notion; his ideas, however, have proved useful elsewhere, and may be argued to be reflected in the theodicies that have been characteristic of liberation theology in more recent years.

Nevertheless, one aspect of Barth's theodicy has caused considerable discussion. Barth describes evil as *das Nichtige* – a mysterious power of "nothingness," which has its grounds in what God did *not* will in the act of creation. "Nothingness" is that which contradicts the will of God. *Das Nichtige* is the "uninvited" enemy, an unwanted intruder into created life. It is not "nothing," but that which threatens to *reduce* everything else to nothing, and thus poses a threat to the purposes of God in the world. For Barth, the ultimate triumph of grace ensures that "nothingness" need not be feared. However, his critics have found the idea of "nothingness" problematic, and have charged him with lapsing into arbitrary metaphysical speculation at a point at which fidelity to the biblical narrative is of central importance.

Barth can certainly be defended against these criticisms. However, it is fair to point out that his notion of "nothingness" is very difficult to grasp, and leaves many sympathetic interpreters puzzled by its apparent incoherence.

Alvin Plantinga (born 1932)

The Reformed philosopher Alvin Plantinga often addressed the questions arising from the existence of evil in the world. The "free-will defense"

offered by Plantinga is deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, and can be summarized in terms of the following points:

- 1 Free will is morally important. That means that a world in which human beings possess free will is superior to a hypothetical world in which they do not.
- 2 If human beings were forced to do nothing but good, that would represent a denial of human free will.
- 3 God must bring into being the best possible world that he is able to do.
- 4 It must therefore follow that God must create a world with free will.
- 5 This means that God is not responsible if human beings choose to do evil, since God is operating under self-imposed constraints that mean God will not compel human beings to do good.

In reviewing this argument, it is important to note how Plantinga insists that we are cautious and responsible about terms such as "omnipotent." To say that God is omnipotent is not, as we saw earlier, to say that "God can do anything." God operates under self-imposed limitations, reflecting God's nature and character. Plantinga brings this point out frequently. For example, in his essay "God, Evil, and the Metaphysics of Freedom," Plantinga argues convincingly that it is possible that God cannot create every logically possible world. If Plantinga's argument has a weak point, it is not to be found in his discussion of God's omnipotence, but in his assertion that a world with freedom is to be preferred to one that is without freedom.

Other recent contributions

The question of suffering remains high on the agenda of modern theology, and has been given a new sense of urgency and importance through the impact of the horrors of the Second World War, and the continued struggle of oppressed people against those who oppress them. A number

of approaches may be noted, each of which can be set against a different backdrop.

1 *Liberation theology* develops a distinctive approach to suffering, based on its emphasis upon the poor and the oppressed (see pp. 89–91). The suffering of the poor is not viewed as passive acquiescence in suffering; rather, it is seen as participation in the struggle of God against suffering in the world – a struggle which involves direct confrontation with suffering itself. This idea, in various forms, can be discerned in the writings of Latin American liberation theologians.

However, it is generally thought to find its most powerful expression in the writings of black theology, especially those of James Cone. The sequence of the cross and resurrection is interpreted in terms of a present struggle against evil, conducted in the knowledge of God's final victory over all suffering and that which causes it. Similar themes can be noted in the writings of Martin Luther King, especially his "Death of Evil upon the Seashore" (1956).

2 *Process theology* locates the origins of suffering and evil within the world in a radical limitation upon the power of God (pp. 214–15). God has set aside the ability to coerce, retaining only the ability to persuade. Persuasion is seen as a means of exercising power in such a manner that the rights and freedoms of others are respected. God is obliged to persuade every aspect of the process to act in the best possible manner. There is, however, no guarantee that God's benevolent persuasion will lead to a favorable outcome. The process is under no obligation to obey God.

God intends good for the creation, and acts in its best interests. However, the option of coercing everything to do the divine will cannot be exercised. As a result, God is unable to prevent certain things happening. Wars, famines, and holocausts are not things that God desires; they are, however, not things that God can prevent, on account of the radical limitations placed upon the divine

power. God is thus not responsible for evil; nor can it be said, in any way, that God *desires* or *tacitly accepts* its existence. The metaphysical limits placed upon God are such as to prevent any interference in the natural order of things.

3 A third strand in recent thinking on suffering has drawn upon *Old Testament* themes. Jewish writers such as Elie Wiesel (born 1928), retaining at least the vestiges of a belief in the fundamental goodness of God, point to the numerous passages in the Old Testament that *protest* against the presence of evil and suffering in the world. This approach has been picked up by a number of Christian writers, including John Roth, who has named the approach "protest theodicy." The protest in question is seen as part of the faithful and trusting response of a faithful people to their God, in the face of uncertainties and anxieties concerning God's presence and purposes in the world.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit really deserves a full chapter in its own right. The Holy Spirit has long been the Cinderella of the Trinity. The other two sisters may have gone to the theological ball; the Holy Spirit got left behind every time. But not now. The rise of the charismatic movement (see pp. 81–2) within virtually every mainstream church has ensured that the Holy Spirit figures prominently on the theological agenda. A new experience of the reality and power of the Spirit has had a major impact upon the theological discussion of the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

Models of the Holy Spirit

"God is spirit" (John 4: 24). But what does this tell us about God? The English language uses at least three words – "wind," "breath," and "spirit" – to translate a single Hebrew term,

ruach. This important Hebrew word has a depth of meaning which it is virtually impossible to reproduce in English. *Ruach*, traditionally translated simply as "spirit," is associated with a range of meanings, each of which casts some light on the complex associations of the Christian notion of the Holy Spirit.

- 1 *Spirit as wind*. The image of "wind" suggests power, movement, and uncontrollability, all of which correspond to aspects of the biblical idea of God. Old Testament writers are careful not to identify God with the wind, and thus reduce God to the level of a natural force. Nevertheless, a parallel is drawn between the power of the wind and that of God. To speak of God as spirit is to call to mind the surging energy of the "Lord of Hosts," and remind Israel of the power and dynamism of the God who led Israel out of Egypt through a powerful wind which divides the Red Sea (Exodus 14: 21). Here, the idea of *ruach* conveys both the power and the redemptive purpose of God.
- 2 *Spirit as breath*. The idea of spirit is associated with life. When God created Adam, God breathed into him the breath of life, as a result of which he became a living being (Genesis 2: 7). The famous vision of the valley of the dry bones (Ezekiel 37: 1–14) also illustrates this point: the bones only come to life when breath enters into them (Ezekiel 37: 9–10). The model of God as spirit thus conveys the fundamental insight that God is the one who gives life. *Ruach* is often linked with God's work of creation (for example, Genesis 1: 2; Job 26: 12–13, 33: 4; Psalm 104: 27–31).
- 3 *Spirit as charism*. The technical term "charism" refers to the "filling of an individual with the Spirit of God," by which the person in question is enabled to perform tasks which would otherwise be impossible. The gift of wisdom is often portrayed as a consequence of the endowment of the Spirit (Genesis 41: 38–9; Exodus 28: 3, 35: 31; Deuteronomy 34: 9).

Similarly, the calling of a prophet also rests upon an endowment with the Spirit (Isaiah 61: 1; Ezekiel 2: 1–2; Micah 3: 8; Zechariah 7: 12), which authenticates the prophet's message – a message which is usually described as "the word [*dabhar*] of the Lord."

The debate over the divinity of the Holy Spirit

The early church found itself puzzled by the Spirit and unable to make much in the way of theological sense of this area of doctrine. This is not to say that the Holy Spirit did not play a prominent role in the early church. The second-century writer Montanus, who is known to have been active during the period 135–75, is an example of a theologian operating in the early period of the church who focused on the activity of the Spirit. The leading ideas of Montanus are known chiefly through the writings of his critics, with the result that our understanding of Montanism may be somewhat distorted. However, it is clear that Montanus placed considerable emphasis on the activity of the Holy Spirit in the present, and particularly on the role of the Spirit in relation to dreams, visions, and prophetic revelations. It is even possible that Montanus may have identified himself with the Holy Spirit, seeing himself as the source of a divine revelation which was not otherwise available. However, the evidence for this assertion is ambiguous.

The relative absence of extensive discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit in the first three centuries reflects the fact that theological debate centered elsewhere. The Greek patristic writers had, in their view, more important things to do than worry about the Spirit, when vital political and Christological debates were raging all around them. This point was made by the fourth-century writer Amphilochius of Iconium, who pointed out that the Arian controversy had first to be resolved before any serious discussion over the status of the Holy Spirit could get under way. The theological development of the early church was

generally a response to public debates; once a serious debate got under way, doctrinal clarification was the inevitable outcome.

The debate in question initially centered upon a group of writers known as the *pneumatomachoi* or "opponents of the spirit," led by Eustathius of Sebaste. These writers argued that neither the person nor the works of the Spirit were to be regarded as having the status or nature of a divine person. In response to this, writers such as Athanasius (c.293–373) and Basil of Caesarea (c.330–79) made an appeal to the formula which had by then become universally accepted for baptism. Since the time of the New Testament (see Matthew 28: 18–20), Christians were baptized in the name of "the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Athanasius argued that this had momentous implications for an understanding of the status of the person of the Holy Spirit. In a letter to Serapion, Athanasius declared that the baptismal formula clearly pointed to the Spirit sharing the same divinity as the Father and the Son. This argument eventually prevailed.

However, patristic writers were hesitant to speak openly of the Spirit as "God" as this practice was not sanctioned by Scripture – a point discussed at some length by Basil of Caesarea in his treatise on the Holy Spirit (374–5). Even as late as 380, Gregory of Nazianzus (329–89) conceded that many Orthodox Christian theologians were uncertain as to whether to treat the Holy Spirit "as an activity, as a creator, or as God."

This caution can be seen in the final statement of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit formulated by a Council meeting at Constantinople in 381. The Spirit was here described, not as "God," but as "the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, and is worshiped and glorified with the Father and Son." The language is unequivocal: the Spirit is to be treated as having the same dignity and rank as the Father and Son, even if the term "God" is not to be used explicitly. The precise relation of the Spirit to Father and Son would subsequently become an item of debate in its own right, as the *filioque* controversy indicates (see pp. 247–9).

The following considerations seem to have been of decisive importance in establishing the divinity of the Holy Spirit during the later fourth century. First, as Gregory of Nazianzus stressed, Scripture applied all the titles of God to the Spirit, with the exception of "unbegotten." Gregory drew particular attention to the use of the word "holy" to refer to the Spirit, arguing that this holiness did not result from any external source, but was the direct consequence of the nature of the Spirit. The Spirit was to be considered as the one who sanctifies, rather than the one who requires to be sanctified.

Second, the functions which are specific to the Holy Spirit establish the divinity of the Spirit. Didymus the Blind (died 398) was one of many writers to point out that the Spirit was responsible for the creating, renewing, and sanctification of God's creatures. Yet how could one creature renew or sanctify another creature? Only if the Spirit was divine could sense be made of these functions. If the Holy Spirit performed functions which were specific to God, it must follow that the Holy Spirit shares in the divine nature. This point is stated with particular clarity by Basil of Caesarea:

All who are in need of sanctification turn to the Spirit; all those seek him who live by virtue, for his breath refreshes them and comes to their aid in the pursuit of their natural and proper end. Capable of perfecting others, the Spirit himself lacks nothing. He is not a being who needs to restore his strength, but himself supplies life. [...] Souls in which the Spirit dwells, illuminated by the Spirit, themselves become spiritual and send forth their grace to others. From here comes foreknowledge of the future, understanding of mysteries, apprehension of what is hidden, the sharing of the gifts of grace, heavenly citizenship, a place in the chorus of angels, joy without end, abiding in God, being made like God and – the greatest of them all – being made God.

For Basil, the Spirit makes creatures both to be like God and to be God – and only one who is divine can bring this about.

Third, the reference to the Spirit in the baptismal formula of the church was interpreted as

supporting the divinity of the Spirit. Baptism took place in the name of the "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28: 18–20). Athanasius and others argued that this formula established the closest of connections between the three members of the Trinity, making it impossible to suggest that the Father and Son shared in the substance of the Godhead, while the Spirit was nothing other than a creature. In a similar way, Basil of Caesarea argued that the baptismal formula clearly implied the inseparability of Father, Son, and Spirit. This verbal association, according to Basil, clearly had considerable theological implications.

The recognition of the full divinity of the Spirit thus took place at a relatively late stage in the development of patristic theology. In terms of the logical advance of doctrines, the following historical sequence can be discerned.

- Stage 1 The recognition of the full divinity of Jesus Christ.
- Stage 2 The recognition of the full divinity of the Spirit.
- Stage 3 The definitive formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, embedding and clarifying these central insights, and determining their mutual relationship.

This sequential development is acknowledged by Gregory of Nazianzus, who pointed to a gradual progress in clarification and understanding of the mystery of God's revelation in the course of time. It was, he argued, impossible to deal with the question of the divinity of the Spirit until the issue of the divinity of Christ had been settled.

The Old Testament preached the Father openly and the Son more obscurely. The New Testament revealed the Son, and hinted at the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Now the Spirit dwells in us, and is revealed more clearly to us. It was not proper to preach the Son openly, while the divinity of the Father had not yet been admitted. Nor was it proper to accept the Holy Spirit before [the divinity of] the Son had been acknowledged. [...] Instead, by grad-

ual advances and partial ascents, we should move forward and increase in clarity, so that the light of the Trinity should shine.

Augustine of Hippo: the Spirit as bond of love

One of the most significant contributions to the development of the theology of the Holy Spirit (an area of theology occasionally referred to as *pneumatology*) is due to Augustine. Augustine had become a Christian partly through the influence of Marius Victorinus, who had himself converted to Christianity from a pagan background. Victorinus had a distinct approach to the role of the Spirit, as can be seen from a hymn which he had penned:

Help us, Holy Spirit, the bond [*copula*] of Father and Son,
When you rest, you are the Father; when you proceed,
the Son;
In binding all in one, you are the Holy Spirit.

Although the theology of these lines seems modalist (to anticipate a trinitarian heresy we shall explore presently; see pp. 244–5), an idea of considerable importance is nevertheless expressed: that the Spirit is the "bond of the Father and the Son [*patris et filii copula*]."

In his treatise *On the Trinity*, Augustine insists upon the distinctiveness of the Spirit; nevertheless, despite this distinctive identity, the Spirit is what is common to the Father and Son. The Father is only the Father of the Son, and the Son only the Son of the Father; the Spirit, however, is the Spirit of both Father and Son, binding them together in a bond of love. In his discussion of this point, Augustine concedes that Scripture does not explicitly state that the Holy Spirit is love; however, in that God is love, and the Spirit is God, it seems to follow naturally that the Holy Spirit is love.

Scripture teaches us that he is the Spirit neither of the Father alone nor of the Son alone, but of both; and this suggests to us the mutual love by which the Father and the Son love one another. [...] Yet

Scripture has not said: "the Holy Spirit is love." If it had, much of our inquiry would have been rendered unnecessary. Scripture does indeed say: "God is love" (1 John 4: 8, 16); and so leaves us to ask whether it is God the Father, or God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit, or God the Trinity itself, who is love.

Augustine regards the Spirit as the bond of unity between Father and Son, on the one hand, and between God and believers, on the other. The Spirit is a gift, given by God, which unites believers both to God and to other believers. The Holy Spirit forges bonds of unity between believers, upon which the unity of the church ultimately depends. The church is the "temple of the Holy Spirit," within which the Holy Spirit dwells. The same Spirit which binds together the Father and Son in the unity of the Godhead also binds together believers in the unity of the church.

The functions of the Spirit

What does the Holy Spirit do? Many theologians have tried to provide brief summaries of the work of the Spirit: for example, Basil of Caesarea's succinct statement: "Through the Holy Spirit we are restored to paradise, led back to the Kingdom of heaven, adopted as children, given confidence to call God 'Father' and to share in Christ's grace, called children of light, and given a share in eternal glory." The Christian tradition has generally understood the work of the Holy Spirit to focus on three broad areas: revelation, salvation, and the Christian life. In what follows, we shall provide a brief indication of the richness of the Christian understanding of the role of the Spirit in each of these three areas.

The illumination of revelation

There has been a widespread recognition of the pivotal role of the Spirit in relation to the making of God known to humanity. Irenaeus wrote of the "Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied, and our forebears learned of God and the righteous were led in the paths of justice." Similarly, in his 1536 commentary on the gospels, Martin

Bucer (1491–1551) argues that revelation cannot occur without the assistance of God's Spirit:

Before we believe in God and are inspired by the Holy Spirit, we are unspiritual and for that reason we are completely unable to apprehend anything relating to God. So all the wisdom and righteousness which we possess in the absence of the Holy Spirit are the darkness and shadow of death.

The task of the Holy Spirit is to lead into God's truth; without that Spirit, truth remains elusive.

The role of the Spirit in relation to the most important theological source of the Christian tradition is of particular importance. The doctrine of the "inspiration of Scripture" affirms that the Bible has a God-given authority by virtue of its origins. This doctrine, in various forms, is the common tradition of Christianity, and has its origins in the Bible itself, most notably the affirmation that "every Scripture is God-breathed [*theopneustos*]" (2 Timothy 3: 16).

In Protestant theology, however, the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture serves an additional purpose – that of insisting on the primacy of Scripture over the church. Whereas more Catholic writers point to the formation of the canon of Scripture as indicating the authority of the church over that of Scripture, Protestant writers argue that the church merely recognized an authority which was already present within Scripture itself. The *Gallic Confession* (1559) illustrates this point well:

We know these books to be canonical, and the sure rule of our faith, not so much by the common accord and consent of the Church, as by the testimony and inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to distinguish them from other ecclesiastical books which, however useful, can never become the basis for any articles of faith.

Yet it is not simply God's revelation which is linked with the work of the Spirit; the Spirit is also widely regarded as being involved in the human response to that revelation. Most Christian theologians have regarded faith itself as the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. John Calvin (1509–64) is

one writer who draws attention to the pivotal role of the Spirit in revealing God's truth and applying or "sealing" this truth to humanity.

Now we shall have a right definition of faith if we say that it is a steady and certain knowledge of the divine benevolence towards us, which is founded upon the truth of the gracious promise of God in Christ, and is both revealed to our minds and sealed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

The appropriation of salvation

We have already noted how patristic writers justified the divinity of the Spirit with reference to the functions of the Spirit. Many of those functions relate directly to the doctrine of salvation; for example, the role of the Spirit in sanctification, making humanity like God, and divinization. This point is particularly important within the eastern Christian churches, with their traditional emphasis on deification; the western concept of salvation, which tends to be relational rather than ontological, nevertheless finds room for a role for the Spirit. Thus, in Calvin's doctrine of the application of salvation, the Holy Spirit plays a major role in relation to the establishment of a living relationship between Christ and believer.

The energization of the Christian life

For many writers, the Holy Spirit plays an especially important role in relation to the Christian life, both the individual and the corporate life. The fifth-century writer Cyril of Alexandria (c.378–444) is one of many to stress the role of the Spirit in bringing unity within the church.

All of us who have received the one and the same Spirit, that is, the Holy Spirit, are in a sense merged together with one another and with God. [...] Just as the power of the holy flesh of Christ united those in whom it dwells into one body, I think that, in much the same way, the one and undivided Spirit of God, who dwells in us all, leads us all into spiritual unity.

However, any properly Christian understanding of the role of the Spirit will go far beyond this, and will include reference to at least two other areas.

First is the "making real" of God in personal and corporate worship and devotion. The importance of the role of the Spirit in relation to Christian prayer, spirituality, and worship has been stressed by many writers, classic and modern. Second is the enabling of believers to lead a Christian life, particularly in relation to morality. Martin Bucer thus draws attention to the necessity of the Spirit, if believers are to keep the law.

So those who believe are not under the law, because they have the Spirit within them, teaching them everything more perfectly than the law ever could, and motivating them much more powerfully to obey it. In other words, the Holy Spirit moves the heart, so that believers wish to live by those things which the law commands, but which the law could not achieve by itself.

Yet the Christian life is corporate, not just individual, and it is important to note the ecclesiological dimensions of the work of the Holy Spirit. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962–5), many Catholic theologians have explored the role of the Spirit in shaping and sustaining Christian community, and fostering its witness in the world. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) thus speaks of the church as both "the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit."

The Spirit prepares people, and goes out to them with his grace, in order to draw them to Christ. The Spirit manifests the risen Lord to them, recalls his word to them and opens their minds to the understanding of his Death and Resurrection.

Growing interest in the theology of mission, linked with an increasing awareness of the importance of tracing God's imprints in other cultures and faiths, has led many to explore the role of the Spirit in the world, preparing the way for the proclamation of Christ (pp. 262, 434–5).

Having discussed the doctrine of God in general, our attention now turns to the more complex area of the doctrine of the Trinity, which seeks to give expression to a sequence of distinctively Christian insights concerning God.

QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 9

"God reveals himself as Lord" (Karl Barth). What difficulties does this statement raise by its use of masculine language in relation to God? How could they be resolved? Do you think the problem is restricted to the word "himself?" Or does it also extend to "Lord?"

2 Many Christians talk about having a "personal relationship" with God. What might they mean by this? What theological insights does this way of speaking offer?

- 3 "God can do anything." How would you respond to this definition of divine omnipotence?
- 4 Why do so many Christians believe that God suffers? What difference does it make?
- 5 Summarize and evaluate the main ways of thinking of God as the creator of the world.
- 6 What is distinctive about the Holy Spirit?