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Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-88092-3 - The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology
Edited by Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, Karen Kilby and Iain R. Torrance
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**Abba** The biblical record indicates that *abba*, the Aramaic word for 'father', was the form of address used by Jesus for God (see, e.g., Matt. 11:25–6; 26:39, 42; Luke 23:34, 46; John 11:41; 12:27–8; 17:5, 11, 21, 24–5). This usage appears to have been regarded as significant enough that it is one of the few pieces of Aramaic that is preserved untranslated in the Gospels (Mark 14:36). Jesus commended the same form of address to his disciples (Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:2; cf. John 20:17), and, again, its significance was such that it appears to have been preserved even among Greek-speaking communities in its Aramaic form (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

While scholars disagree over whether or not Jews customarily addressed God as 'Father' before Jesus' time (cf. Isa. 63:16; Jer. 3:19), there seems little question that Jesus' use of the term was regarded by his followers as distinctive. The canonical evangelists understand Jesus' use of 'Father' as correlative of his own status as 'Son' (Matt. 11:27; John 17:1; cf. Matt. 3:17; 17:5 and pars.). From this perspective, later developed explicitly in the doctrine of the Trinity, God's identity as 'Father' does not refer to a generic relationship between Creator and creature, but rather to a unique relationship with God's own co-eternal Word (John 1:1; see Logos), who, as 'Son', enjoys an intimacy with God that has no creaturely parallel (John 1:18). Thus, while Jesus is intrinsically God's Son, other human beings are children of God only by adoption through Jesus' Spirit (Rom. 8:23; Gal. 4:5; see Holy Spirit).

Ian A. McFarland

**Abortion** Abortion is one of today's most contested moral issues, with many anti-abortionists taking an absolutist stand on the basis of the sanctity of innocent human life and the personhood of the unborn child, and many feminists taking an opposing stand on the basis of a woman's right to choose and her right to personal bodily autonomy. Between these polarized positions, there is a wide range of more nuanced historical and contemporary debates.

Christian attitudes to abortion are informed by Scripture and, in Catholic tradition, by natural law. Yet it is difficult to derive an unambiguous conclusion from the diverse biblical passages which refer to life in the womb (e.g., Ps. 139:13–16), and to God's breathing of life into the human form (e.g., Gen. 2:7). Similarly, natural law lends itself to different interpretations as far as early human development is concerned, and there is ongoing debate regarding the personal identity and moral status of the embryo. Christianity has always regarded abortion as a serious sin, and the early Church vigorously opposed practices of infanticide and abortion in surrounding cultures. Until the nineteenth century, however, there was a distinction in the Catholic theological tradition between early and late abortion in terms of the moral gravity of the act, relating to debates about when the soul enters the body ('ensoulment').

Although early abortion was not criminalized under English common law, during the nineteenth century legislative changes in Britain and the USA resulted in the criminalization of all abortion in response to pressure from the medical profession. In the late nineteenth century the Catholic Church stopped distinguishing between early and late abortion, and it is now the most absolutist of all religions on this issue. With the liberalization of abortion law in some countries since the 1960s (most famously, the 1973 decision of the US Supreme Court in *Roe* v. *Wade*), and with the more recent emergence of campaigns for women's reproductive rights, the Catholic hierarchy has sought to use its political influence wherever possible to block or abolish the legalization of abortion.

Modern Catholic teaching leaves open the question as to when the embryo acquires personhood, but it insists that the embryo must be accorded full human dignity from conception. Abortion might be permissible to save the mother's life, but only if the death of the fetus is an indirect rather than a direct consequence of the procedure (an ethical position known as the doctrine of double effect). Other Churches and religions such as Judaism and Islam adopt a more casuistic approach: although abortion is generally regarded as wrong, particular cases must be evaluated before a judgement can be made.

Abortion is a unique moral dilemma. There is widespread concern about high abortion rates and disputes about time limits for legal abortion are common in countries such as the UK and the USA. Significant ethical questions arise with regard to abortion on grounds of fetal disability, and scientific developments in embryology and biotechnology bring with them the risk of the commodification of human embryos and maternal bodies. Feminist pro-choice arguments sometimes show insufficient concern for questions regarding the dignity and vulnerability of the unborn child and the psychological wellbeing of women who are traumatized by abortion. On the other hand, the World Health Organization estimates that some 70,000 women die every year as a result of illegal abortions, and anti-abortion campaigners sometimes appear to be indifferent or even hostile towards the often profound suffering caused to women by unwanted pregnancies.



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In view of the intractability of these issues, the traditional distinction between early and late abortion might serve society and the law well. For those who insist that there is no such distinction, the debate might more justly and effectively be conducted on moral grounds than through the law and politics. However, the ultimate credibility of any position might depend upon the extent to which it respects the moral authority of women and allows them to speak for themselves, recognizing that this will inevitably have a significant impact on an ethical debate from which women have historically been excluded, and yet which has such profound implications for women's lives.

R. M. Baird and S. E. Rosenbaum, eds., *The Ethics of Abortion: Pro-Life Vs. Pro-Choice* (Prometheus, 2001).

G. F. Johnston, *Abortion from the Religious and Moral Perspective: An Annotated Bibliography* (Praeger, 2003).

TINA BEATTIE

**ABRAHAM** The biblical figure of Abraham, whose story is found in Gen. 11:27–25:10, is foundational for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, to the extent that together they are sometimes named the three 'Abrahamic' religions. As the recipient of the COVENANT of circumcision, Abraham is regarded by Jews as the first Jew; his repudiation of idolatry for the worship of the one God means that he is sometimes described as the first Muslim in Islam (though formally most Muslims would accord this honour to Adam). While Abraham has never been popularly designated as the first Christian, his significance for the theology of PAUL has given him a central role in the doctrine of JUSTIFICATION, especially as developed in PROTESTANTISM.

In Galatians 3 and Romans 4, Paul cites Gen. 15:6 ('And [Abraham] believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness') to argue that Abraham is the prototype of those who are justified by FAITH apart from works of the LAW. In this way, Paul argues, Abraham is ancestor not only of the Jews by virtue of his reception of the covenant of circumcision, but also of Gentile Christians, who, like Abraham, are reckoned righteous by virtue of their faith, apart from either circumcision (which was commanded only afterwards; Rom. 4:10–11) or the works of the Mosaic law (which was given hundreds of years later; Gal. 3:17). In this way, Abraham, as 'the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised . . . and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised' (Rom. 4:11–12), points to the overcoming of the division between Jew and Gentile in the Church.

IAN A. MCFARLAND

**ABSOLUTION:** see PENANCE.

**ACCOMMODATION** The concept of accommodation is a corollary of the DOCTRINE of REVELATION and refers broadly to the processes by which God, though utterly transcendent of and thus intrinsically inaccessible to human investigation or knowledge, works within creation to make the divine self knowable to humankind. Accommodation thus refers to divine condescension to creaturely capacities and includes the use of any finite reality as a vehicle for divine self-disclosure. Most frequently, however, accommodation is associated specifically with God's use of SCRIPTURE as a vehicle of revelation scaled to the capacities of an unsophisticated audience. Thus, J. CALVIN, following a tradition going back to ORIGEN (*Cels.* 4.71) and AUGUSTINE (*Gen. lit.* 1.18.36), characterized the Bible's use of anthropomorphic language for God as analogous to a nurse's use of baby talk to communicate with an infant (*Inst.* 1.13.1).

Within this hermeneutical context, accommodation frequently serves as a tool of Christian APOLOGETICS. Calvin, for example, invoked divine condescension to account for discrepancies between biblical and scientific cosmologies (*CGen.* 6:14), as did G. Galilei (1564–1642) in his defence of heliocentrism (*Opere* 1.198–236). Divergence between Christian practice and the cultic and legal provisions of the OT is also explained in terms of accommodation, in line with Jesus' teaching that divorce was permitted by Moses only as a concession to hard-heartedness (Matt. 19:8). In Catholic thought accommodation is also used for the application of biblical texts to persons or circumstances other than those implied by their immediate context (e.g., the extension to all believers of God's promise to Moses, 'I will be with you', in Exod. 3:12).

See also INERRANCY.

IAN A. MCFARLAND

**ACCULTURATION:** see INCULTURATION.

**ACEDIA:** see SEVEN DEADLY SINS.

**ADIAPHORA** Derived from the Greek for 'indifferent things', 'adiaphora' (singular: 'adiaphoron') was used in ancient Stoic philosophy for things (e.g., wealth) that were neither commanded as virtues nor proscribed as vices. In Christian theology it refers analogously to aspects of Church practice regarded as permissible but not obligatory. The category is implicit in PAUL's pleas for toleration of diverse behaviours in the congregations to which he writes (e.g., eating or abstaining from meat; Rom. 14:1–4). In the second century IRENAEUS likewise opposed papal demands for liturgical uniformity on the grounds that differences in practices of fasting did not preclude unity in faith (Eusebius, *EH* 5.24). The German Lutheran P. Meiderlin (1582–1651) appears to be responsible for perhaps the most well-known statement of this need to distinguish between what is and is not necessary in the Church: 'In essentials, unity; in inessentials, liberty; in all things, charity' (*Paraenesis* 128).



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Although Meiderlin's formula has been taken up by a wide range of Christians from Moravians to Catholics (see Pope John XXIII, *Ad Petri*, §72), the topic of adiaphora achieved its greatest theological prominence during the REFORMATION, when Lutheran theologians debated the permissibility of submitting to certain Catholic practices judged to be adiaphora (e.g., the episcopal ordination of ministers) in the furtherance of Church unity. In adjudicating this controversy, the BOOK OF CONCORD affirmed that adiaphora played the important role of maintaining good order and discipline in the Church; but while its authors conceded that in questions of adiaphora every effort should be made to avoid giving offence, they also insisted that, when the threat of persecution is present, compromise on adiaphora is forbidden, lest it appear that the practices in question are required and not a matter of Christian freedom (*FC, Ep.* 10).

Although the intra-Lutheran debates of the sixteenth century were not marked by disagreement over what counted as adiaphora, the criteria for distinguishing between essential and inessential matters remain a point of contestation among Christians, depending largely on the role they grant TRADITION as a guarantor of ORTHODOXY. The Protestant tendency to regard SCRIPTURE as the sole source of essential teaching reflects a view of tradition as fallible and, thus, subject to correction and change. The authors of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), following the Book of Concord's equation of adiaphora with ecclesial rites and ceremonies, distinguish between those things necessary for salvation, which are 'either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture', and 'circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church . . . which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence' (1.6). By contrast, Orthodox, Catholic, and some Anglican Christians would include the content of the classical CREEDS, the decrees of ecumenical COUNCILS, and the apostolic succession of bishops in the list of essentials, reflecting a greater willingness to treat practices sanctioned by tradition as permanently binding on the Church.

IAN A. MCFARLAND

**ADOPTION** Adoption as an ongoing, socially sanctioned *practice* does not exist in OT LAW. Three *acts* of adoption – of Moses (Exod. 2:10), Genubath (1 Kgs 11:20), and Esther (Esth. 2:7, 15) – are referred to, but these all take place outside Palestine and thus in contexts foreign to Jewish rule and custom. Torah tradition as such simply does not admit that someone who is not one's biological child can be rendered one's son or daughter by legal fiction. It was PAUL who first introduced the notion of adoption into Christian theology.

The NT Greek word translated by the NRSV as 'adoption' is *huiothesia*, from *huios* ('son') and *tithēmi* ('to put or place'). The term appears five times in Paul's epistles (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5), but not once in the Gospels. Construed literally, *huiothesia* is gendered and connotes a legal placing or taking in as a male heir (i.e., one who may inherit) someone who is not one's biological son. One can readily see why Paul – that liminal figure at the dividing line between the historical Jesus and the HOLY SPIRIT, Jew and Gentile, Roman and barbarian – would have been attracted to adoption metaphors. Paul knew himself to have been an outsider graciously allowed in (1 Cor. 15:8–10; cf. 1 Tim. 1:12–14), and he saw in his personal experiences a model of a fatherly God's salvific way with the wider world: 'When the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children' (Gal. 4:4–5).

See also OBLATION.

TIMOTHY P. JACKSON

**ADOPTIONISM** Adoptionism is the idea that the human being Jesus of Nazareth has some existence prior to union with the divine LOGOS, such that the union is something that *happens to* a particular human being. Some Ebionites, for instance, seem to have seen Jesus as a 'mere man' who fulfilled the LAW and was therefore anointed by the HOLY SPIRIT (see EBIONITISM). Something similar appears to have been taught in second-century Rome by Theodotus of Byzantium (*fl.* 180) and others, and later Paul of Samosata (d. *ca* 275) also seems to have emphasized the distinct existence of the man who was united to God's Word. The fourth-century theologian Marcellus of Ancyra (d. *ca* 375) is sometimes wrongly accused of adoptionism (though he could speculatively imagine the Word withdrawing from the human Jesus and the latter nevertheless continuing to exist); but one of his followers, Photinus of Sirmium (*fl.* 350), who stressed the unity of the *Logos* and the Father and downplayed the unity between the *Logos* and Jesus' humanity, argued that the *Logos* descended upon and eventually departed from Jesus. Considerably later, at the end of the eighth century, Elipandus of Toledo (*ca* 715–*ca* 800) and Felix of Urgel (*fl.* 800) drew upon distinctive Spanish liturgical traditions to authorize talk of the 'adoptive man' in Christ ('Spanish adoptionism'). They were opposed by Beatus of Liebana (*ca* 730–*ca* 800) and Alcuin of York (*ca* 735–804) who argued that 'adoption' language must be reserved for the Church's identity as child of God, in order not to obscure the difference between that relationship and the HYPOSTATIC UNION between Jesus' humanity and God.

MIKE HIGTON

**ADVENT:** see CALENDAR, LITURGICAL.

**ADVENTISM** Adventism grew out of the Millerite movement, whose members expected the return of Christ in



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judgement in 1844. When this did not occur as predicted (the 'Great Disappointment'), numerous clergy and LAITY combined their shared FAITH into a new movement. Its adherents adopted the name 'Seventh-Day Adventist' in 1860 and established its highest administrative body, the General Conference, in 1863. Seventh-Day Adventists have a representative four-tier administrative structure: congregations; conferences; union-conferences; and General Conference, which includes thirteen world divisions.

Since J. N. Andrews (1829–83) became the first missionary in 1874, Adventists have grown into one of the world's ten largest Christian denominations. Facilitators in Adventism's growth include its commitment to education (operating the largest educational system within PROTESTANTISM); preventive and curative health systems, hospitals, orphanages, and retirement homes (Adventist health practices contribute to an added life expectancy of six to ten years over the general American population); worldwide television, radio broadcasting, and publishing; and practical involvement in local communities through Adventist Community Services and the Adventist Disaster and Relief Agency, which facilitates humanitarian aid worldwide; and programs to counter AIDS in many developing countries.

Adventists come from the REFORMATION traditions of *SOLA SCRIPTURA*, *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, and *sola gratia*, and hold the DOCTRINES of an eternal TRINITY, literal six-day CREATION and young earth, stewardship of the earth, tithing, God's moral LAW as binding on all humanity, traditional Christian marriage, respect for life, Holy Communion (see EUCHARIST), and spiritual gifts (see CHARISM). Adventists are also part of the Arminian/Wesleyan tradition (see ARMINIANISM), believing in FREE WILL; restoration of the complete individual in the image of God through Christ (JUSTIFICATION); and the ministry of the HOLY SPIRIT (SANCTIFICATION and personal holiness).

Other Adventist doctrines include: adult BAPTISM by immersion; holding both OT and NT as of equal relevance; historicist interpretation of biblical PROPHECY; premillennial ESCHATOLOGY (see PREMILLENNIALISM); a temporary and literal great controversy between Christ and the DEVIL (viz., good and evil), concluding with the creation of a new earth; a literal HEAVEN; mortality of the soul, with immortality given as God's gift at Christ's PAROUSIA (Ezek. 20:12, 20; 1 Cor. 15:52–4); the imminent, literal second coming of Christ; a future, temporary HELL; the seventh-day sabbath of both testaments as relevant today; and strict separation of Church and State derived from Revelation 14.

Adventism also holds that the prophetic gift (1 Cor. 12:10) is one of God's gifts to the Church, and was evidenced through E. G. White (1827–1915). This conviction is understood in the context of a belief that non-canonical prophetic gifts throughout history have been lesser lights pointing humanity to God's greater light (i.e., Christ as revealed in SCRIPTURE). A product of early Methodism, White held that her writings were to exalt Scripture, never to replace it, and to encourage adherence to it as God's perfect standard of truth (see METHODIST THEOLOGY). Her view, and that of Adventism more generally, is that salvation is effected by one's submission to God's will as revealed in Scripture.

See also SABBATARIANISM.

G. R. Knight, *Reading Ellen White* (Review and Herald, 1997).

N. J. Vyhmeister, 'Who Are Seventh-Day Adventists?' in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, ed. R. Dederen Commentary Reference Series 12 (Review and Herald, 2000), 1–21.

MICHAEL DAVEY PEARSON

**AESTHETICS, THEOLOGICAL** Theological aesthetics addresses the place of beauty in Christian life. In classical metaphysics, beauty is taken to be an element of all reality, and therefore often numbered among the TRANSCENDENTALS. Because it cuts across (or 'transcends') categorization, and is thus, like truth and goodness, a property of being, beauty is an attribute of God. The beauty of God is the foundation of theological aesthetics. While goodness and truth are universal properties of being, the goodness of reality is best observed in individual moral acts, and truth is most easily analyzed in particular true judgements. Likewise, the finite, particular beautiful object, or 'aesthetic beauty', is our central means of access to transcendental beauty. Works of art capture aesthetic beauty in a lasting and socially transmissible form. Hence, works of art, and the aesthetic sensibility requisite to their appreciation, play a significant role in theological aesthetics. The high-intensity beauty of works of art represents the presence and appeal of divine beauty in all created reality.

The most influential modern proponent of theological aesthetics is the Swiss H. U. von BALTHASAR. Balthasar composed a trilogy which began with theological aesthetics (*The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*), moved thence to theological ethics (*Theo-Drama*), and ended with a theological consideration of truth (*Theo-Logic*). By presenting his theology in this sequence, he affirmed the need to anchor the theological senses and imagination in beauty before moralizing theologically or knowing theological truth. The ordering of Balthasar's trilogy reverses that of I. KANT's philosophical *Critiques*, which begin with judgement, move to ethics, and are completed by aesthetics. It likewise reverses the tendency of modern SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY to work largely on a conceptual and moral plane, including aesthetics only as superficial, rhetorical decoration. For theological aestheticians, human imagination naturally desires the supernatural beauty of God because God calls it through beauty, which is gratuitously rooted in reality and graciously permeates it.



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The aesthetic is what is sensorily perceived. One side of the western Christian attitude to aesthetic imagination is summed up in AUGUSTINE's adage, *ex umbris et imaginibus in veritas* ('out of shadows and images into truth', *Ep.* 75). This marked an attitude to aesthetic beauty which lasted from the patristic era to the nineteenth century, when the adage was carved over the doorway of J. H. NEWMAN's oratory in Birmingham. While formally adhering to this deprecation of the imagination and sensory images as obstacles to transcendental Truth, medieval THOMISM in its own way began with the 'aesthetic', by making sensation the first step in cognition, and by appealing to 'congruence' (*convenientia*) as a sign of theological plausibility. The Franciscan Bonaventure (1221–74) likewise subordinates the senses to the 'spiritual' but gives beauty a foothold by transforming Francis of Assisi's (1181/2–1226) Christocentric spirituality into a theology in which all reality is systematically envisaged as the expression of Christ. Many modern Christians have been motivated to make this starting point and foothold explicit in reaction to the way in which post-Kantian philosophy has heightened the early Christian depreciation of the aesthetic sensibility by removing its theological basis: for much modern thought the purer the philosophical reason of the aesthetic and sensory, the more attenuated its grip on reality and revelation.

In response to this depreciation of the sensory imagination, Balthasar countered that one reason for beginning with beauty was 'APOLOGETIC': unless one is first touched by its beauty, one will not grasp or be grasped by the Christian REVELATION at its most elemental level, and thus fail fully to recognize and desire the reality of the goodness and truth of the TRINITY. Rather than eliminating the senses and imagination, one must baptize them. In line with this perspective, it is important to note that the most successful works of apologetics of modern times have been, in a broad sense, exercises in theological aesthetics. Works which have used beauty and imagination in service to revealed truth include those of G. MacDonald (1824–1905), C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), and J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973). Ever since J. Butler's (1692–1752) *Analogy of Religion* (1736), British theology has appealed to the reader's sense of harmony and congruity. In the nineteenth century, Romantic writers like S. T. Coleridge (1772–1834), MacDonald, and G. M. Hopkins (1844–89) explicitly turned to imagination as a witness to the supernatural, and used mythology, fairy tales, and poetry as a way of expressing Christian truths in symbolic, imaginatively attractive forms. Newman's idea of 'real assent' (which he originally called 'imaginative assent'), meaning assent to truth in the particular and concrete, is in the tradition of British empiricism. In this way, Romantic Christians of the nineteenth and early twentieth century (including Newman) effectively proposed a new, more positive interpretation of Augustine's 'out of shadows and images into truth'. Balthasar saw Hopkins and Lewis as exponents of an originally Anglican tradition which aimed to achieve supernatural realism through imagination.

Theological aesthetics is not a purely theoretical discipline. It has the practical and pastoral mission of educating the religious sensibility and physical senses to appreciate revealed beauty. Hence, art remains its most significant secular medium, and the ecclesial task of enabling WORSHIP to engender LOVE for divine beauty belongs to the vocation of theological aesthetics. An important development in practical theological aesthetics has been the increased interest in Christian literature, from F. O'Connor (1925–64) to R. Hansen (b. 1947), religious film (e.g., the Orthodox movie, *The Island*, 2005), and Christian popular music (e.g., S. Stevens, b. 1975). Journals which link Christianity and contemporary aesthetics include *Image: A Journal of Art and Religion*; B. Nicolosi (b. 1964) trains Christian filmmakers at 'Act One', in Hollywood; and a dozen major universities offer MA programmes in 'Theology and the Arts'. To the extent that these enterprises are theological in spirit and do not merely serve niche markets, they cut across secular/Christian categories through the appeal to beauty; and they enable Christians to educate their aesthetic sensibility.

In so far as theological aesthetics appeals to common ground with non-Christians, it looks to a religious sense thought to be stimulated by contact with beauty. It was by admixture with a religious feeling for congruity and form that pre-Christian humanity developed the aesthetic sensibility which gave rise to the classical recognition that beauty is a property of everything that is real. Where nineteenth-century Romantic Christianity hoped mythology would revive this religious sense, contemporary theological aesthetics directs post-Christian humanity beyond the universal religious sense to its root in God's love for all humanity. The claim that aesthetics belongs to revealed theology comes down to the belief that the agapic love of the TRINITY creates a counterpart to itself in the human desire or eros for God.

D. B. Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Eerdmans, 2003).
A. Nichols, *Redeeming Beauty: Soundings in Sacral Aesthetics* (Ashgate, 2007).
P. Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty: An Introduction to Theological Aesthetics* (Clarendon Press, 1992).
R. Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (Continuum, 2006).

FRANCESCA A. MURPHY

**AFRICAN THEOLOGY** African theology is an academic endeavour developed at the nexus of theological (including, e.g., biblical, systematic, confessional, missiological, and practical) and contextual (e.g., geographical,



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anthropological, sociological, and geopolitical) specifics. It has emerged and progressed as a result of shifts at the nexus of these two sets of issues. On such shifting ground it has grown from a focus on colonial and cultural concerns mostly defined in missiological terms (from the 1960s), to political concerns closely associated with South African confessional forms (from the 1980s), and, most recently, to an African public theology interacting with geopolitical contexts that include public morality, local policy formation, Church–State relationships, and the developmental agenda (from the 1990s). African public theology is a contemporary thrust in African theology that feeds on the earlier trajectories and, as such, may rightly be called the defining progress leading to the emergence of a 'modern' African theology.

In its response to the impact of European colonialism, the focus of African theology in the 1960s was largely on the meaning of African cultures or traditions. Reaction to the European colonial influence on African theology stressed the elements of cultural and spiritual enslavement that accompanied the slave trade and later commercialization. Across the continent cultural or traditional African theologies took on the form of pan-African, continental themes, or even local, tribal metaphors, which came to be known collectively as indigenous African theologies. Many of the earlier expressions of these theologies were theologically conservative and shaped primarily by concerns surrounding the themes of inculturation.

The confrontational and reconstructive nature of these theologies was defined by historical conditions, both colonial and cultural. This early quest in African theology sought to understand the continuities and discontinuities between African traditional religions and identity, on the one hand, and Christian faith, on the other. Its leading representatives included J. Mbiti (b. 1931), K. Bediako (1945–2008), G. Setiloane (b. 1925), and K. Dickson (1929–2005), whose work helped to shatter negative theological stereotypes of indigenous African thought and provide a space for African theology to develop with greater independence from European models. Because a significant part of this theological engagement was brought about by the postcolonial African Christian experience of misrepresentation or marginalization within western theology, postcolonial African theology was partly driven by a hermeneutic of suspicion as exemplified in the work of I. Mosala (b. 1950), T. Mofokeng (b. 1942), and M. Dube (b. 1964), and partly by the hermeneutic of reconstruction characteristic of J. Ukpong (b. 1940), D. Tutu (b. 1931), and A. Boesak (b. 1946).

Modern African theologies emerged from a framework of questions embedded in differentiated patterns of social exclusion expressed in oppositional thought structures. Such thought structures were used to distinguish the particular forms of African victimhood from a diversity of adversarial social constructs, most often missiological in nature, that were a legacy of the colonial opposition between the European (equated with Christian) and the African (equated with pagan). The ruptures in traditional African thought patterns resulting from the confluence of historical forces on the African continent were expressed as 'alienation', which could, in turn, be associated with some institutional context, aspect of continental geography, or political structure. Correspondingly, Africans' alienating experience with colonialism, suppressive African regimes, western Christianity, European culture, and European definitions of race, as well as with Marxist definitions of class, dominated this earlier discourse in African theology.

With the advent of the 1980s the increasing international prominence of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa added a new dimension to African theology. Influenced by strands of liberation theology developed in Latin America and among North American Black theologians, it included a strong focus on questions of human rights, as well as more specific social and theological analyses of racism. The specifically theological condemnation of apartheid as a heresy and the call for prophetic denunciation of injustice that defined this period included the production of several internationally prominent theological texts, including the Kairos Document and the Belhar Confession.

Throughout the post-apartheid period in the 1990s African theologians wrestled with the continuities and the discontinuities of the former oppositional, anti-colonial model of theological reflection on its way to new forms of distinctively African theological reflection. This quest for a new or modern form of African theology, combining insights from earlier emphases on indigenization and liberation, has led to a number of serious experiments in constructive theology, including C. Villa-Vicencio's (b. 1942) 'theology of reconstruction', R. Botman's (b. 1953) 'theology of transformation', and a 'theology of reconciliation' promoted pre-eminently by Tutu, along with Botman, J. de Gruchy (b. 1939), and others.

In this transitional phase of theological reflection, many African theologians realized that a fundamental weakness of African theology resided in its inability to bring about a renewal of African ecclesiology. African theology could not overcome the ecclesiological weakness embedded in its missiology. This inability was brought about by the strong oppositional nature of African anti-colonialist theology, with its tendency to formulate itself over against European models that had shaped churches established in the colonial period. However, in recognition of this problem new strains of African theologies are emerging as positive expressions that no longer posture in a deficit model. They seek their defining character in a critical, futurist form. This emergent critical form is being expressed as a 'modern' theology from Africa.



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Most recently, African theologians such as Botman, D. Smit (b. 1951), J. Cochrane (b. 1946), and N. Koopman (b. 1961) have introduced 'PUBLIC THEOLOGY' as an example of this sort of definitive, positive, and ecumenical theological form that could also engage other theologies beyond an oppositional (i.e., north–south) or exclusively continental framework. In spite of its intended international reach, moreover, African public theology remains rooted in the context of Africa. This successful transformation to a 'modern' African theology can be ascribed to three historical stimuli: questions of gender, the persistent presence of ecumenical reasoning in African theology's political engagements, and the inherent methodological and hermeneutical restlessness of African theology. One can therefore speak of the theological 'bridges' of gender, ECUMENISM, and contextualization that have sustained and propelled the emergence of 'modern' African theology. Each of these needs to be explored in greater depth.

At each phase of its development, African theology encountered women's voices impacting its own theological meaning, such that the transformation to a modern African theology cannot be grasped without reference to the challenges raised by women theologians. Their work spans the breadth of the developments in African theology. The Circle of Concerned African Woman Theologians was born in Ghana in 1989. As such, it was formed on the not yet concluded foundations of the 1960s, with its focus on colonialism and culture. At the same time, some of its interlocutors related well to the 'confessional period' of the 1980s and beyond, and significant numbers of these theologians have become renewing public theologians.

African women played an important role in redefining ecclesiological identities in Africa. A significant part of this quest was a reaction to colonialism. However, it was sustained through the period of confessional engagement and has continued into the present. The Circle of Concerned African Woman Theologians guided the gender discourse in the African contexts in a formative fashion. Many of the women of the Circle have played a formidable role in establishing the public theological discourse of 'modern' African theology, sustaining the gender bridge throughout the transformations in African theology. The mothers of theology in Africa, including M. A. Oduyoye (b. 1934) of Ghana and D. Ackermann (b. 1935) of South Africa on the one hand, and younger scholars such as E. Mouton (b. 1952) and M. Dube on the other, fought the theological battle of women in African theological contexts. Their engagement with contexts, identity, and SPIRITUALITY has been presented through experience and storytelling, most programmatically in the volume *Claiming our Footprints* (2000). The scholarship of the Circle of Concerned African Woman Theologians will continually inform the future modalities of African theology, the significance of which as a legitimate endeavour is tied to the presence of gender-based critique in its midst.

Ecumenism has also played a significant role in sustaining African theology in the modern period. African theology has a persistent knack of exposing itself to ecumenical scrutiny and engagement, as seen in the work of figures such as Boesak, M. Buthelezi (b. 1935), J. Durand (b. 1934), and B. Naudé (1915–2004). In the early developments of the postcolonial period the major role-players (e.g., Bediako, Mbiti) deliberately sought exposure to ecumenical and international platforms where they tested and presented their contributions to African theology. Some of them studied in Europe and the USA, resulting in a certain ecumenical and international confidence about their skill and scholarship. In the time of 'confessing theology', the theologians of the Kairos Document (A. Nolan (b. 1934), F. Chikane (b. 1951), Villa-Vicencio, and others) and those of the Confession of Belhar (e.g., Boesak, Smit, Durand, and Daan Cloete (b. 1938)), immediately presented their work to the international and ecumenical world. Although both confessing documents arose within the apartheid context in South Africa, they have sustained their relevance also in a post-apartheid context. The Kairos Document was a radical rejection of theologies that support the status quo of apartheid while embracing a prophetic theology of the people. Even more significantly, the Confession of Belhar, as the first Reformed confession born on African soil to be received as having the same status as established confessions composed and adopted in Europe, leads this theological trajectory. Its central significance lies in the fact that, based on its identification and critique of the theological centre of the South African policy of apartheid, it treats racism as a confessional question. A significant number of Churches – European and American as well as African – have adopted Belhar as a confession of their own Churches. The major breakthrough in this theological initiative is vested in the strength of the argument that certain ethical questions should be regarded as equally important confessional issues. This discourse is also meaningful for questions related to gender justice and economic justice.

Contemporary African public theology builds on this ecumenical instinct. Therefore, it extends into the debates of the Christian, and sometimes inter-religious, ecumenical community (as in the work of John Pobee (b. 1937)). In this way modern African theology will continue its quest for being truly African but with an ecumenical and international reach, as exemplified in the work produced by African theologians at the Beyers Naude Centre for Public Theology at Stellenbosch University in South Africa.

Finally, the methodological transition from a liberation theological stance in the 1980s to a more explicit



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reconciling theology in the 1990s and beyond forms an important bridge in the transformation of African theology. African theologians of liberation were always at issue with each other with regard to their methodology and hermeneutics. The bridging role of LIBERATION THEOLOGY in the transformation of African theology resulted from a political engagement with the context that manifested itself – most notably in South Africa – in a legacy of methodological and hermeneutical 'restlessness' (T. Maluleke). However, this 'restlessness' can be seen in developments throughout the continent in Black theology, contextual theology, the theology of African religions, ecumenical and REFORMED THEOLOGIES, and theologies of reconciliation.

With the theme of reconciliation as its blazing flag, the drive to a secular, post-apartheid mode of theological knowledge on African soil connected well with the postcolonial mindset that guided the new thinking of African theologians. In this way, contemporary African theology incorporates the focus on issues of colonialism and cultural identity prominent in the 1960s and the confessional positions associated with the struggle against apartheid and racism in the 1980s to generate an African public theology for the twenty-first century. Although the agency of the victim, the poor, and the marginalized remain the *raison d'être* of African public theology, the methodological and hermeneutical restlessness about questions of identity, justice, race, class, power, forgiveness, confession, globalization, and gender will still have us see further transformation in future.

K. Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Orbis, 1995).
E. M. Conradie, ed., *African Christian Theologies in Transformation* (EFSA, 2004).
L. Hansen, ed., *Christian in Public: Aims, Methodologies and Issues in Public Theology* (SUN Press, 2007).
B. Knighton, 'Issues of African Theology at the Turn of the Millennium', *Transformation* 21:3 (July 2004), 147–61.
M. G. Motlhabi, 'Black or African Theology? Toward an Integral African Theology', *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 8:2 (1994), 113–41.
M. A. Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

H. RUSSEL BOTMAN

**AGAPE:** see LOVE.

***AGGIORNAMENTO*** An Italian word that means 'updating', *aggiornamento* was, along with *ressourcement*, one of the two principal watchwords associated with the work of VATICAN COUNCIL II. Both terms denote movements that emerged from widespread dissatisfaction with the state of CATHOLIC THEOLOGY in the mid-twentieth century. Specifically, they reflected a desire to address the concern that rigid adherence to neo-Scholastic categories and methods developed in the nineteenth century had caused a certain ossification of Catholic thought. Yet, while advocates of *ressourcement* sought to rejuvenate the life of the Church by recovering the riches of patristic and medieval theology, the language of *aggiornamento* suggested that the best way for the Church to address the modern world was to appropriate the best insights of modern thought.

At the opening of Vatican II, Pope John XXIII (r. 1958–63) explicitly noted the need to ensure that DOCTRINE be 'explored and expounded in the way our times demand' ('Address', §6.5), but the implications of this summons have been sharply debated among Catholics. Liberals have seen in John's language at the Council and elsewhere a call for reform of Catholic practice comparatively free from captivity to established modes of thought. By contrast, more conservative voices argue that John's emphasis on the enduring substance (as opposed to the changeable form) of TRADITION suggests more caution, in order to ensure that engagement *with* modernity does not result in assimilation *to* it.

See also *NOUVELLE THÉOLOGIE*.

IAN A. MCFARLAND

**AGNOSTICISM** Since the term 'agnostic' was coined in 1869 by T. H. Huxley (1825–95) as a more epistemically responsible alternative to 'atheist', it and its cognate term 'agnosticism' have frequently come to be heavily value-laden, and thus need to be approached with some caution. Huxley's intention was value-neutral, but the concept has often been understood either as putting the whole God-question to one side as unresolvable or unimportant, or simply as reflecting a certain spiritual laziness.

There is a strong case that agnosticism, rightly understood, is a living part of faith – perhaps even its prerequisite: a notion which H. Mansel (1820–71) explored in his 1858 Bampton Lectures, *The Limits of Religious Thought*, although he did not use the actual term 'agnosticism'.

Agnosticism in the strict sense is an acknowledgement of the limitations and provisionality of all human knowledge, especially when finite minds attempt to explore the infinite and the divine. In the OT it surfaces especially in the Prophetic and Wisdom traditions, notably in the books of Jonah, Job, and Ecclesiastes, and profoundly in the book of Daniel also. In the NT it is present in Jesus' elliptical parabolic teaching, and in the frequent misunderstandings and blindness of the disciples, and highlighted particularly in their uneasy faltering towards some kind of post-resurrection understanding and faith.

Similarly, just as it is present in SCRIPTURE, though often as an undertone to the ongoing rush of story and event, so too agnosticism is witnessed to, *sotto voce* at least, throughout the history of Christianity. It even finds a voice in AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (e.g., *Conf.* 1.4). Its



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flowering is richest in the mystical tradition through such concepts as *The Cloud of Unknowing* (late fourteenth century) and John of the Cross' *Dark Night of the Soul* (1619) in which all knowledge and even sense of God is stripped away.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, agnosticism has become an oft-neglected poor relation in the household of faith, and faith and theology have found themselves impoverished by its absence. A contemporary rediscovery of agnosticism is necessary, especially in a religious world which, in the face of challenges both internal and external, inclines more and more to the comforting illusions of certainty and even of fundamentalism.

A properly agnostic faith is one which prevents itself from being a closed circle of fixed and unchanging knowledge, and which, by acknowledging its own provisionality opens itself up to the insights of other disciplines, and places more stress on the relationality of faith and the category of 'personal knowledge' than it does on purely propositional knowledge – which it accepts is, in the case of God, unavailable to us in any definitive form. This in turn facilitates dialogue, both between the Christian traditions, and between Christianity and other world faiths.

Agnosticism, then, in spite of the relatively recent appearance of the word, is a concept as old as Christianity itself, and one which remains enduringly relevant. Its appositeness as a foundational strand in faith has never been better expressed than by the sixteenth-century Anglican divine, R. HOOKER: 'Dangerous it were for the feeble braine of man to wade farre into the doings of the Most High, whome although to know be life, and joy to make mention of his name: yet our soundest knowledge is to know that we know him not as in deed he is, neither can know him: and our safest eloquence concerning him is our silence, when we confesse without confession that his glory is inexplicable, his greatness above our capacitie and reach' (*Lawes 1.2.2.*).

S. R. White, *A Space for Unknowing: The Place of Agnosis in Faith* (Columba Press, 2006).

M. Wiles, 'Belief, Openness and Religious Commitment', *Theology* 101:801 (May/June 1995), 163–71.

STEPHEN R. WHITE

**ALLEGORY** Allegory can refer either to the reading of a text in some other sense than what would seem to be its literal meaning, or to a kind of text designed to be read in a non-literal way. For example, King David thinks Nathan's story of the rich man who steals the poor man's only lamb is a clear but abstract case of injustice that has nothing to do with himself. In reality it was about David's own treachery, designed to bring about his repentance: 'I have sinned against the Lord' (2 Sam. 12:13). An allegory is thus a reading meant (when applied to SCRIPTURE) to draw the reader and her community into the divine exchange between God and humanity that Scripture not only subscribes to but instantiates.

Many communities make use of allegorical modes of interpretation to read texts in counter-intuitive ways, especially when the community's core commitments change. Greeks read Homer (*fl.* 850 BC) and other ancient epics differently once the deeds depicted were deemed immoral. Christians could adopt similar strategies when reading the OT: the story of Sarah and Hagar no longer simply casts Abraham in an embarrassing light; it is an *allēgoroumena* (Gal. 4:24 – the only place the NT uses the term directly) about Gentile Christians and the LAW. But allegory is not only a defensive hermeneutic to apologize for awkward stories. It can also be employed because an ancient story (e.g., the Exodus) and a contemporary liturgical practice (e.g., BAPTISM) resonate in the community's experience (see 1 Cor. 10:1–11). Or it can be a way of reading greater significance into details than may seem warranted at first glance, as when the new COVENANT is seen in details of Israel's worship (Heb. 8–10), or when Gregory of Nyssa (see CAPPADOCIAN FATHERS) sees descriptions of the adornment of the soul with virtue in the story of the priestly vestments in Exodus in his *Life of Moses*. Allegory is an attention to the depth of things, their nature as 'mystery', where Christ meets the Church in judgement and grace. This new meeting can change things so dramatically that the old seems passé (2 Cor. 3:6). Once these NT readings are canonized, the practice of allegory itself (arguably) is as well.

Exactly how far can allegory go? When those who came to be called Gnostics seemed to other Christians to be allegorizing without limit, the nascent 'Orthodox' Church reacted by drawing some boundaries (see GNOSTICISM). For Clement of Alexandria (*ca* 150–*ca* 215), the Bible has to be read as a whole – one cannot find a teaching allegorically in one place that is not also present literally in another. IRENAEUS insisted that readings of Scripture had to conform to a single image – that of Christ. He mostly used texts that Christians had traditionally seen in Christological terms, such as those in Isaiah and Zechariah. ORIGEN took allegory and applied it more liberally throughout the Bible. To be sure, Origen thought that most of Scripture should be read literally and historically. Allegory was also an art for the advanced, since to discern Christ in counter-intuitive places could obviously be dangerous. But later Christians found him insufficiently circumspect in his application of these strictures. Antiochene theologians reacting against Origen attempted to recover the literal, plain meaning of the words on the page. Yet later Christians continued to imitate Origen in practice while vilifying his name.

This vacillation between eagerness to allegorize and worry over its randomness continued through the Middle Ages until today. Medieval Christians included allegory as the final level of reading in their fourfold



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*quadriga*. For example, if the literal 'meaning' of the word 'Jerusalem' is a city in Palestine, the tropological (moral) is the soul, and the anagogical (eschatological) is heaven, then the allegorical is the Church. These readings were reinforced in Church art in stained glass, iconography, and statuary. The Reformers reacted against allegory, worried that with its licence their Catholic opponents could defend non-biblical teaching with a veneer of Scripture without its depth. M. LUTHER continued to allegorize fairly regularly; J. CALVIN was more adamant in his efforts to root the practice out, even if he was never entirely successful.

Modern historical criticism has often seen itself as an ally of the Antiochenes and the Reformers in efforts to attend 'soberly' and not 'arbitrarily' to the words on the page. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the argument was made (citing the way in which Christians often coupled allegory with anti-Jewish polemic) that allegory erases not only the words on the page, but the Jewish bodies of those who hold to the literal sense. In the last generation or two Catholic scholars (including H. DE LUBAC, H. von BALTHASAR, and others) led the way in rehabilitating allegory as a hermeneutical move appropriate to those who are in Christ, looking to their Lord throughout all creation, including in the pages of the Bible.

J. O'Keefe and R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

G. Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (John Knox Press, 2001).

JASON BYASSEE

**AMILLENNIALISM** 'Amillennialism' designates the belief that the 1,000-year reign of Christ and the SAINTS (viz., the MILLENNIUM) described in Revelation 20:4–6 does not refer to a future period of earthly history, but is rather a symbolic designation for the present period of the Church established at PENTECOST and ending with Christ's return and the Last Judgement. The term is problematic, both because it is easily misunderstood to mean a denial of the Millennium (leading some to prefer the phrase 'realized millennialism'), and because it is a neologism rarely used by the majority of those whose position it purports to describe. However named, the amillennial position is clearly distinct from PREMILLENNIALISM; its relationship to POSTMILLENNIALISM, whose proponents also identify Christ's return with the end of terrestrial history, is more ambiguous.

The denial of an earthly kingdom of Christ has been dominant in both eastern and western Christianity since the fourth century. The view of both the Catholic MAGISTERIUM and the Anglican, Lutheran, and Reformed traditions is indebted to AUGUSTINE's interpretation of the Millennium as referring to the indirect and contested way in which Christ reigns with the saints in the present (viz., in the Church), as contrasted with the immediate and uncontested way in which Christ will reign after the PAROUSIA (*City* 20.9). While defenders of this position stress its coherence with Christ's dissociation of God's kingdom from worldly politics (John 18:36), critics charge it with an undue spiritualization of the Christian hope that fails to take seriously God's commitment to realize God's purposes within rather than beyond history.

See also ESCHATOLOGY.

IAN A. MCFARLAND

**ANABAPTISTS:** see MENNONITE THEOLOGY.

**ANALOGY** While analogy is commonly used as a form of reasoning, as in an 'argument from analogy', or explanation, as in a PARABLE, the focus here is its use as a category of predication, one that is a mean between the settled meaning of univocation and the shifting meaning of equivocation. As a theory of how certain words are used when referring to God, analogy involves basic anthropological and theological understandings. In analogical predication, affirmative statements about God can be made that are based on REVELATION, and, more controversially, from the creaturely experience of perfections such as the good and the true (see TRANSCENDENTALS).

While the origins of analogy are unclear, early Greek mathematicians developed proportions, where a:b::c:d, e.g., 2:4::3:6. Plato (*ca* 430–*ca* 345 BC) subsequently moves to a non-mathematical application, as he sees something analogical in the proportional structure of things: 'the body of the world was created, and it was harmonized by proportion (*analogias*), and therefore has the spirit of friendship . . . having been reconciled to itself' (*Tim.* 32c). He is also the first to develop the framework of what will later be called participation metaphysics (see PLATONISM).

Aristotle lays out three kinds of predication: a term can be used with a single meaning; with multiple meanings (e.g., the meaning of 'sharp' changes when applied to musical pitch or knives); or, anticipating the category of analogy, with meanings that are partly the same and partly different (*Top.* 106a–108b). Aristotle's *pros hen* equivocation relates several terms to one that is primary, e.g., 'healthy' primarily said of a man, but also of what preserves health (food) and of what is its symptom (urine; *Meta.* Γ2, 1003a33). In the medieval period Aristotle's *pros hen* model becomes the basis of the analogy of attribution (see ARISTOTELIANISM).

T. AQUINAS is the benchmark in the history of analogy, as his synthesis and creative developments of Platonic, Aristotelian, and Christian uses generate a tradition that persists even today. Some important Protestant theologians, although increasingly interested in analogy, have remained critical of Thomistic accounts of how it works.



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