



**CTH 321**  
**GOD AND REVELATION**

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**Introduction**

The Course, God and Revelation is about the person of God and man's knowledge of God. The need to know God arises from the fact that he is our creator, the object of our worship, and the one who controls and rule this world. The knowledge of God is important for our worship and how we live our lives. The course is part of what is called "Theology Proper." It is about God's essence, being, and his relationship with the creation.

The aim of this course is to help you gain more knowledge of the person of God and his revelation. This course will lead you to see the necessity and importance of God's revelation to humanity. Revelation is God's self disclosure to humanity. God is far removed from humanity and different from us in many ways but he has chosen to enter into a relationship with humanity. It is because of the relationship that he has revealed himself to us. Fundamentally, God has revealed himself through general and special revelation but humanity also know him through his attributes, names, and images which describe different aspects of God life. A careful study of God and Revelation will help us evaluate our worship and the way we conduct our lives before him. This course will be based on biblical materials and emphasise the importance of biblical context and content. This is for you to avoid speculative teachings and evaluate claims to prophecies, miracles, dreams, and visions today.

**What You Will Learn in this Course**

The general purpose of this course is to lead you to in-depth study of God's Revelation. It is important to note that the materials of this course go beyond the introductory level. In this course you will be learning about the person of God, different views that people hear God, and the different ways God has chosen to reveal himself to humanity. We will look at different concepts such as attributes, natural theology, experiential theology, principle of accommodation, names and images of God.

**Course Aims**

The aims of this course are to:

1. Introduce you to the meaning and nature of God.
2. Lead you to examine the relationship between God and man and the basis of this relationship as well as man's status before God.
3. Expose you to general and special revelation and their modes in order to see how God has dealt with humanity in the past and continues in the present.
4. Lead you to see the differences between general and special revelation as well as their deficiencies and importance.
5. Enable you to see the root of human problem and negative attitudes towards God.
6. Help you to grasp the importance of natural phenomena to our knowledge of God

**Course Objectives**

To achieve the aims stated above, the course sets its overall objectives which are always stated at the beginning of each unit. You are strongly advised to always read these objectives carefully. These objectives will help you evaluate your progress.

When you have successfully completed this course you should be able to:

- define God and explain the implication of the name
- identify the different sources of man's knowledge of God
- explain the nature and meaning of God's revelation
- identify the two most important aspects of God's revelation
- account for the relationship between general and special revelations
- discuss the modes of general and special revelation
- explain why attributes are considered part of God's revelation
- discuss the names of God
- account for the necessity and importance of the doctrine of inspiration
- identify the differences between natural theology and general revelation
- discuss progressive revelation and be able to give some of its examples
- explain images of God, their importance, and their different aspects.

**Working through this Course**

For you to complete this course, you are expected to read the units thoroughly, read the recommended textbooks and other materials provided by the National Open University of Nigeria. Each and every unit has self-assessment exercises and you may be required to submit assignments for assessment purpose. It is assumed that this course should take you about 15 weeks to work through. In order to help you achieve this, you will find listed, all the components of the course, what you have to do and how you should proceed to allocate your time to each unit in order to enable you complete the course on time and successfully.

**Course Materials**

Major components of the course are:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Recommended Textbooks and other reference materials
4. Assignment file

**Study Unit**

The study units in this course are as follow:

**Module 1 The Knowledge and Revelation of God**

Unit 1: The Person of God

Unit 2: The Existence of God

Unit 3: The Denial of the Existence of God

Unit 4: Introduction to God's Revelation

Unit 5: General Revelation

**Module 2: General Revelation and the Analysis of Special Revelation**

Unit 1: The Effects of General Revelation, and the Analysis of Natural and Experiential Theology

Unit 2: Special Revelation

Unit 3: The Doctrine of Inspiration

Unit 4: Theories of Inspiration

Unit 5: Methods of God's Revelation

**Module 3: Other Means of Revelation: Attributes, Names and Images**

Unit 1: Classification of the Attributes of God

Unit 2: Attributes Belonging to the Essence and Existence of God

Unit 3: Attributes Relating to God's Life

Unit 4: God's Revelation in his Names of God

Unit 5: God's Revelation through Images

**Textbooks and References**

We have included a list of books that are relevant for every unit. You will gain greatly if you read such books and similar ones on the topics treated. Reading the books will help to build your knowledge and thereby enhance your understanding of the course.

**Assignment file**

In the assignment file, you will find all the details of the work you are required to submit to your tutor for marking. The grade you obtain from these assignments will count towards the final grade you obtain from the course. Read more information on assignments in the assignment section of this course guide.

**Presentation Schedule**

Your course materials contain the presentation schedule which gives you the key dates for the completion of your TMAs and attending tutorials. Do not forget to submit all your assignments by the due date. However, alternate dates and times for submission of the assignments in situation of emergency will be given and at the tutor's description. You should avoid falling behind in your work.

**Assessment**

You are expected to be sincere and honest in attempting the exercises. It is expected that you apply information, knowledge and skill that have been gained during the course. All assignments must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the presentation schedule and assignment file

The assignment submitted to your tutor counts for.....	30%
The final examination at the end of the course counts for.....	70%
Total.....	100%

**Tutor-Marked Assignment**

There are three TMAs in this course. Each assignment will count for 10% towards your total course work. Assignment questions for this course are contained in the assignment file. You will be able to complete your assignments from the information and materials contained in your study units, reading and reference books. You are to read and do further research on your own. When you complete each assignment, send it together with a TMA form to your tutor on assignment file.

**Final Examination and Grading**

The final examination for this course will be of 2 hours 15 minutes duration and will be marked over 70% of your total course grade. The examination will comprise of questions which reflect the type of self-assessment exercises and TMAs you have previously solved. Every area of this course will be assessed. You are advised to do thorough reading of the course material and even revise your

TMA's and self-assessment exercises to be fully prepared for the final examination. The final examination will cover all aspects of the course.

### Course Marking Scheme

The table below gives a breakdown of the course mark:

Assessment	Marks
Assignments 1-15	Three assignments, 10% each = 30%
Final examination	70% of overall course grade
Total	100% of course marks

Table 1: Course Marking Scheme

### Course Overview

Below is the table which brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them and the assignments that follow.

Unit	Title of Work	Week's Activity	Assessment (end of unit)
<b>Course Guide</b>			
<b>Module 1 The Knowledge and Revelation of God</b>			
1	The Person of God	1	Assignment 1
2	The Existence of God	2	Assignment 2
3	The Denial of the Existence of God	3	Assignment 3
4	Introduction to God's Revelation	4	Assignment 4
5	General Revelation	5	Assignment 5
<b>Module 2: General Revelation and the Analysis of Special Revelation</b>			
1	The Effects of General Revelation, and the Analysis of Natural and Experiential Theology	6	Assignment 6
2	Special Revelation	7	Assignment 7
3	The Doctrine of Inspiration	8	Assignment 8
4	Theories of Inspiration	9	Assignment 9
5	Methods of God's Revelation	10	Assignment 10
<b>Module 3: Other Means of Revelation: Attributes, Names and Images</b>			
1	Classification of the Attributes of God	11	Assignment 11
2	Attributes Belonging to the Essence and Existence of God	12	Assignment 12
3	Attributes Relating to God's Life	13	Assignment 13
4	God's Revelation in his Names of God	14	Assignment 14
5	God's Revelation through Images	15	Assignment 15
	Revision	16	
	Revision	17	
	Examination	18	

Table 2: Course Overview

**How to Get the Best from this Course**

The advantage of the Distance Learning programme is that the course materials are designed in such a way that you work through the course at your own pace, time and place that is convenient for you. You read the lectures instead of listening to the lecturer and exercises are provided for you to do at the appropriate points.

There is a common format for each study unit. Each unit contains an introduction to the subject matter, the objective/s that make you know what you should be able to do as you complete studying the unit, the main body of the unit and self-assessment exercises. Working through these assessments will help you achieve the objectives for the unit and prepares you for the assignments and examination.

When you finish studying in the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Again, you are to cross check to make sure that the unit's objectives are achieved.

**Facilitators/Tutors and Tutorials**

There are 28 hours of tutorials (fourteen 2 hour sessions). You will be told of the dates, times and location of these tutorials together with the name and phone number of your tutor as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group. Each assignment will be marked by your tutor. Pay close attention to the comments your tutor might make on your assignment as these may help you in your progress. It is an opportunity to meet your tutor and get help in form of discussion over areas of difficulty encountered in the course of reading.

**Summary**

This course introduces you to God and His revelation to humanity. It leads you to understand the person, nature, essence, and being as well as the activities of God in the created world. The course helps you to see God's involvement in the history of nations and lives of human beings. The nature and activities of God can be seen in the different aspects of God's revelation to humanity. God has chosen to reveal himself in order to have a relationship with humanity. The presentations in this course are to help you evaluate the worship and conduct of the contemporary Church.



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**CONTENT**

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Unit 5: God's Revelation through Images

**MODULE 1**

**THE KNOWLEDGE AND REVELATION OF GOD**

**Unit 1: The Person of God**

**Unit 2: The Existence of God**

**Unit 3: The Denial of the Existence of God**

**Unit 4: Introduction to God's Revelation**

**Unit 5: General Revelation**

**UNIT 1: THE PERSON AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD****Content**

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	The Person of God
3.2	Man's Knowledge of God
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor- Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

**1.0 Introduction**

In this unit you will be exposed to the meaning and connotation of the word God. You will find out that both in the Old and New Testament, God is to be worshipped and invoked by human beings. This unit will lead you to understand the various Biblical uses of the word "know." Knowing God means having a relationship with him and this is expressed both in the Old and New Testaments. This unit also deals with the natural sources of man's knowledge of God and gives biblical support for all these views.

**2.0 Objectives**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain what the Hebrew and Greek word about God reveal about him
- state what the Bible means by knowing God
- identify the various sources of man's knowledge of God
- explain man's attitudes towards God's revealed knowledge.

**3.0 MAIN CONTENT****3.1 The Person of God**

Before making any specific statement about the person of God, it may be necessary to explore briefly the origin of the concept of person(hood). This may also give us a good ground to understand the difference between the person of God and the person of human. It is also necessary for us at this early stage to observe that all our language about God is built on analogy. Consequently, our discussion does not, and cannot, exhaust the knowledge of the person of God because God is fundamentally spirit, and beyond the perfect knowledge of mortal. So, we find ourselves in the midst of mystery.

**3.1.1 The Origin of the Concept of Person**

The idea of "person" goes back to the Etruscan cult of the goddess, P(h)ersepone, where mask was worn. The Romans took over the word (persepone) and branded it persona (from personare, "to speak through") the mask ordinarily worn by actors, and thereby the role being played. In the third century B.C, it had occupied a place in linguistic vocabulary, thus indicating the first, second and third persons. Then the

legal sense of a person subject to law emerged. in the 1st cent. B.C., the same human could exercise numerous roles, or personae, within the social and legal fabric.

In the Greek world, the word prosopon was used to mean "face." It designates the theatrical mask. It becomes something that one puts on but does not belong to the "nature" of the one that puts it on. It is within this context that one can appreciate the tragic settings of Greek drama, thus reminding human of the tragic nature of human in the universe, for at the end human owns nothing unique or lasting: the body decomposes; the soul either unites with another body or disappears. We can now see why human could be called a person, a being that puts on what that does not fundamentally belong to human. Thus the nature of human is then considered different from the person of human.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Do you agree with the idea that the human person is an actor dramatizing the human tragedy in the world stage?

#### **3.1.2 The Nature of Human and the Person of Human**

From what we have said above, we can now but carefully state that the nature of human precedes the "person" of human. The person of human becomes the individuated human nature which is bound to disappear at the point of death. It is the human "mask" that disappears at the end of the drama on earth. That is to say, human carries a mask of personhood and plays the role that fits the mask. After the earthly drama, the mask is put off, and the real nature of human resurfaces. In other words, the human "person" is a mask-carrying being.

The point we are making is that the nature of human is different from the person of human. Human "nature" is natural to human but human "person" is acquired and actuated. No one can carry the totality of human nature with oneself. But one carries one's person along with oneself, and ends. Therefore the death of one does not entail the death of all.

Again, one human nature can assume many and different "persons"; for human is one but plays different various roles. It is in this sense that we come to value more the modern expression of "literary person" as "a voice or character representing the speaker". The literary person is not the speaker per se but a representation of the person. The speaker masks himself with the "literary person". In another sense, a non-technical contemporary usage of the word depicts the role one assumes or displays in public or society; one's public image or personality as distinguished from the inner self. It speaks about the role or character adopted by an author or an actor, the character as perceived by others, which may not necessarily be the true nature human. It is synonymous in a sense synonymous with personality, personage and character.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Does the difference between human nature and human person make any difference in your present understanding of the human person?

### God Encountered as Person

The idea that the world, as man understands it in a finite way, is dependent on some reality altogether beyond his comprehension, perfect and self-sustained but also peculiarly involved in the world and its events, is presented with exceptional sharpness and discernment in the Old Testament, whence it became a formative influence in Hebrew history and subsequently in Christianity and Islām. Behind the creation stories; behind the patriarchal narratives, like that of Jacob at Bethel (Gen. 28) or wrestling with his strange visitor at Penuel (Gen. 32); and behind the high moments of prophecy, like Isaiah's famous vision in the Temple (Isa. 6), and of moving religious experience in the Psalms, in the Book of Job, and (with remarkable explicitness) in some well-known passages, like the story of Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3)—behind all of these there lies a sense of some mysterious, all-encompassing reality by which man is also in some way addressed and which he may also venture to address in turn.

Moses wished to see God, to have some explicit sign that could convince the people and establish his own authority; but he was shown, instead, that this is just what he could not have: all that he could be assured of was that God is real and is bound to be—"I am who I am," he was told. On the other hand, in the throes of this humbling and staggering experience, Moses began to learn also what was expected of him and how his people should live and be led. The God who was so strange and elusive was somehow found to be a God who "talked" to him and with whom people could "walk." The same seemingly bewildering claim of remoteness, almost to the point of unreality, linked with a compelling explicitness and closeness, is also found in other cultures, as illustrated below. This claim presents the reflective thinker with the twofold problem of theism, viz., how, in the first place, a reality as remote and mysterious as the God of theism—the "wholly other," in the famous words of the German theologian Rudolf Otto—can be known at all; and, second, how, if it can be known, it can be spoken of in precise and intimate ways and encountered as a person.

#### 3.1.3 The Person of God and the Nature of God

Having seen the connection between "person" and "nature" in terms of human, we may now turn to God. It is interesting to note that Christianity adopted the idea of "person" as understood by the Romans and Greeks then gave it a new meaning that would become fundamental in the Christian understanding of the nature of God. Nevertheless, our present understanding of human reveals to us there is a far-reaching distinction between human "nature" and human "person." The distinction sets some radical limits on human operations and existence. But the case is different in God. In God, there is no limitation of "person" by "nature". It becomes inconceivable to make a difference between the nature and the persons of God. Here we speak about one nature but three persons. The one and three coincide in God, and each person is unthinkable without the others. Therefore, nature is defined by the three persons, and their relationship is of the essence of the deity, so much so that Basil equalled the divine nature and the communion of the divine persons: "in the divine and in composite nature, in the communion of the Deity, is the union."

In other words, when we say that God is a person, we do not mean that there is a difference between the nature of God and the person of God since both coincide in the very nature of God. God is spirit; God is person but not human. It means that God has some features we can associate with a human person, that is to say, he has personality. God is not “it.” God is not a mere force or power. God is not merely the personification of good. God is not the totality of all that is (pantheism). God describes himself/herself in terms we associate with personality. As a person, God possesses the power of self-consciousness of Him/Herself, and S/He possesses the power of self-determination (the ability to initiate from within Him/Herself His/Her purpose. This understanding may now take us to another level of reflection – the name of God.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What do you understand by the assertion that “God is not a mere force or power;” that “God is not merely the personification of good”?

#### 3.1.4 The Name of God

We observe in the Judeo-Christian scripture two names closely associated with God, thus YHWH and 'Elohîm. The two names are equally linked with two important incidents in the Jewish religious tradition - the burning bush and of the Shema 'Yîserâél. Conventionally, YHWH is rendered as “Yahweh” when the two vowels omitted in Hebrew orthography are added. YHWH records a unique and indispensable historical revelation, while “'Elohîm” refers just as much to what many historical religions call “God,” even when an idol is designated. This bipolarity continues into the New Testament.

YHWH is linked to the Mosaic Law: the burning bush next to Sinai (Ex 3). The word YHWH is formed of two components: the subject (third person: “He”) and the verb to be, in the third person. As it stands, the narrative interprets YHWH as derived from the verb in the first person, for first of all God utters it in this form in Exodus 3:14 (adopted in Hos 1:9, in the negative form in the Hebrew!). The Latin Vulgate renders it as Ego sum qui sum (Ex 3:14a: “I am who I am,” which appears more reliable and faithful translation to the Hebrew than the Septuagint’s ho ôn (“the being”). God’s name makes him known as subject: it is in the act of speaking that his essence of being is given, by his signing of a promise. For this reason he calls out, he is called to, he is announced, without ever losing the link that ties him to the founding event (Ex 3:15 ab). The covenant can be considered the authorization and foundation of the exchange of words between God and humanity. Committed to a covenant that cannot proceed without controversy, the biblical God exposes himself to history. One of the biblical epithets that best sums up the divine manifestations is that of “living” (1 Kgs 18:15; 2 Kgs 2:2; 3:14; Jer 10:10; 23:36). God is living, although immortal. Correlatively, the idol is a god who is not living.

Important for us, however, is that the revelation of the name “YHWH,” which would later be attached to the person of God, occurs within the context of creative liberation



and worship (Ex. 3-4). So, we may not be surprised to discover later that one of the stress areas of the person of God will be the ‘singularity,’ the ‘worship,’ and the ‘fellowship’ of God

The above idea becomes clearer in the Middle Ages, where the name of “God” (God = theos) was linked with two origins. One is the “theorô” thesis (“I see:” – Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* XII, 2, 969 C) thus referring to the coincidence between the divine vision and the creative act. The other is the theô (“I run”) thesis, which indicates the cosmogonic course of the Word touching all beings to give them life (John the Scot Eriugena, *De divisione naturae*). God’s unicity, revealed by the Bible as well as by the Koran and confirmed by Neoplatonic speculations, renders problematical the use of the name in the plural: God is a proper name; it is improper, idolatrous, and meaningless, to speak about several “gods”. In other words, the name of God is closely associated with the person of God. That is most proper to God him/herself.

Later in the history, probably under the influence of Maimonides, the name YHWH was then reserved as only name that is but God, that human beings cannot utter, and that God alone knows. God can be named only by God, and that is why he reveals himself in the Scriptures by names whose multiplicity compensates for this partial approach.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Can you think of any deity or god(dess) in your locality with more than one names? What meanings do the names convey?

#### **3.1.5 Worship as Proper to the Person of God**

The etymology of the name of God as YHWH, as earlier indicated, points to the idea of “calling,” “to call”. It denotes the object of worship as one whom humans “call upon,” to “worship” and to “invoke” his name. It has the connotation of a personal object of religious perception and one with power. The New Testament word carries the meaning that, that object is spirit. When we put these thoughts together, the word God as found in the Bible fundamentally is about the almighty spirit who is worshipped and whose name and aids are invoked by human beings.

In sum, the personhood of God reveals that God is spirit. God is only ONE. The “ONENESS” of God is emphasised in the Godhead, revealed in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It further reveals that the person of God is the “worshiping” God. He alone is to be worshiped, and to be worshiped in spirit and truth. In other words, we are called to fellowship with God, to worship God and serve God; we are called to believe in God in truth. The truth is that there is only one true God and one Godhead consisting of three separate persons. God is the ONE who creates, who sustains, who guides and guards. He is ever all encompassing.

#### **3.1.6 Implications of God’s Personhood**

From the foregoing discussion, we can draw some conclusion on the implication of our understanding of God as a person.

- i. God's personhood is fundamentally and radically different from human personhood. God's personhood has not limit placed on it. The person of God cannot be separated from God's nature. Even within the Trinitarian doctrine, the persons still share in that one divine nature, thus depicting the theological mystery of "one and many"
- ii. One of the implications of God's personhood is that God's personality must not be reduced to human personality descriptions. We may easily reduce God to our conceptions of how S/He ought to act rather than respect the revelation S/He has made about Her/Himself.
- iii. The meaning our existence is dependent upon God's purpose for creating us, not what meaning we choose to assign to it.
- iv. We need to relate our behaviour to the personality of God. God is not indifferent to our actions. God is not some kind of stoic, unmoved being, unaffected by human conduct.

Unfortunately, the real personhood of God has been in the modern time supplanted by a quasi-human god made in human's image. Let us never forget that God's spiritual nature implies that we are dependent upon Him/Her for life and life's meaning. We are dependent upon Him/Her for definition of morality and meaning in our lives. And our ultimate destiny depends upon whether our lives conform to His purposes.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

1. What is the name of the god that your people worshipped before the advent of Christianity?
2. Were there any similarities between that god and the God that is found in the Bible?
3. From the above paragraph, what is it that leads to the real knowledge of God?

## **3.2 Knowledge of God**

### **3.2.1 Knowledge of God and Knowing of God**

Everywhere people are religious, and in many parts of the world, people recognise a High God. Sometimes the non-Christians' ideas of the High God are so different that they cannot be identified with the God of the Scripture. But at other times the local idea of the High God is so close to the biblical picture of God that missionaries have simply used the local name for this God in their preaching.

It is not surprising that people have such an idea of God, because all nations descended from Adam and Eve, to whom God first revealed himself (Acts 17:26). Moreover, as we have learned, all people can observe God's General Revelation in his works of creation and providence (Rom. 1:19-21; Acts 14:17).

But knowledge of God is not the same as what the Bible calls "knowing God." Here, knowing God points to a relationship. In the Old Testament the word know is used for

intimate personal fellowship, for example between a man and his wife (Gen. 4:1, 17, 25, etc.). It is also used for a relationship with God (e.g. Jer. 31:34; 2:8; 4:22). Such a relationship can only exist where God reveals his word. Thus we read of the boy Samuel, “Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him” (1 Sam. 3:7).

God’s special revelation and a personal relationship with him is the only way for an accurate knowledge of him. In the New Testament, we find the same truth brought out in the story where Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father. Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.... Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves” (Jn. 14:9-11). Here Jesus firmly identifies “knowing” him, and “knowing” the Father, with believing in him. Without faith, in response to God’s special revelation, there can be no real “knowledge” of God (cf. Jn. 10:14; Gal. 4:9; Heb. 8:11).

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

What is the difference between knowing God and the knowledge of God?

#### **3.2.2 Sources of the Knowledge of God**

Man’s knowledge of God has several sources. These sources are as follows:

##### **1. The Traditional or Historical Knowledge of God**

Man’s knowledge of God can be traced to the first man, Adam. Ever since God created man in his own image (Gen. 1:26), man has known about God his creator. However, we can deduce from the Bible that sin distorted man’s knowledge of God. The living relationship that Adam enjoyed with God was lost when Adam sinned. Throughout the generations that follow Adam, the truth about God was distorted as man invented lies about God his creator. Romans 1, teaches that men by their wickedness have suppressed the truth about God (V.18). They refuse to honour and worship God (V. 21). Instead they worshipped images of men and animals (V. 23). They did not worship the creator but they worshipped creatures that he has created (V.25).

##### **2. The Perceived Knowledge of God**

The first chapter of Romans also teaches that we can know about God through what we can see in the things he has created. Verses 19 and 20 reads:  
For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, had been made known.

These verses do not mean to say that man can clearly see what God is like by just looking at the things he has created. We must remember that nature itself is affected by sin (Gen. 3:17,18; Romans. 8:19-22). Furthermore, man’s perception itself is covered by sin, consequently he cannot see God clearly in nature unless he looks through the spectacles of faith.

### 3. The Innate Knowledge of God

Some theologians believe that man also has an innate knowledge of God. By this we mean that man is born with the knowledge of God inside of him, or that he has an instinctive knowledge of God. Some theologians argue out this by virtue of our being created in the image and likeness of God. This kind of knowledge could be designated as *cognitio insita* (implanted knowledge). It is a sort of knowledge that is natural and automatic. It is the knowledge of God based on God's presence within us. It is not acquired, inferred or reflected knowledge. We have no ground for such knowledge save God's grace. It is simply there within us. It is innate and mediate.

However, it is difficult to find a biblical support for this kind of knowledge. What the Bible clearly teaches is that man has an innate knowledge of the law of God. Romans 2:15 says, "what the law requires is written on their hearts." The Bible does not mention a similar innate knowledge of the Law-Giver, God himself.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

1. Explain the various sources of man's knowledge of God.
2. Summarise what man had done as a result of the sin of Adam.
3. What is the problem with the innate knowledge of God?

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

The Word God denotes an object to be honoured and worshipped. The Bible depicts God as an almighty spirit from whom human beings look for aids. Historical survey has shown that all people have some knowledge of God. While others have the correct knowledge, others have distorted knowledge of him. Man's general knowledge or awareness of God, which is the innate knowledge, is rooted in the fact that all men are descendants of Adam, who was created by God himself.

### 5.0 SUMMARY

This introductory unit attempted to explain the meaning of the word God in Hebrew and Greek, and the implication of the name. This unit established that all men are created by God and are descendants of one man therefore all men are related. The three main sources of man's knowledge of God discussed in this unit include the traditional or historical, man's perceived knowledge, and man's innate knowledge of God.

### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the meaning of the word God and state its implications.
2. Discuss the three sources of the man's knowledge of God.

### 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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**UNIT 2: THE EXISTENCE OF GOD****CONTENTS**

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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the last unit, we established the fact that every group of people has a religion and an idea of a high God whether they worship him or not. Man's knowledge of God comes from the fact that mankind is created by God himself and descends from the first man, comes from what he sees from created things, and also through an innate knowledge. Having established that, it is important to also establish the existence of God. We can only talk about the knowledge of God because he exists. The Bible, which is the main and most accurate source of the knowledge of God does not take time to argue about the existence of God. It assumes the existence and teaches that it should be accepted by faith. Despite this, some theologians and philosophers have taken the pain to device rational arguments for God's existence. This unit takes you through some of these arguments noting their importance and deficiencies. Though these arguments are helpful they do not prove the existence of a personal loving God.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- state the position of the Bible on the issue of God's existence
- explain the nature of the faith that Christians exhibit
- identify the weaknesses and strengths of the proof of God's existence
- state the various arguments for God's existence and their various versions
- identify the theologians who propounded these arguments.

**3.0 MAIN CONTENT****3.1 The Existence of God**

The existence of God is the most important question in human existence. It affects the

whole tenor of human life, whether man is regarded as the Supreme Being in the universe or it is believed that man has superior being that he must love and obey, or perhaps defy. In reality, one cannot speak of the knowledge or revelation of God unless the existence of God is established. In Christian theology, the greatest presumption is that God exists. This assumption is reasonable. This does not mean that we can logically demonstrate the existence of God. We accept the existence of God by faith. This is based on reliable information. It is not a blind assumption. It is an assumption based on evidence found primarily in the Bible as well as in nature.

It should be noted that the proof from the Bible is not explicit or logical but assumed. The biblical verse that comes close to prove the existence of God is Hebrew 11:6. The opening verses of the Bible attests that God created the world and the entire Bible teaches that as the creator, God upholds all things, rules over the destinies of individuals and nations and He works all things according to his will. This can be seen clearly in the history of Israel and the life and work of his son Jesus Christ. The Bible is the revelation of God's words in actions.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

1. In the above paragraph, there is a phrase which reads "faith based on evidence found primarily in the Bible as well as in nature."
2. What is the evidence that is seen in nature?
3. Give biblical examples which show that God upholds nations and individuals

### 3.2 The Proofs of God's Existence

The rational arguments are to support the proposition that the existence of God is capable of logical demonstration. The fact is that we accept the existence of God by faith but it is faith based on reliable information. These arguments are part of what is called natural theology. Natural theology that stands on its own and is self-sufficient does not take us far. Even before these arguments are discussed it must be understood that they have fundamental deficiencies. They do not tell us about a righteous and holy God. This does not mean they are worthless. Rational arguments are a testimony about God and can augment and strengthen our faith even though they are not grounds of faith and cannot induce faith. These arguments are a faithful observance of the God's created order.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Summarise the importance of rational proofs in the above paragraph.

### The Influence of Pre-Christian Greek Thought

Proofs of the existence of God have a prehistory in ancient thought. When we read Plato, we discover that the Greek philosopher went early enough into the business of justifying the belief in the gods. Plato, for example, referred to the teachings of Socrates as evidenced in Xenophon's Memorabilia (I, 4 and IV, 3) and in some earlier

sources such as Diogenes of Apollonia. He taught about god mostly in mythical terms, stressing the goodness of god (cf. the *Republic* and *Timaeus*) and god's care for human (cf. the *Phaedo*). It is, however, in the *Phaedrus*, and much more explicitly in the *Laws*, that he presented a more rigorous argument. He based his argument on the fact that things change and are in motion. Plato was quick here to observe that not all change comes from outside; some of it is spontaneous and must be due to the "soul" and ultimately to a supreme or perfect soul. Consequent upon this, Plato was able to develop at least three arguments, which centred on the antecedence of the "self-moving" soul, the regular order of the universe and the universal consent of the races of humanity (cf. *Laws* XII, 966 e and X, 886). For Plato, God fashions the world on the pattern of immutable Forms and, above all, on "the Good," which is "beyond being and knowledge"; i.e., it is transcendent and beyond the grasp of thought.

Whether God so conceived will give the traditional theist all he wants is another issue. Nevertheless, Plato's combination of the notion of the transcendent, which is also supremely good, and the argument from change, provided the model for subsequent philosophical arguments for the proof of the existence of God. Thus, the themes of the hierarchy of beings and of the universe of the Forms, which, reinterpreted in particular by Augustine and Anselm, would leave their mark on the formulation of proofs of the existence of God.

Furthermore, Aristotle, in his *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, advanced an argument that would find great success: a consideration of movement led him to posit the existence of an "unmoved mover." While the *Physics* defines this only in a negative sense, the *Metaphysics* conceives it positively as something living and intelligent. This immobile prime mover, which moves all things in a desirable and good manner; it is the final cause, being both life and intelligence. It is God, a thought that thinks itself and rejoices in itself. It is an eternal and perfect living being.

So, we may not be quick at this juncture to observe that Aristotle's argument from motion, though how more precise it might appear, is coupled with a doubtful astronomical view and a less theistic notion of God. For the "god" of Aristotle is the unmoved mover. It is the ultimate source of all other movement, not by expressly communicating itself to beings but by being a supreme object of aspiration, and all appetite and activity being in fact directed to some good. Aristotle thus set the pattern for the more deistic view of God, whereas the theist, taken in the strict sense, turns more for his start and inspiration to Plato

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. What is the difference between the 'god' of Aristotle and that of Plato?
2. Can you see a point of intersection between the Christian God and the 'god' Plato?
3. To what extent do you think the Christians can agree with the idea of Aristotle's 'Unmoved Mover'?

#### 3.2.1 Ontological Argument

Ontological arguments attempt to establish the existence of God by relying on one's concept of God, or the definition of the word 'God,' without involving truths known through experience. This argument is expounded by Anselm (11th Cent.), Descartes



(mid-17th Cent.) and Samuel Clarke (Late-18th Cent). This argument comes in many forms; however, all of them are dealing with the attempt to prove the existence of God from thought. The idea is that whenever we think about God, we necessarily think of his existence. In other words, the very idea of God implies his existence. And God is the greatest or most perfect being. If the attribute of existence, however, is not included in man's concept of God, he can then think of something more perfect, viz., that which has existence as well. So, we are dealing with our consciousness here. And we either trust it or despair it.

### **The Classical Argument**

We are going to list only the three most popular forms. The first one tries to prove the existence of God from the general ideas and norms present in the human mind. The second form deduces the existence of God from the necessity of thinking of the highest absolute idea. It concludes that that idea is God. The third has to do with the innateness of the idea of God as a fact that can in no way be explained except by the existence of the God who implanted this idea in the human mind.

So argues Anselm:

- Man has the idea of an absolute perfect being named God
- Something can only be absolutely perfect when it exists
- Therefore, the absolute perfect being, named God, exists.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

What are the key words in the classical ontological argument of the proofs for the existence of God?

### **Modern Approach to the Ontological Argument**

Inspired by Anselm's ontological argument, most modern proponents of ontological argument have tried to avoid the dispute resulting from Anselm's mode of reasoning. They now refocus the argument from God's existence to God's necessary existence. That is to say, for anything to count as God, they argue, it would have to be absolutely perfect. But anything that exists and yet might not have existed is thereby deficient in some way. So if God exists, God exists necessarily; it could never be that God just happens to exist.

Now, we can think of a necessary being as something that exists according to all the ways the world might have been, or "possible worlds." So either God exists in every possible world or in none. But this means that, so long as it is possible that God exists, God actually exists; and the way things actually are is one of the ways things can be.

Certainly some thinkers comprehend the trend of the argument from conceptual possibility, and further argue that unless the concept of God is somehow incoherent, the existence of God is possible. Thus Charles Hartshorne insists that either God exists or else the term God is meaningless or self-contradictory. And on the face of it, he contends that the existence of God certainly does not appear to be incoherent. It seems perfectly conceivable.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

What is the difference between the classical and the modern ontological arguments of the proofs for the existence of God?

### Weakness of the Argument

i. Again, not every thinker is comfortable with the proofs on God's existence. The assumption that existence could be "predicated" has proved fatal to the argument. The critics insist that existence is not a predicate or attribute in the same way as we can speak of colour or shape. Thus, Bertrand Russell argues that something with stated properties exists is not to attribute to it a further property, namely existence. Rather our job must be to assert that the concept (existence) is represented by concrete instance. But whether or not a given concept is represented by concrete instance is a question of fact. It cannot be determined a priori but only by whatever is the appropriate method for discovering a fact of that kind. This need for observation cannot be circumvented by writing existence into the definition of the concept, for the need arises again as the question of whether this enlarged concept is or can be represented by concrete instance. We can appreciate from the angle Bertrand Russell is coming. He is an empiricist and therefore should elevate practical concrete experience at the expense of any philosophical or theological thinking.

ii. Another contention is that the argument(s) forces a dilemma between the necessity of God's existence and its impossibility. The key question becomes whether the existence of God conceived of as a necessary being is even possible. It is only a proof of the concept of God, but not the proof of the existence of God Himself. It makes God a concept but not a living person.

iii. Some scholars have equally contested the proof of God's existence based on the idea of the necessity of God's existence. According to them, the proof is a slanting and needlessly elaborate way of eliciting the feeling that there must be some reality that exists by the very necessity of its own nature and to which everything else directs human thought. As a result of this, the argument on "necessary existence" as a property with even higher value than "existence" is, for them, a fail.

The proof fails to observe the distinction between logical and ontological, or factual, necessity. Logically necessary existence, it is said, is an incoherent idea. Logical necessity applies to the relations between concepts, not to their instantiation. God's necessity, then, must be an ontologically, or factually, rather than a logically, necessary existence: God exists as the ultimate fact, without beginning or end and without depending upon anything else for existence. But whether this concept of an ontologically necessary being is instantiated cannot be determined a priori. It cannot be validly inferred from the idea of an eternal and independent being that there actually is such a being.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

2. Do you think that the critique of the ontological argument do exert any negative impact in the proof of the existence of God?

#### 3.2.2 Cosmological Argument

Cosmological arguments are based on the existence of a caused. They aim at establishing the causal or explanatory dependence of the world on a wholly

independent being. The being is usually identified with God. These arguments typically proceed from the claim that familiar things are dependent in various ways upon other things for their origin, movement, and continued existence. They proceed from the affirmation of cause for everything to the contention that not every being can be dependent in the relevant way. Therefore, any chain of dependence must ultimately be grounded in a being that admits of no such dependence. Simply put:

- everything has a cause
- when we trace back all causes we come to one ultimate and absolute cause also called a first cause
- this absolute or first cause is God.

But the processing of coming to this idea has some historical antecedents as we shall observe below.

### **History of cosmological argument**

i. **The Ancient Period:** Historically, the theory goes back at least to Aristotle, though his understanding of the Prime Mover, as we earlier mentioned, bears little resemblance to theism. After Aristotle, the history divides naturally into two categories:

ii. **The Middle Age:** In the Middle Ages, philosophers in all three major theistic traditions defended cosmological arguments. Prominent among them were Ibn Sina (Avicenna), St. Thomas Aquinas, and Moses Maimonides. Incidentally, all the three thinkers are found within the Aristotelian metaphysical framework.

iii. **The Modern Period:** By the early modern period, the principles of Aristotelian metaphysics that had supported cosmological arguments were no longer in vogue. But it proved natural to formulate a cosmological argument in fresh terms, as Samuel Clarke did in 1705. Clarke insisted that whatever comes to be is dependent on other things to provide an account or reason for its existence, and he argued that an account is incomplete if it is not ultimately grounded in some independent thing. Clarke's contemporary, Gottfried Leibniz, also defended a cosmological argument, while both David Hume and Immanuel Kant would provide grounds for the famous criticisms of cosmological argument.

### **The Five Ways of Thomas Aquinas**

We shall present the "five ways" of Thomas Aquinas, that is, the five proofs of the existence of God, as a representation of the Middle Age cosmological argument. The five-way cosmological argument was inferred from the Aristotelian idea of motion, but at the same time given a more familiar form. It is also influenced by some of the teachings of Plotinus, the leading Neoplatonist of the 3rd century AD. Plotinus acknowledged God as mysteriously the source of all being, and all beings emanate from the ultimate, and mysteriously dependent on God. Yet God remained transcendent.

#### **The First Way: Argument from Motion**

1. Our senses prove that some things are in motion.
2. Things move when potential motion becomes actual motion.

3. Only an actual motion can convert a potential motion into an actual motion.
4. Nothing can be at once in both actuality and potentiality in the same respect (i.e., if both actual and potential, it is actual in one respect and potential in another).
5. Therefore nothing can move itself.
6. Therefore each thing in motion is moved by something else.
7. The sequence of motion cannot extend ad infinitum.
8. Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God.

### **The Second Way: Argument from Efficient Causes**

1. We perceive a series of efficient causes of things in the world.
2. Nothing exists prior to itself.
3. Therefore nothing is the efficient cause of itself.
4. If a previous efficient cause does not exist, neither does the thing that results.
5. Therefore if the first thing in a series does not exist, nothing in the series exists.
6. The series of efficient causes cannot extend ad infinitum into the past, for then there would be no things existing now.
7. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.

### **The Third Way: Argument from Possibility and Necessity (Reductio argument)**

1. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, that come into being and go out of being i.e., contingent beings.
2. Assume that every being is a contingent being.
3. For each contingent being, there is a time it does not exist.
4. Therefore it is impossible for these always to exist.
5. Therefore there could have been a time when no things existed.
6. Therefore at that time there would have been nothing to bring the currently existing contingent beings into existence.
7. Therefore, nothing would be in existence now.
8. We have reached an absurd result from assuming that every being is a contingent being.
9. Therefore not every being is a contingent being.
10. Therefore some being exists of its own necessity, and does not receive its existence from another being, but rather causes them. This all men speak of as God.

### **The Fourth Way: Argument from Gradation of Being**

1. There is a gradation to be found in things: some are better or worse than others.
2. Predications of degree require reference to the “uttermost” case (e.g., a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest).
3. The maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus.
4. Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God.

### **The Fifth Way: Argument from Design**

1. We see that natural bodies work toward some goal, and do not do so by chance.
2. Most natural things lack knowledge.

3. But as an arrow reaches its target because it is directed by an archer, what lacks intelligence achieves goals by being directed by something intelligence.
4. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.

We will discover that some of the Aquinas, arguments, especially the way of thinking of the being and necessity of God, would be impressively modified and presented in the modern times.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Among the five arguments presented above, which one does appear to be the strongest for the proof of the existence of God?

### **Deductive cosmological argument**

We know also from common experience that things and events are explanatorily dependent on other things. But a central question in debates over cosmological arguments of the deductive type centres on the possibility of an infinite series of things or events, each providing an adequate explanation for the existence (or motion) of the next. But we cannot end up on the “infinite series of things,” otherwise our explanation is incomplete. This means that a complete explanation for anything or event must ultimately be grounded in something that has no explanatory dependence. And it is only a necessary being, that is, a being that could not have failed to exist, requires no explanation for its existence. And God is considered the most natural example of a necessary being with causal powers.

The proponent of the deductive cosmological argument further argues it is not only the familiar facts of experience, but every contingent state of affairs (that is a state of affairs that might not have been the case) must have an explanation outside of itself (cf. the Principle of Sufficient Reason). If this principle were true, not only would every individual in an infinite series of causes require explanation, but the existence of the series itself would require explanation. Hence the need for explanation would entail the presence of being whose exist does not depend on the series itself.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

What do you think could be the weakness of the deductive cosmological argument?

### **Evidential cosmological argument**

Another aspect of the argument is the evidential cosmological argument. The insistence is that some principle of reason rules out the possibility that the physical universe could simply exist unexplained. Consequently, the creation hypothesis is compared with its rivals by using criteria such as simplicity and explanatory power. In this respect, the existence of God is treated as an explanatory postulate similar to the existence of electrons. These facts are considered as mere existence of a complex and contingent physical universe.

Nevertheless, the evidential cosmological argument is widely considered inconclusive at best because there is no established standard for comparing the merits of ultimate explanations.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

What is the merit of the evidential cosmological argument if the argument is still inconclusive?

**Critique of the Cosmological Arguments**

It is important to clarify that even a successful deductive cosmological argument would not establish the truth of theism. This is because:

- i. The argument may not necessarily entail the conclusion that there is a single independent and necessary being, since there could be a number of them.
- ii. Even if there were only one such being, a cosmological argument would provide no guarantee that the being is personal, all-powerful, or good. It can equally be an impersonal force or a great demon.
- iii. The critic can also reject the notion of complete explanation on the ground that every individual thing in an infinite series of dependent beings is explained by the thing immediately prior to it, and the existence of that individual remains intelligible despite the lack of an independent being in the series.
- iv. We can equally claim that the infinite series itself provides a complete explanation for the existence of whatever follows it. But the series itself is not dependent on anything else for an explanation. The implication is that one may predicate any of the explanations at any stage as ultimate without making reference to the Christian God.

The above limitations, however, do not mean that cosmological arguments are useless for justifying theism. For a great many competing theories would be ruled out by a successful deductive cosmological argument.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

1. Can you think of anything or event that has no cause?
2. What are the importance and deficiencies of the cosmological arguments?

**3.2.3 Teleological or Design Argument**

Attempts to arrive at the idea of God in somewhat more comprehensible terms are reflected in the references to value and design in the fourth (moral argument) and fifth (design argument) ways of Aquinas. This approach, however, has been given a more explicit presentation in the modern times. This we describe as teleological (design) and moral arguments. While we make some allusions to the latter, it will be discussed in the subsequent section.

The Greek word *telos* has the connotation of a definite purpose or a particular goal or end. The main thrust of the teleological argument is that there is worth and purpose, or apparent design, to be found in the world. It proceeds from the order, beauty, harmony and purpose observable in the world. This order is observed in the entire world and particular creatures both animate and inanimate such as the sun, stars, moon, humans, plants and animals. The Bible also teaches that there is purpose for the creation and created things. Verses that testify to this include Prov.8; 1Cor. 3:21-23; Rom.8:28. The Teleological argument is held that:

- when we look at the world we see order, harmony and purpose in the things that exist
- this order and harmony implies that it is designed by an intelligent being
- this intelligent being is God.

The argument from design gives us the advantage to speak about the nature of God and of ascribing a certain aim and character to him from our knowledge of the phenomena of the world. The supreme Designer or Architect is known from his works, especially perhaps as reflected in the lives of humans. This approach opens up one way of speaking of God, not just as mysterious power behind the world but as some reality whom human may come to know in a personal way from the way the world goes and from human understanding of what it means.

### **Critique**

- i. One of the issues raised against the teleological mode of thinking is that it does not tell us whether there is one single intelligent being or there are many working in harmony and for the purposefulness of history.
- ii. We also discover the argument assumes some feature of the causal argument as its starting point.
- iii. The presence of seemingly purposeless features of the world cannot be denied. Sometimes, the human person has come to conclusion that it would have been better not to be than to be, simply because of the apparent contradictions and purposelessness associated with life and the world.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5**

1. According to this paragraph, what is the goal of life?
2. What do we mean when we talk of the beauty and harmony of the world?
3. Read Prov.8; 1Cor.3:21-23; Rom. 8:28, and note down the purposes of creation

#### **3.2.4 Moral Argument**

This argument is based on the ethical phenomena present in the human world. The exponents of this argument argue that there is a moral phenomenon occurring in the life of human beings such as conscience, moral responsibility, repentance, reward and punishment, virtue and happiness, the fear of death and judgment, the triumph of good over evil, etc. All these infer that there is a moral being who created and maintains that moral order. In deed moral phenomena are a powerful witness even to unbelievers.

An aspect of the argument is that the acceptance of the absolute demands of ethical obligation is to presuppose a morally structured universe, which implies a personal God whose commands are reflected in the human conscience. The focus becomes on the conscience, whose voice is heard in everyone. Others may end up emphasising the moral law known by every human being and conclude that there is a supreme and

sovereign law giver. So, the argument acknowledges the sense of morality and presents it as something internal and compelling.

The version by Philosopher Emmanuel Kant states that:

- a. People everywhere recognise moral laws.
- b. When there are laws, there must be a law giver.
- c. This law-giver is God

### **The Strength of the Argument**

The argument from moral order gives us some clue about moral person of God. We now understand God as a person with some moral attributes derived from our understanding of the world and some positive moral characters associated with human.

### **Critique**

- i. We may assess the moral theistic argument as coming from quarters where perhaps reflects the modern lack of confidence in metaphysical constructions.
- ii. Attempts to trace ethical obligation to a transcendent divine source may also appear weak for many thinkers simply on grounds that it is possible to account for morality without going beyond the human realm. It has been argued that the exigencies of communal life require agreed codes of behaviour, which become internalized in the process of socialization as moral laws.
- iii. Again, the natural affection that develops among humans and the more occasional sense of a call to heroic self-sacrifice on behalf of others could be a matter of socialisation rather than an eternal and universal moral obligation.
- iv. The theist is equally confronted with the explanation of wickedness, suffering and evil in the world in the presence of the ultimate and omnipotent being, who is also morally perfect.
- v. Criticising the theistic assumption, Nielsen, argues that even if there is no purpose to life, there are purposes in life that can remain perfectly intact even in a godless world. God or no God, immortality or no immortality, it is vile to torture people just for the fun of it, and friendship, solidarity, love, and the attainment of self-respect are human goods even in an utterly godless world. There are intellectual puzzles about how people know that these things are good, but that is doubly true for the distinctive claims of a religious ethic. The point is that these things remain desirable and that life can have a point even in the absence of God

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. Mention the basic moral responsibilities that you know.
2. How does reward and punishment help in reforming behaviour?
3. What do we mean by moral order?
4. Who is the law giver in the Old Testament?



### 3.2.5 Argument from Universal Consent

This argument is also known as Historical or Ethnological argument. It is based on the fact that all human are religious. It was proposed by Cicero and reinforced by the study of religion. Every historical study of religion has shown that there are no peoples without religion and hence religion is the common possession of all humans. Those who have done research into the study of religion have concluded that every group of people have a religion no matter how far back you go into the ancient times. However, the question historical research has not answered is the origin of religion. The psychological study of religion has also revealed that religion has not originated and cannot have accidentally originated from a combination of non-religious elements, but is rooted in the essence of human nature (Bavick 88). It is therefore concluded that the seed of religion in humankind is the creation of human in the image of God.

It states that:

- All humans everywhere are religious
- There is something in human constitution that makes human religious
- This sense of divinity must have been put there by a Divine Being

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7**

1. What was the religion of your people before the advent of Christianity?
2. What were the objects of worship of that religion?

### **Arguments from religious experience and miracles**

#### **Religious Experience**

Religious experience is used in Christian apologetics in two ways—in the argument from religious experiences to God as their cause and in the claim that it is as reasonable to trust religious as it is to trust nonreligious experience in forming beliefs about the total environment.

The argument maintains that special episodes, such as seeing visions of Christ or Mary or hearing the voice of God, as well as the more pervasive experience of “living in God's presence” or of “absolute dependence upon a higher power,” constitute evidence of God as their source.

#### **Miracle**

The argument from miracle is similar to the argument from religious experience. It asserts that the miraculous works experienced or witnessed are cannot be explained without attributing it to an an agent. And this agent must be superior to natural phenomena, the universe and the human. The agent must be God. Therefore, God must exist as the agent of these miracles.

These arguments (religious experience and miracle) go a long way to demonstrate some aspects of the explanatory power of the idea of God. We must, however, note that divine activity is not the only possible way of understanding the character of the universe, its contingent existence, the unconditional claims of morality, or the occurrence of religious experiences and “miracles” but only one out of the many ways.

### **Critique of the Arguments**

Most of the experiences account for in religion and miracle could be justified not necessarily by the intervention of divine agency but by the operation of natural phenomena.

To establish that the experiences are real, as experiences, is not to establish that they are caused by an infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, divine being. As Thomas Hobbes succinctly put it, when someone says that God has spoken to him in a dream, this “is no more than to say he dreamed that God spake to him” (Leviathan, Pt. III, ch. 32).

So the arguments from religious experience and miracle once again lack strict proof for the existence of God. Nevertheless, the concept of deity offers a possible, satisfying answer to the fundamental questions to which these various factors point. These questions may thus be said to open the door to rational theistic belief, while still leaving the nonbeliever waiting for a positive impetus to go through that door. The work of some contemporary Christian philosophers can be characterized as a search for such a positive impetus.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Evaluate the criticisms against the religious experience and miracle arguments for the existence of God, and state the weakness of the criticisms.

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

This unit established the existence of God. It reiterated that belief in the existence of God is related to how we live our lives. Those who believe that God exists and is concerned and will hold them accountable for the things they do live a more careful life. What we found out here is that the Bible and Christian theology assume the existence. However, we live in a world that wants proof for everything. The people at the time of Christ wanted miracles and signs to believe in Christ. All the proofs we discussed here are based on philosophical reasoning and have no or just little biblical support.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

Throughout the history of the Church, different theologians such as Anselm, John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, and Samuel Clarke have come up with different theories to prove the existence of God. These theories can be used as a point of contact between a Christian and non-Christian; they have fundamental deficiencies in that they failed to prove the existence of a personal and loving God. The God

portrayed in the Bible is interested in entering into relationship with human beings and also wants humans to enter into relationship with him.

### 6.0 TUTOR- MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. State the importance and deficiencies of the rational proofs for God's existence.
2. Discuss the ontological argument of God existence.
3. Choose one from the following argument of God's existence and discuss in details:
  - a. Cosmological argument,
  - b. Moral argument.

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## UNIT 3: DENIAL OF GOD'S EXISTENCE

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## 7.0 References/Further Reading

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the last unit, we looked at the arguments developed by different theologians to prove the existence of God, and the deficiencies and strengths of these arguments. This unit presents a view that seems contrary to what was discussed in the last unit. It exposes you to the denial of God's existence and the implications of the denial. These denials include those who either feel God does not exist or have interest in what they do. Some of these views that will be presented here are not flat denials of God's existence but misrepresentations of the person of God which equally amounts to his denial. The way one behaves in this life has some relationship with his or her view of God's existence. If you believe that God exists and he is going to hold you responsible for your behaviour, then you live cautiously.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

- At the end of this unit, you should be able to:
- identify the different groups of atheists
- explain the difference between Pantheism and Panentheism
- identify the people who holds similar views in our day
- list and discuss all the wrong views about God.

**3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

In the last unit, we said that the idea of God is universal and it is found even among the citizens of the earth. This does not mean that there is no one who does not deny the existence of a personal, self-existent and perfect God revealed in the Bible. The denial comes in various forms. Some form of it can be called misrepresentation of God rather than a flat denial. Views that do not acknowledge the existence of one true God can also be referred to as denial of His existence. We shall classify this into two broad headings: the total denial of the picture of God of the monotheistic religion as presented in the scholarship (atheism) and the misrepresentation of God, which for want of terms may be treated under misrepresented monotheism.

**3.1 Atheism**

Atheism comes from the combination of two Greek words, **a** –negative which means **no** and **theos** – which means God. Atheism therefore means “No God or Without God.” An atheist is one who asserts that there is no God. In this narrow respect, an atheist is a person who claims that the sentence, **God Exists** – expresses a false proposition. He rejects and repudiates belief in God. There are, however, two forms of atheists, namely, practical and theoretical atheists.

A practical atheist is a Godless person who lives as if there is no God. The Bible makes references to this kind in Ps. 14:1 and 53:1 “The fool says in his heart, there is no God”. Ps. 10: 4b which says “All thoughts are that there is no God. That is, he does not seek God, or call on God; he ignores God, and assumes God will also ignore him. He takes God to be inactive. In Eph. 2: 12 Paul argues that those who do not have Christ do not have God. Anyone who refuses to worship the true God is in a sense an atheist.

Theoretical atheist is more of an intellectual thing. It is based on the process of reasoning and rational argumentation. This group of atheists says that the human mind has no ability to determine whether or not God exists and that there is no valid proof for God's existence. They teach that the belief in God is a delusion. Theoretical atheism is a scientific or philosophical theory known as materialistic Monism.

### Atheism in a Broad Sense

Our approach in this section is a deviation from the normal traditional view of atheism to consider it in a broader sense. But Before going into this, it will also be good for us to pause and reflect for a moment on the three presuppositions as stated below:

- i. Not all theologians who regard themselves as defenders of theistic religion(s) are themselves defenders of theism.
- ii. Not all theists seek to demonstrate or even in any way rationally to establish the existence of God.
- iii. Not all denials of God are denials of his existence. Believers sometimes deny God while not being at all in a state of doubt that God exists. They either wilfully reject what they take to be his authority by not acting in accordance with what they take to be his will, or else they simply live their lives as if God did not exist. In this important way they deny him.

Consequently, our understanding of the term, atheism, contains a more complex claim than what we might earlier consider the subject matter to be.. An atheist is someone who rejects belief in God for any of the following reasons:

- i. for an anthropomorphic God, the atheist rejects belief in God because it is false or probably false that there is a God;
- ii. for a nonanthropomorphic God, the atheist rejects belief in God because the concept of such a God is either meaningless, unintelligible, contradictory, incomprehensible, or incoherent;
- iii. for the God portrayed by some modern or contemporary theologians or philosophers, the atheist rejects belief in God because the concept of God in question is such that it merely fronts an atheistic substance, for instance, "God" is just another name for love, or "God" is simply a symbolic term for moral ideals.

This atheism is a much more complex notion, as are its various reflective rejections. It is clear from what has been said about the concept of God in developed forms of Judeo-Christianity that the more crucial form of atheist rejection is not the assertion that it is false that there is a God but instead the rejection of belief in God because the concept of God is said not to make sense—to be in some important way incoherent or unintelligible.

So, the claim of many contemporary atheists is not that religious claims are meaningless. The argument is rather that some religious statements concerning the existence of God are incoherent and that the conception of God reflected in such a claim is unintelligible, and in some sense inconceivable and incredible. They are incapable of being a rational object of belief for a philosophically and scientifically sophisticated person touched by modernity. In other words, a sophisticated atheist does not simply claim that all cosmological claims are false but takes it that some are so problematic that, while purporting to be factual, they actually do not succeed in making a coherent factual claim. The claims do not necessarily make sense. The atheist insists that believers are under the illusion that there is something intelligible to be believed in, while in reality there is nothing. These seemingly grand cosmological claims are in reality best understood as myths or ideological claims reflecting a confused understanding of their utterers' situation.

Keeping the different considerations of atheism in mind it is crucial for us to ask:

- i. Is there is any good reason at all to believe that there is a personal creative reality that is beyond the bounds of space and time and transcendent to the world?
- ii. Is there even a sufficient understanding of such talk so that such a reality can be the object of religious commitment?

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

1. What is the opposite of foolishness?
2. Make a comparative chart of practical and theoretical atheists.
3. Find out the meaning of Materialistic Monism.

Agnosticism

### **Etymology**

Agnostic is a term derived from Ancient Greek ἀ- (a-), meaning "without", and γνῶσις (gnōsis), meaning "knowledge"). Before its recent usage by Thomas Henry Huxley in a speech at a meeting of the Metaphysical Society in 1869 to describe his philosophy which rejects all claims of spiritual or mystical knowledge, it had already been in vogue. Some of the earlier thinkers who promoted agnostic points of view include Sanjaya Belatthaputta, a 5th-century BCE Indian philosopher who expressed agnosticism about any after life. Protagoras, a 5th-century BCE Greek philosopher who was agnostic about the gods, and the Nasadiya Sukta in the Rig Veda which is agnostic about the origin of the universe. The fathers of the Church also made use of the term to describe "spiritual knowledge". In this sense, the term is not to be confused with religious views opposing the ancient religious movement of Gnosticism in particular.

### **The Concept**

Technically, agnosticism is a stance about the difference between belief and knowledge, rather than about any specific claim or belief. In the popular sense, an

agnostic is someone who neither believes nor disbelieves in the existence of a deity or deities, whereas a theist and an atheist believe and disbelieve, respectively. In our own context, it is the claim that humanity does not currently possess the requisite knowledge and/or reason to provide sufficient rational grounds to justify the belief that deities either do or do not exist. Agnosticism is the view that the truth values of certain claims, especially claims about the existence or non-existence of any deity, as well as other religious and metaphysical claims, are unknown.

According to Thomas Henry Huxley, Agnosticism, is not a creed, but a method, the essence of which lies in the rigorous application of a single principle. Positively the principle may be expressed: In matters of the intellect, follow your reason as far as it will take you, without regard to any other consideration. And negatively: In matters of the intellect do not pretend that conclusions are certain which are not demonstrated or demonstrable.

In recent years, scientific literature dealing with neuroscience and psychology has used the word to mean "not knowable". In technical and marketing literature, "agnostic" often has a meaning close to "independent"—for example, "platform agnostic" or "hardware agnostic."

### **Kinds of Agnosticism**

Agnosticism has, more recently, been subdivided into several categories, some of which may be disputed.

### **Qualified Agnosticism**

Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume contended that meaningful statements about the universe are always qualified by some degree of doubt. He asserted that the fallibility of human beings means that they cannot obtain absolute certainty except in trivial cases where a statement is true by definition (i.e. tautologies such as "all bachelors are unmarried" or "all triangles have three corners"). All rational statements that assert a factual claim about the universe is only tentative and subject to uncertainty.

### **Agnostic Atheism and Theism**

Agnostic atheism, on the one hand, is the view of those who do not believe in the existence of any deity, but do not claim to know if a deity does or does not exist. On the other hand, agnostic theism are the opinion of those who do not claim to know of the existence of any deity, but still believe in such an existence.

### **Apathetic or Pragmatic Agnosticism**

The view that there is no proof of either the existence or nonexistence of any deity, but since any deity that may exist appears unconcerned for the universe or the welfare of its inhabitants, the question is largely academic.

### **Strong and Weak Agnosticism**

Strong agnosticism is also described as "hard", "closed", "strict", or "permanent agnosticism". The view that the question of the existence or nonexistence of a deity or deities, and the nature of ultimate reality is unknowable by reason of our natural inability to verify any experience with anything but another subjective experience. A

strong agnostic would say, "I cannot know whether a deity exists or not, and neither can you." But the weak agnosticism, also known as "soft", "open", "empirical", or "temporal agnosticism" maintains that the existence or nonexistence of any deities is currently unknown but is not necessarily unknowable; therefore, one will withhold judgment until evidence, if any, becomes available. A weak agnostic would say, "I don't know whether any deities exist or not, but maybe one day, if there is evidence, we can find something out."

These views are atheistic because they place the question of the existence of God in doubt, and makes it practically impossible for human to take concrete action based on assured faith.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. Discuss the concept of agnosticism
2. Which of the agnostic type do you think is most dangerous to the theistic faith?

### **Ignosticism**

#### **The Claim of Ignosticism**

The term ignosticism was coined in the 1960s by Sherwin Wine, a rabbi and a founding figure of Humanistic Judaism, later popularised by the secular humanist Paul Kurtz in 1992. It becomes a theological position that insists on a coherent definition of a given religious term or theological concept before any question of the existence or nature of a said term can be meaningfully discussed. Even the definition is proved satisfactory, it does not guarantee a fruitful discussion concerning the existence or nature referred to by the term, hence all effort is meaningless. Theologically, it argues against every other theological position, and accuse theology of assuming too much about the concept of God and many other theological concepts including, but not limited to, afterlife, damnation, salvation, sin and the soul. Consequently, Ignosticism and theological noncognitivism are generally synonymous, and could be regarded as a variation of agnosticism or atheism (cf. the discussions on the themes above).

#### **Relationship to Other Views about God**

Theodore Drange observes that atheism and agnosticism are two different positions that accept "God exists" as a meaningful proposition: atheists judge it to be "false or probably false" while agnostics consider it to be inconclusive until further evidence is met. This by extension means that ignostics are neither atheists nor agnostics. A simplified maxim on the subject brings out clearer: "An atheist would say, 'I don't believe God exists'; an agnostic would say, 'I don't know whether or not God exists'; but an ignostic would say, 'I don't know what you mean when you say, "God exists".'" This makes the view of A.J. Ayer more ad rem, for one can not speak of God's existence, or even the probability of God's existence, since the concept itself was unverifiable and thus nonsensical. Consequently, atheism and agnosticism as well as theism because all the three positions assume that the sentence "God exists" is meaningful. Given the meaninglessness of theistic claims are efforts in futility. There is "no logical ground for antagonism between religion and natural science", as theism alone does not entail any proposition which the scientific method can falsify. Sam



Harris finds debating about the existence of God to be both absurd and ascientific yet still an inconvenient necessity when speaking in defense of reason and science.

Ignosticism is not to be confused with apatheism, a position of apathy toward the existence of God. An apatheist may see the statement "God exists" as insignificant; yet they may also see it as meaningful, and perhaps even true.

### **Critique on Ignosticism**

Drange equally demonstrates that any statement on the question of God's existence is made with respect to a particular concept of what one claims to represent "God." This is because the word "God" has many different meanings for many different people in many different contexts. It is also possible for the sentence "God exists" to express many different propositions. What we need to do is to focus on each proposition separately. And for each statement, there will be theists, atheists, and agnostics relative to that concept of God.

As God means very different things to different people, when the word is spoken, an ignostic may seek to determine if something like a child's definition of a god is meant or if a theologian's is intended instead. A theistic child's concept generally has a simple and coherent meaning, based on an anthropomorphic conception of god. This according to him can be read from the different views held by many different philosophers and theologians including St. Augustine, Maimonides, St. Thomas Aquinas, Baruch Spinoza, Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard., who have rejected this conception of god while affirming belief in another conception of god.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Do you believe that ignosticism is another form of atheism or agnosticism? Give reasons to support your position.

Do you agree with A.J. Ayer that there is no logical ground for antagonism between religion and natural science since theism alone does not entail any proposition which the scientific method can falsify.

Do you think that the criticism levelled against Ignosticism is strong enough to undo some of the system had done to theism?

Apatheism

### **The Teaching**

Apatheism is a portmanteau of apathy and theism/atheism. It can also be described as pragmatic atheism or critically as practical atheism. It is an action in apathy. It is acting with apathy, disregard, or lack of interest towards belief or disbelief in a deity. It is an attitude found in both theism and atheism. An apatheist becomes one who is not interested in accepting or denying any claims that gods exist or do not exist. In other words, an apatheist is someone who considers the question of the existence of gods as neither meaningful nor relevant to his or her life.

Apathetic agnosticism or pragmatic agnosticism) acknowledges that any amount of debate can neither prove, nor disprove, the existence of one or more deities, and if one or more deities exist, they do not appear to be concerned about the fate of humans. Therefore, their existence has no impact on personal human affairs and should be of

little theological interest. And if at all it were possible to prove that God does or does not exist, it cannot induce any behavioural change for the apatheists. Jonathan Rauch described apatheism as "a disinclination to care all that much about one's own religion, and an even stronger disinclination to care about other people's

### **For and Against Apatheism**

Historically, practical atheism was considered by some people to be associated with moral failure, willful ignorance, and impiety. Those considered practical atheists were said to behave as though God, ethics, and social responsibility did not exist; they abandoned duty and embraced hedonism. According to the French Catholic philosopher Étienne Borne, "Practical atheism is not the denial of the existence of God, but complete godlessness of action; it is a moral evil, implying not the denial of the absolute validity of the moral law but simply rebellion against that law."

In our days, pragmatic atheism has been seen in a more positive light. The journalist Jonathan Rauch believes that "apatheism is to be celebrated as nothing less than a major civilizational advance. Religion, as countless acts of violence in the name of God have underscored, remains the most divisive and volatile of social forces... Apatheism, therefore, should not be assumed to represent a lazy recumbency... Just the opposite: it is the product of a determined cultural effort to discipline the religious mindset, and often of an equally determined personal effort to master the spiritual passions. It is not a lapse. It is an achievement."

### **Types of Apatheism**

An apatheist may justify their decision using one of these perspectives, or they may combine all of the below to create their own attitude towards faith.

#### **Moral Apatheism**

This apatheistic argument states that morals are present in human society and do not rely on religion to be a part of the human experience. Apatheists recognize that religion may provide a "comfort" for many people around the world, but apatheists do not need religion to be content with the morality of their lives and therefore live without it. This is known as "moral apatheism".

#### **Apatheism of "Indifference"**

Indifference is better known as indifferentism, the belief that all religions are equal in value. The use of indifferentism in this context was popularized by Immanuel Kant in his Critique of Pure Reason. According to Kant, indifferentism represents an extreme form of skepticism. Its stance is that there is no rational ground for accepting any philosophical position. Its doctrine is exemplified by the claim: Since the existence of God can never be proven, nor can it be disproven, it becomes a wasteful venture asking questions to which there are no answers. It is, in its extreme form, the willingness to concede any position. Consequently, it has close affinity with moral relativism, and advances all forms of atheistic, materialistic, pantheistic, and agnostic philosophies, as well as religious pluralist philosophy, such as that espoused by Rousseau. It is found among the theists and atheists, and many institutions within a society.

**Apatheism of Evidence**

The argument here is that if a deity truly wants people to believe in it, then it is the left for the deity to prove its existence through miracles, and explain its plan(s) for humanity or the lack thereof. If the deity is all-powerful as most Christians claim that their God is, the deity could send a clear divine sign that would not need further interpretation. But since the deity does not seem to care if humans believe or not, apatheists will not care until the shows human a reason to, and perhaps not even if such an event occurred. So, the position is simply that of non-belief.

The greatest danger in this system of thought is not necessarily about religion as such, but humanity. It is, argues Jonathan Rauch, a total disinclination to care all that much about one's own religion, and an even stronger disinclination to care about other people's religions.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. Describe briefly the teaching of apatheism.
2. Which of the claims of apatheism is most dangerous to theism?
3. Evaluate the claims of apatheism.

**3.2 Pseudo-Monothism**

Philosophies are monistic if they show a strong sense of the unity of the world, dualistic if they stress its twoness, and pluralistic if they stress its manyness.

**3.2.4 Deism**

Deism is a religious movement, which became prominent in the 17th and 18th centuries AD. The movement reawakened what we may regard as natural religion, thus calling for the acceptance of a certain body of religious knowledge that is inborn in every person or that can be acquired by the use of reason. The movement jettisoned all religious knowledge acquired through either revelation or the teaching of any church.

The god of deism may be a supreme being but has no intervention in the universe. He is often compared to the conception of some high gods as *dei otiosi*, "inactive gods," who have created the world and put it into order but after their work was done retreated from the world and left it to run in accordance with the order installed at the creation. Consequently, the deist's 'God' is the creator of the universe. He is compared with a clock master. God wound up the clock of the world once and forever at the beginning, so that it now proceeds as the world history without need of his further involvement.

Deism is not only religious. It is ideological and atheistic.

- i. It is atheistic because it is a denial of an active and living God. God is more or less sleeping if not dead. God is personal and transcendent but not imminent.
- ii. Deism was represented as the view of those who reduced the role of God to a mere act of creation in accordance with rational laws discoverable by human.
- iii. Deism is anti-revelation. Its direct attack and rejection of revelation, as well as the teachings of the Church about God and revelation makes the movement atheistic.

iv. Deism extols the freedom and autonomy of human at the expense of the existence of the God, who acts and saves in the course of history

v. Deism denies Trinity, incarnation, atonement, miracle, divine authority of the Bible, particular elect people and any supernatural redemptive act in history.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. Why is deism, in spite of its recognition of ‘God,’ is still being classified as atheistic?

2. By implication this view is saying that God is not in control. If God is not in control who in this view is in control?

### 3.2.3 Pantheism

#### **The Doctrine**

Pantheism is typically monistic. It is a doctrine that insists on a sense of the divine in the unity of the world. It sometimes relates the unity of the world to the mystical intuition of personal union with God. Pantheism imagines the eternal God literally encompassing the world, and human is an utterly fated part of a world that is necessarily just as it is, and freedom is thus illusion.

The doctrine pantheism is various divergent forms. Most of them, however, understand the eternal God to be in intimate juxtaposition with the world, thus minimizing time or making it illusory. The world becomes absolute since it is identical with God.

Pantheism is a polite form of atheism. It is monistic about reality; the personal being is swallowed up in the one predominant over soul.

A Jewish Philosopher Spinoza is considered a classic exponent of Pantheism in western culture. In one instance, this view identifies the whole universe with God. God is synonymous with nature. There is no distinction between the creator and creatures. It upholds that we are one in essence with God. Human beings are part of the divine essence. In sum, God equals everything and everything equals God. God is impersonal and immanent but not transcendent.

On the basis of the preceding discussion several forms of pantheism can be distinguished.

#### **Forms of Pantheism**

##### **Hylozoistic pantheism**

The divine is immanent in, and is typically regarded as the basic element of, the world, providing the motivating force for movement and change. The world remains a plurality of separate elements. Hylozoistic (Greek hylē, “matter,” and zōē, “life”) pantheism, is not monistic, as are most other forms of pantheism, but pluralistic - that the divine is one of the elements in the world whose function is to animate the other elements that constitute the world

**Immanentistic pantheism**

God is a part of the world and immanent in it. Though only a part, however, his power extends throughout its totality.

**Absolutistic monistic pantheism**

God is absolute and identical with the world. The world, although real, is therefore changeless.

**Relativistic monistic pantheism**

The world is real and changing and is within God (e.g., as the body of God). But God remains nonetheless absolute and is not affected by the world.

**Acosmic pantheism**

The absolute God makes up the total reality. The world is an appearance and ultimately unreal.

**Neo-Platonism or Emanationistic Pantheism**

God is absolute in all respects, remote from the world and transcendent over it. This view is like Classical Theism except that, rather than saying that God is the cause of the world, it holds that the world is an emanation of God, occurring by means of intermediaries. God's absoluteness is thus preserved while a bridge to the world is provided as well. In Plotinus (3rd century AD), the foremost Neoplatonist, the Nous (Greek, "mind"), a realm of ideas or Platonic forms, serves as the intermediary between God and the world, and the theme of immanence is sustained by positing the existence of a World-Soul that both contains and animates the world.

**Some Implications**

Panentheism deals with God's knowledge, that God's knowledge grows and changes. God is identified with the world. As the world grows, God also grows and God becomes. Everything that happens affects and changes God. In this way the God who loves the world shares the joys and sorrows of each creature in the world

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

By implication, who is this view saying humans are?

Dualism

## **The Doctrine**

Dualism is a religious thought that, so much influenced by monotheism, sets out to make a clear distinction between God and the world, the divine and human. It conceives God as separated from the world and mind from body. It is a belief system that stresses the existence of two contrary and mutually inimical principles but of no polarity. Both principles are mutually dependent and none can exist without the other

Dualism perceives the world (or reality) as consists of two basic, opposed, and irreducible principles that account for all that exists. It is the belief in two supreme opposed, not opposite, powers or principles, or sets of divine or demonic beings that caused the world to exist. The most important instance of a dualistic religion is the Persian religion Zoroastrianism as founded by Zoroaster (7th–6th century BC) in which Ormazd (the good god) and Ahriman (the evil god) are each other's opposite and implacable enemies.

Dualism may conveniently be contrasted with monism, which sees the world as consisting of one principle such as mind (spirit) or matter; with monotheism; or with various pluralisms and polytheisms, which see a multiplicity of principles or powers at work. Insofar as the conception of a god and antigod rather than that of two gods is encountered, this kind of religion can be considered as another variation of monotheism.

## **Taxonomy of Dualism**

The taxonomy of dualism as a religious doctrine and their sub-classifications are very complex and sometime overlapping. So, whatever is said here is only one out of many ways of looking at the subject matter under discussion.

### **i. Radical and Mitigated Dualism**

Dualism can be either absolute (radical) or relative (mitigated). In a radical or absolute dualism, the two principles are held to exist from eternity, be it the bright and beneficent and the sinister and destructive principles are from eternity. In a mitigated or relative dualism, one of the two principles may be derived from, or presuppose, the other as a basis. Thus, the Bogomils medieval heretical Christian group, for example, held that the devil is a fallen angel who came from God and was the creator of the human body, into which he managed by trickery to have God infuse a soul. Here the devil is a subordinate being and not coeternal with God, the absolute eternal being. This, then, is clearly a qualified, not a radical, dualism.

### **ii. Dialectical and Eschatological dualism**

Another and perhaps more important distinction is that between dialectical and eschatological dualism. Dialectical dualism involves an eternal dialectic (or tension) of two opposed principles, such as the One and the many, or Idea and matter (or

space, called by Plato “the receptacle”). It also ordinarily implies a cyclical, or eternally repetitive, view of history. Eschatological dualism, on the other hand, focuses on the ultimate destiny of human and the world, how things will be in the “last” times. It conceives of a final resolution of the present dualistic state of things, in which evil will be eliminated at the end of a “linear” history. Unlike the dialectical dualism that pictures history as cyclic, the eschatological dualism considers history as a series of unrepeatable events. The ancient Iranian religions, Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism, and Gnosticism make good examples of eschatological dualism.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

How do you think that dualism is monotheistic?

#### Inclusive Monotheism

Inclusive monotheism accepts the existence of a great number of gods but holds that all gods are essentially one and the same, so that it makes little or no difference under which name or according to which rite a god or goddess is invoked. Such conceptions characterized the ancient Hellenistic religions. A typical example of such belief could be read from the popular “The Golden Ass of Apuleius” where the goddess Isis in the Greco-Roman mystery religion is depicted in different forms. Thus: “My name, my divinity is adored throughout all the world, in divers manners, in variable customs, and by many names.” Then there follows a number of divine names, and this enumeration ends: “And the Egyptians, which are excellent in all kind of ancient doctrine, and by their proper ceremonies accustomed to worship me, do call me by my true name, Queen Isis.”

#### Henotheism

The term, henotheism is derived from Greek *heis theos*, meaning “one god”. It is a belief in the worship of one god without denying the existence of other gods. It is often called kathenotheism, a term with Greek influence (*kath hena theon*, “one god at a time”), which literally implies worship of various gods one at a time.

The term was introduced by the eminent 19th-century philologist and scholar in comparative mythology and religion Max Müller (1823–1900). However, many later authors would prefer the term monolatry, which designates the worship of one god irrespective of the fact whether or not the other gods and deities exist.

So, whether we refer to the henotheism or kathenotheism, both terms indicates that one god has a central and dominating position in such a way that it is possible to address this god as if he were the one and only god, without, however, abandoning the principle of polytheism by denying or in any other way belittling the real existence of

the other gods. Such a religious concept is at home in cultures with a highly centralized monarchical government.

### 3.2.1 Panentheism

#### Origin and Teaching

The term “panentheism” appeared much later, in 1828. Although the terms are recent, they have been applied retrospectively to alternative views of the divine being as found in the entire philosophical traditions of both East and West. The belief system is neither monotheistic nor polytheistic, but monistic, dualistic and pluralistic. It is typically monistic in holding to the unity of God and the world, dualistic in urging the separateness of God's essence from the world, and pluralistic in taking seriously the multiplicity of the kinds of beings and events making up the world. Panentheism (“Pan – all;” “en – in;” “theism – god” = all in god) is a doctrine that asserts that the world is included in God; God includes the universe as a part though not the whole of his being. In other words, God is neither equal to the world, nor the world equal to God (contra pantheism).

That is to say, God is finite and distinct from the world, but at the same time inseparable from and interdependent with the world. God becomes both absolute and relative, cause and effect, actual and potential, active and passive. Panentheism — unlike pantheism, which holds to the divine immanence — maintains that the divine can be both transcendent and immanent at the same time. That notwithstanding, it is in agreement with pantheism by emphasising the divine as intimate rather than as alien, as indwelling and near dwelling rather than remote separate reality from human and the world.

For the proponent of the panentheism, God is complex; he changes, grows but also retains his own integrity and wholeness during this process of change and growth. That is, there are some elements of God which remain the same regardless of what happens in the world. One of such elements is God's perfection.

It promotes a view of a temporal-eternal God who stands in juxtaposition with a temporal world. This, by implication; cancels out the temporality of the world, and time retains a reality of eternal.

#### Merits and Demerits

Such immanence encourages man's sense of individual participation in the divine life without the necessity of mediation by any institution. On the other hand, it may also encourage a formless “enthusiasm,” without the moderating influence of institutional forms.

In addition, some theorists have seen an unseemliness about a point of view that allows the divine to be easily confronted and appropriated.

Recognizing, however, that if the separation between God and the world becomes too extreme, man risks the loss of communication with the divine,

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

1. What does this group of people mean when they say God is finite?
2. Do you think that this view contain any truth in it? If so what is the truth?



### 3.3 Polytheism

The term comes from the Greek poly ("many") and theoi ("gods") and was first invented by the Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria to argue with the Greeks. When Christianity spread throughout Europe and the Mediterranean, non-Christians were just called Gentiles (a term originally used by Jews to refer to non-Jews) or pagans (locals) or, in a clearly pejorative idiom, idolaters (worshipping "false" gods). The modern usage of the term is first revived in French through Jean Bodin in 1580, followed by Samuel Purchas's usage in English in 1614.

As a concept, polytheism, represents the worship or belief in multiple deities usually assembled into a pantheon of gods and goddesses, along with their own religions and rituals. It contrasts with monotheism. Polytheists do not always worship all the gods equally, but can be henotheists, specializing in the worship of one particular deity. Other polytheists can be kathenotheists, worshipping different deities at different times. The deities of polytheism are often portrayed as complex personages of greater or lesser status, with individual skills, needs, desires and histories. The gods are in many ways similar to humans (anthropomorphic) in their personality traits, but with additional individual powers, abilities, knowledge or perceptions.

Polytheism cannot be cleanly separated from the animist beliefs prevalent in most folk religions. The gods of polytheism are in many cases the highest order of a continuum of supernatural beings or spirits, which may include ancestors, demons, wights and others. In some cases these spirits are divided into celestial or chthonic classes, and belief in the existence of all these beings does not imply that all are worshipped.

#### Classification of Deities

Kinds of deities often found in polytheism may include:

- i. Creator deity,
- ii. Culture hero
- iii. Death deity (chthonic)
- iv. Life-death-rebirth deity
- v. Love goddess
- vi. Mother goddess
- vii. Political deity (such as a king or emperor)
- viii. Sky deity (celestial)
- ix. Solar deity
- x. Trickster deity
- xi. Water deity
- xii. Gods of music, arts, science, farming or other endeavors.

The belief is that the gods and deities influence human lives and activities. They can bestow different gifts upon human, and protect human from unhappy fate. They direct and guide the affairs of human and always assist human to overcome most difficulties in life.

However, the Greek philosopher Epicurus describes the gods as living, incorruptible, blissful beings, who do not trouble themselves with the affairs of mortals, but who could be perceived by the mind, especially during Epicurus believed that these gods were material, human-like, and that they inhabited the empty spaces between worlds.

Again, the stories about the gods and deities in mythology are to be distinguished from their worship or religious practice. For instance deities portrayed in conflict in mythology would still be worshipped sometimes in the same temple side by side, thus illustrating the distinction in the devotees' mind between the myth and the reality.

Polytheism is seen as a furtherance of atheism in the sense that in the midst of plurality of gods, the monotheistic God, is reduced and relegated to one among many in the pantheon of gods.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Name a few tribal gods that you know and mention the aspect of life that they control.

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit has discussed some views propounded to deny the existence of God. Some of these views take different shape today. For example, atheism takes the shape of materialism while pantheism wears the modern shape of monism. Deism is the view of liberal theologians who deny miracles and supernatural activities of God. Atheism and polytheism were found even in the Bible days and continue among many people today. It will also be noted that there are similarities among other views. Example, pantheism is a polite form of atheism, pantheism and polytheism have plurality of gods, pantheism and deism deals with the activities of God.

### 5.0 SUMMARY

There are many people throughout the history of mankind who believe in the existence of a high God. Some go as far as revering him while others only acknowledge his existence. This notwithstanding, there are also some people who deny the existence of God. This denial comes in different versions and immanent for different reasons. The denial of God usually leads to the denial of his works and important doctrines of the Bible such as miracles, incarnation, and the trinity. One of the reasons for various misrepresentations of God is lack of a clear revelation of God. The Bible calls such a person a fool. This means that such a person lacks wisdom and understanding. Anyone with wisdom and understand can perceive God's existence in the things He has created and the received word.

### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What do you understand by atheism?
2. What is the difference between panentheism and pantheism?
3. How is deism different from your view of God?

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## UNIT 4 INTRODUCTION TO THE REVELATION OF GOD

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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last three units we looked at the existence of God, the proof and denial of his existence. This unit will lead to the understanding of the nature of God's revelation. It is important to understand that God revelation is rooted in his incomprehensible nature and more important his love for humanity. In the revelation of God, it is God himself who has taken the initiative to disclose himself to us. The purpose of God revelation is that man may worship him and do his will. This unit also discloses that God revelation is opened to all people. In the Old Testament, God's revelation revolved around the covenant through which he entered into relationship with Israel and in the New Testament it was about the person of Jesus Christ, his works and teachings. Christ, as his name, Immanuel, implies, is God living among his people in a visible form.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

- At the end of this unit, should be able to:
- identify reasons and grounds of God's revelation
- identify the relationship between God's revelation and his nature
- explain the meaning of the word revelation
- discuss the mode of revelation in the Old and New Testaments

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Explanation of the Term Revelation

##### Etymology

The term revelation could be traced back to the Greek *apokalupsis*, *epiphaneia*, *dêlôsis*; Latin *revelatio*, manifestation. In its secular usage, it depicts the act of revealing or disclosing; disclosure. It points to something revealed or disclosed, especially a striking disclosure, as of something not before realized.

The term has been associated with the Christian writings right from the nascent the history of Christianity. But Christianity, in addition, gave the concept new and deeper theological meaning in the course of history that conveys the idea of God's disclosure of Himself and His will to His creatures; and instance of God's communication or disclosure with his creature. It can equally contain communication or disclosure. It signifies something that is communicated or disclosed. It conveys the idea that "God is known only through God." It means the unveiling of God by God himself; the revelation of God by God alone to and for humanity.

##### Different Meanings

Theologically, we further differentiate three basic meanings of revelation within the Judeo-Christian thoughts – that the natural, supernatural and direct revelation. The natural revelation is the manifestation of God who makes himself known through creation and the consciousness of human. The supernatural revelation is also the manifestation of God but communicating to human by words addressed to his messengers. The communication invokes certain knowledge of the being of God, his will, his plan as it unfolds in history. Furthermore, direct revelation is that communication which God establishes directly with human as one of God's elect, notably through vision or hearing. It is the inner conviction that God has spoken, an inward hearing, or a dream or vision in which the impression is unmistakably conveyed.

Therefore, God is always the subject of revelation. This becomes clearer if we go back to the etymology of the word – "to take away a veil." The picture is that God is hidden by a veil, and we can only see him when he himself takes away that veil. When he reveals himself, He unveils Himself. Sometimes this God can also unveil future events, and also unveil the world including human in order that human can appreciate power, faithfulness and love of God. It is, as Paul remarks, only when the true believer has the veil lifted by God that the believer can see God's revelation (2 Cor. 3:14-4:4).

##### Some Problematiques

From the above descriptions, you can discover that it is always a matter of relationship between the subject (God) and an object (human). The subject always reveals himself to the object, whose response, positive or negative, is inevitable. This understanding will therefore expose you further to another problematique associated with revelation.

As Jean-Yves Lacoste (2005) puts it: “if revelation must be interpreted in terms of divine spontaneity and human receptivity, and if revelation is therefore a process that includes its audience, then no satisfying concept of it can be proposed that does not do equal justice to subjective and objective factors.”

The matter is further complicated when we take into consideration the nature of God and that of human. God is infinite and human is finite and so if he does not reveal himself, human will not know him. But how can the distance between the finite and the infinite and all-encompassing be overcome? Probably the answer would demand more theological inquiry other than what the subject matter of this unit will come into play – the incarnation, the revelation of the God in and through Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

However, our incomprehensibility of God does not stop us from knowing him because he has made himself known to us. This is what is called revelation. Revelation is a deliberate and free act of God. Revelation is the only means that we know about God. This is because we cannot go to God and study him the way we would study a human being, animal or some other part of God’s creation. God is so infinitely far removed from us that we can only know God as he shows himself to us (Job 11:7, 8; 1 Cor. 2:9, 10). Formally, when a man studies God, he places himself above the object of his study. In the case of studying God we cannot place ourselves above God. In studying God we can only place ourselves under God and receive only what he wishes to reveal. In this way God is not the object but the subject. In God’s revelation he is the one that has taken the initiative to disclose his divine identity and purpose. Revelation helps us to speak correctly about God, know how to approach and think correctly about Him. It also helps us to have fellowship with Him. The nature of God demands that statements about him should be correct and must be in accordance with His nature. It is through revelation that we achieve this.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

1. Do you think that the etymology of word “revelation” throws enough light to the meaning of the word?
2. What is the underlying difference between the etymological, secular and theological meaning of the word “revelation”?
3. What are some of the challenges associated with the concept of revelation?

### 3.2 The Nature of God’s Revelation

We have earlier noted that the word “revelation” can be used in a variety of ordinary, biblical, and theological senses. Also that as a comprehensive theological category, “revelation” covers a variety of phenomena that we encounter in Scripture. It is also important for us to note that there is divine speech and there are mighty acts of God in history; there is theophany, dream, prophecy, revelation in nature, revelation in Christ, the revelation of the gospel, and eschatological manifestation. None them exhausts the means and content of revelation. Even when they are combined to form a list, it is neither an exhaustive nor an ordered account. It involves concepts that may deeply interlock or that are relatively separate. The concepts may be on the scriptural surface

or the product of our broader theological construction; they may or may not be correlated with specific Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek words, whose semantic ranges may or may not be close to each other. A cluster of things in Scripture, therefore, can be put under the rubric of “revelation.” They are held together by the biblical claim that there is a God who has personally communicated with humanity, and this warrants talk of revelation in a comprehensive way.

### 3.2.1 Faith

You have equally observed that there are three ways in which God reveals Himself to us. The first is in nature, the second is in His Word spoken through his messenger, and the third through direct personal communication, in which vision and audition dominate. Thus in Psalm 19, we read how all nature declares the glory of God (Ps. 19:1-6). Then the Psalms speak about God’s revelation in His Word. When Psalm 19 was written, God’s Word consisted of the Law, what the Jews called the Torah, or what today we call the Books of Moses (Ps. 19:7-11). The emphasis here remains on faith. It may also be necessary for us to note that the knowledge of God is not information or conceiving that God exists. Consequently, Calvin advises us that “properly speaking, God is known only where there is piety and where knowledge is fused with love of God and the desire to do his will.”

### 3.2.2 Christo-Centric

We have to take cognisance of the Christo-centric character of revelation because of its theological significance in our consideration of the nature of revelation, that is, the centrality of Christ and Christology. But this boils down to the question: Is it possible for God to reveal Himself outside the ambit of Christianity? This further brings us closer to the importance on the discussion between general revelation and special revelation. Incidentally, this theme will occupy us in the subsequent unit. But the obvious is that even if we may insist on general revelation, it does not necessarily follow that we can construct a whole natural theology on its basis. We may and should speak of the possibility of salvation outside the explicit knowledge of God in Christ, it does not necessarily follow that this is because general revelation abounds. In this case, it may not be for the interest of theology to make a radical distinction between the talk of revelation and talk of salvation, that is, between Heilsgeschichte (salvation history) and Offenbarungsgeschichte (the history of revelation). They are, in fact, inextricably connected. They are in Christ and in history. These themes are some of the dominant claims of the Gospels, which also lie at the centre of the entire biblical narrative.

### 3.2.3 Communication

You can observe how the thread of communication runs through the entire discussion on revelation. It is God himself who unveils himself by communicating to human through nature, his word and his direct encounter with human. Although communication, above all, suggests speech, the overarching concept of revelation

includes action in the sense of deeds. That is to say, when God speaks, he acts. So, you have to be reminded at this point that speech is a form of action. Communication as understood here is always language in action, and usually communicative action. It is a communicative speech. There is also an intrinsic connection between speech and revelation; that the act of divine speech has some analogy with human agency. In speech, humans disclose or reveal things, which may include facts unknown or unknowable in any other way. There can also be direct or indirect disclosure of one's identity or character. All this applies to God.

### 3.2.4 Knowledge

Revelation has to do with how we have the knowledge of God and all the creatures in relation to him. It is the source of our knowledge of God. The word Revelation literally means an unveiling or disclosure of something previously hidden. In theology, it refers to the self-disclosure of God in creation, in history of Israel, and above all, in the person of Jesus. It is a personal disclosure of one subject or other.

Two things are peculiar in this case. First, since God is not accessible to the empirical senses in the way that humans are, particular importance attaches to the revelation that God is and who God is. Second, what God reveals is of unsurpassed and unsurpassable significance for everyone without exception, since the nature, purpose, and destiny of humankind is at stake, and salvation is at issue.

### 3.2.5 Ordinary and Extra-ordinary Actions and Events

Besides the fact that revelation is in a sense communication, it also involves some sense of extraordinary actions, which may be understood as defying natural course or as a coincidence. But the important thing is that these actions are of revelatory character when they are seen, understood and interpreted by word of God.

Furthermore, the nature of revelation is that it involves both ordinary and extraordinary events and events. We find same idea running through the entire Judeo-Christian scripture. For example, the crucifixion of Jesus can be called an ordinary event, but its significance is ultimately revealed, so that God's action in Christ is revealed. Resurrection is an extraordinary event per se, but its significance is unintelligible apart from the apostolic word that interprets it, so that it becomes a revelation of divine power.

### 3.2.6 Empirical, Public and Private

The Gospel accounts present betray the public and objective character of revelation. Revelation in this sense may be seen as involving some empirical medium, which could be seen, touched, heard, taste and smell. This story conveys the public aspect of revelation. When Jesus pronounced blessed those "who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29), he was not denigrating the importance of the empirical, nor of the empirical as the medium of revelation. He was attending to the fact that the generation of eyewitnesses will pass away, not suggesting that faith is not grounded in

what that generation saw. Inasmuch as reason is implicated in seeing, hearing, and judging, revelation and faith are not set in opposition or in sharp contrast to reason. In another respect, we may say that revelation is also private and subjective. We understand here that it is the Spirit, which illuminates the believer, revealing the things of God. In the wider NT context, he reveals Christ. So a theological interpretation of Scripture compels us to distinguish roughly between the grounds for believing and the causes of conviction. The public aspect of revelation through Christ provides grounds for believing that are within the objective capacity of human reason to apprehend—this is the significance of the empirical emphasis in the Gospel reports. But the cause of personal conviction and certainty lies in the operation of the Spirit of God—he testifies to Christ, who is the revealer.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. Think about other characteristics that could be associated with revelation.
2. Do you think that people of other religions have a place when we see revelation purely from the Christo-centric perspective?
3. Do you agree that the revelation of God is intrinsically connected with communication?

### 3.3 Revelation and Scriptural Text

We shall see here another interesting aspect of revelation. We are talking about the relationship or connection between revelation and the scriptural text. It ranges, as Williams (2005) rightly observes, from the question of canon, church, and tradition, arising in the patristic era, to questions of speech and writing, text and language, in postmodernity; from Enlightenment questions about faith and history to contemporary questions about discourses of truth and power. We also discover that in all contemporary clamours for hermeneutics, the broad question of revelation is somehow at heart and shows itself multidimensionality.

The argument at this point is no longer that the Scripture bears witness to revelation. It is on the word spoken by God to the prophets. The word was committed into writing because of its revelatory significance. It is of divine, not human, origin and was revealed to the prophets.

From the perspective of the Bible itself, the text can and should be regarded as the word of God. The spoken word of God can be textually inscribed as revelation, and also enjoy in salient respects the same status of revelation, even when its originating accompaniments have disappeared. Indeed, speech and prophecy are just examples of revelation; the Pauline ascription of inspiration to Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16) offers a more comprehensive connection between revelation and text, however we interpret the notion of inspiration in detail.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE



From the discussion, could we affirm that the entire text in the bible is the word of God?

### 3.4 Key Points of Revelation

It has been argued by many Christian theologians that revelation may not be considered comprehensive without reference to God and personal agent, and human, the principal recipient of the revelation as moral subject, whose response to revelation is not necessary but also of significance.

#### God as Personal Agent

To see God as a personal agent of revelation brings us to point of convincing ourselves that that God is to be conceived of as a personal agent. Jesus is the exegesis of that claim. His appearance confirms the fact that the personal attributes predicated of Yahweh in the OT are not personified ways of speaking of a deity who is unknowable or who is not personal in any sense remotely analogous to our own personal being. These ways of speaking may be literal, anthropomorphic, or metaphorical; Christian theologians have embarked on cataphoric and apophatic approaches to knowledge of and speech about God. However we elucidate matters, the Son reveals the nature of God as personal in terms of his character and ways, not the metaphysics of his form. Incarnation is the definitive disclosure of the personal reality of God; in that respect, incarnation is the heart of revelation.

#### The Demand for Moral Response

Revelation aims not only at intellectual response or cognitive acknowledgment, but also at personal repentance and transformation. The broad line of a biblical theological anthropology is that active will and understanding, which are mutually conditioning, are rooted in the profound religious affection or disaffection of the heart. Both the disposition to obey and the exercise of obedience can be conditions of receiving disclosure (John 14:21). As John Baillie put it: "In the last resort the determining conditions of religious belief are moral conditions," although "moral" is perhaps too weak a word here to describe our basic orientation. Revelation is a divine initiative in the sphere of interpersonal relations, and as such is ultimately ordered to the achievement of communion, not to the imparting of information.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Do you think that human disposition can determine if God would reveal himself to human or not?

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. What are the two key points mentioned in this section?
2. Why do you consider them as key points?

### 3.5 Revelation in the Old Testament

If you read through the Old Testament, you will shockingly observe that the theme of revelation, that is veiling and unveiling, is certainly not ubiquitous in the Old Testament. Moreover, the discretion of its presence in the Wisdom writings is striking. Ecclesiastes never refers to a revelation; Ecclesiasticus assimilates its teaching to a prophetic teaching (24:33), but it is the teaching that asks to be heard, and not necessarily the word of God. The Wisdom books, however, make their contribution to a theology of revelation by emphasizing the gratuitous character of a wisdom that, although not “revealed” in the technical sense, comes to human from beyond human self. If God manifests himself through his creation, wisdom is the privileged bearer of that manifestation. And if God does indeed reveal himself to everyone as the Creator, then it is possible to say that the idolatry “is not forgivable” (Wis 13:8; cf. Rom 1:20). Again, even in the instances of ‘revelation’ in the Old through nature, words (via messenger) and direct encounter, the communicative act is understood analogically. Thus the OT generally neither analyses the concept nor even describes the details of the experience associated with the communicative act. But what we can say is that there appears to be an inner conviction that God has spoken, an inward hearing, or a dream or vision in which the impression is unmistakably conveyed.

Nevertheless, God’s revelation in the Old Testament is manifested in various ways such as in the gracious covenant he made with Israel. The covenant had so many aspects such as the promise made to Abraham, the disclosures of the divine name, the giving of the Torah, the deliverance from Egypt, the preaching of the prophets about judgment and grace and God’s disclosure of himself in various events.

The Old Testament affirms that human on his/her own cannot know God. God is known when God decides to disclose himself (Deut. 4:32-34; Ps. 147:19ff). For the Israelites, life cannot be possible without revelation. Revelation makes true life possible. Revelation reveals God’s name, majesty, power, action and aid. The Old Testament uses various words such as disclose, announce and present something clear to someone to describe God’s revelation.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

1. What are the various ways in which God reveals himself to human?
2. Does it make sense for God to create human and still remain hidden, that is, without revealing Himself to human?
3. When in the history of Israel was God’s appearing disturbing and shocking.

### 3.6 Revelation in the New Testament

We earlier observed that the Christian concept of revelation is Christo-centric. It revolves round the person of Christ. It is about the centrality of Christ and Christology. It orbits round the new covenant made in Jesus Christ. It is found in the proclamation, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

However, Bultmann made a serious observation that the teaching of Christ does not communicate “a doctrine of God, a vision of the world, but a call to conversion in the face of the coming kingdom of God.” But we must also agree that the position of Bultmann does not negate the idea of God self-revelation in the New Testament. Thus the language of mystery in Paul is correctly associated with the language of manifestation (cf. Rom 3:21, 16:26) and of revelation (1 Cor 2:10; Eph 3:5). The Logos in John is seen as the revelation of the invisible Father (Jn 1:18). The revelation of the Name occupies the same central place in John that it did in the Old Testament (Jn 17:6), linked to the revelation of divine truth and grace (Jn 1:17). The same observation we can make in the introduction of the Letters to the Hebrews, thus the word transmitted by the Son seals a history punctuated by many divine utterances (Heb 1:1 f.).

It is also important for us to understand the logic of Christian theology is that even if God could be known outside the confine of “covenant” on the basis of the nature of things (cf. Rom 1:20; Acts 17:22–31), John 14:9 states that God is clearly visible in Jesus, hence Jesus Christ remains the full revealer of the true God.

We may conclude this section by signing up with **Lacoste** (1391) that the central concern of the New Testament is not apocalyptic but soteriological. The primary message is not necessarily to supply information about or descriptions of the end of the present age, the kingdom of God, and the like. The major interest is “to provoke interest not in a theophany or an epiphany, but in the dialogical relation between the saviour God and human the sinner, the language of salvation and conversion cannot be used without also using the language of knowledge — the revelation of the salvific purposes of God calls for faith and elicits praise, which is inseparable from contemplation.”

In summary, revelation refers to God’s own self-disclosure, it points to particular events and particular people through whom God has communicated in decisive way with humanity, it is God’s calls for our personal response and appropriation. Revelation haunts. It is always a disturbing or even shocking event. It transforms our imagination. It does not stop God from being a mystery. Rather it opens channels for us to humanly know and understand God and appreciate Him, hence general and special revelation.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

1. Can you think of a difference between God’s self-revelation in the Old Testament and the New Testament?
2. Does revelation tell us everything about God?
3. What are the benefits of revelation to humanity?

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we have learnt that revelation is the means by which God makes himself known to humanity. It is through revelation that we know the divine identity, purpose and speak correctly about God. Revelation does not only help us to know God, it helps us to know more about ourselves and about our relationship with God and the rest of the creation.

**5.0 SUMMARY**

The explanation and nature of revelation provided in this unit is to enable you see the necessity of God's self-disclosure. Of course more will be said about revelation as we progress. Meanwhile, it is important to note that revelation is the imitative of God and he carried it out in various ways in the history of his dealing with humanity. In the Old Testament, God's revelation centered on the covenant which included the Law of Moses that the people had to obey. In the New Testament it was around the person of Jesus Christ who came to provide salvation through his work on the cross. In the Old Testament the Law played a big role while in the New Testament it was grace.

**6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Give the full explanation of the word revelation and its nature.
2. Discuss revelation in the Old and New Testaments.

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**UNIT 5: ANALYSIS OF GENERAL REVELATION****CONTENTS**

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| 1.0 | Introduction                         |
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5.0	Summary
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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit begins the discussion of one of the aspects of God's revelation. You will recall that we have already mentioned that God has revealed himself through general and special revelation. General revelation is manifested through creation and God's providential care. The modes of general revelation are nature, history and human consciousness. The most important biblical passages that testify to general revelation are Psalms 19 and Romans 1:18ff. General revelation reveals much about God to us, tells us why people everywhere are religious but do not lead us to a personal relationship with God. It is this deficiency that calls for another type of revelation.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the meaning of General revelation
- explain the god's revelation in the created things
- analyse what constitutes God's providential care
- state the relationship between sin and general revelation
- list the modes of general revelation and explain them.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 The Meaning of General Revelation

General revelation is also known as natural or universal revelation. It is found in the natural and universal order of creation. We can summarise this as the revelation of God through creation and providence. In simple terms, general revelation is the natural awareness of God. It is generally accepted that everyone by nature possesses the natural awareness of God. The awareness is the recognition that there is a God who deserves to be worshiped, obeyed and does great works and wanders. John Calvin says that the General revelation is God's revelation in his works; and "there is no spot in the universe in which you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory" (Bavick, 2004, p. 69). The created things are mirrors and documents of his majesty and divinity. The way God made humans is another way of his revelation. Bavick (2004) describes the created world as a theatre of God's glory. In this way God is immanent in the creation.

It is God's communication of himself to all persons at all places and in all times. He manifests himself through nature, history and in the inner being of human beings (human conscience). Calvin says "there is within the human mind and by natural instinct an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy."

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

1. What does the word "universal" tell you about general revelation?
2. Mention the great works and wanders of God in the creation.

### 3. How are human beings a part of the revelation of God?

#### 3.2 General Revelation in Nature

We have already seen that the nature of revelation involved God's communication. Then in "general revelation", it is God's communication of himself to all persons at all times and in all places, in contrast to special revelation – God's particular communications and manifestations of himself to particulars at particular times. You might have equally observed from the explanation of general revelation that it refers to God's self-manifestation through nature, history, and the inner being of the human person, hence its universal availability and the content of the message less particularised and detailed than special revelation (Erickson, 2006). According to Erickson (2006), the traditional loci of general revelation are three, that is, nature, history, and the constitution of the human being.

The idea of God's revelation in nature toes in some sense the line of the earlier arguments presented to prove the existence of God. God can be known in nature. God can be known with certainty from created things by means of the natural light of human reason. On this note we argue against two one-sided positions of many theologians and philosophers, who deny either God's existence or the possibility of knowing him; on the other hand, and again in a deep spirit of scepticism regarding human reason, but with all the greater emphasis on the role of faith. That is to say, "the origin and ultimate goal of all things could be known by the natural light of reason from the visible works of creation in the same way that a cause can be known from its effect, and that therefore his existence could be proved" (Schmaus, 1965, p.65).

Based on the above, we can better appreciate Ps.19, when we read: "The heavens are telling the Glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiworks." God reveals himself through these creatures. On another note, Paul says, God's eternal power and deity have been clearly shown in the things that have been created. Humanity can know God, and God may be known from the greatness and the beauty of creation. Therefore, human is has left without any excuse for not knowing God (Rom. 1:18-22). The created world is the medium of God's communication. God has manifested himself in the creation so that as human comes in contact with it. Human receives the awareness of God. Creation gives us the practical and existential knowledge of God. In Athens Paul talked about the unknown God that they have been worshipping (Acts 17:22ff). In Acts 14:15-17, Paul called on the people to turn to God who has made the heavens and the earth. He observed that God has not left himself without a witness even though he has allowed nations to walk in their ways. He provides rain – fruitful seasons, does good and satisfies their hearts with good and gladness i.e. benevolent preservation of its creation.

Job 36:24-37 draws attention to the rain that waters the earth, the thunder and lightning that strike terror in the earth. These natural phenomena among others attest the power, majesty, goodness of God.

It must however be noted that the knowledge of God is threatened by our moral attitudes, refusal of the truth and love for injustice. For other people, it could just be

because of stupidity or deficiency of intellectual orientation or the use of wrong philosophical principles.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

1. Why is God going to punish even those who have not heard the gospel in a formal way?
2. According to this passage, what are the things that prevent man from having the true knowledge of God?
3. Which are the things mentioned in this unit that mostly remind people of the existence of God?

### 3.3 General Revelation of God in History

We may identify another aspect of God's self-revelation is in history. It has been argued that God reveals himself through historical events that take place in the lives of individuals as well as nations. God is understood as moving the course of history and controlling the destinies of nations (Job 12:23; Pss. 47:7–8; 66:7; Isa. 10:5–13; Dan. 2:21; Acts 17:26).

Some theologians would argue strongly against the idea of God revealing Himself in history base on the subjective nature of the material. According to them, history is less accessible than is nature. Even if one is opportuned to consult historical records, they are dependent upon second hand materials liable to various readings and perspectival interpretations. In other words, history is so a limited segment to permit detection of the overall pattern or trend (Erickson, 2006, 179).

Good example of God's revelation in history is the preservation of the people of Israel. The emphasis is on how the small nation has survived over many centuries within a basically hostile environment, often in the face of severe opposition. References have also been made to some great significant events of history in individuals. Many non-Christians today too realise that God is in control and they thank God for taking charge of difficult situations.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Mention a few things that God did among the Israelites to show other nations that He is God.

### 3.4 God's Revelation in Human Conscience

Man's capacity to know God through the natural powers of his human reason is possible. But since from the very beginning God has communicated himself to human in grace and has promised to give himself to human ultimately in direct encounter, it becomes superfluous and less attractive for human to labour under natural revelation. That is to say that creation it graceful act of God. It is the free manifestation and communicative act of God. It is a purposeful project of love. It is in close relation to

God, but relatively free to be itself so as to develop in love for God and display divine glory (Gunton, 1998).

Therefore, creation is revelation. It should not be seen only as the forerunner of God's saving action. It is also a salvific event in itself. However, sin has marred the witness of general revelation and the testimony of God in creation is blurred. Consequently, human in the present situation of sinfulness, needs a special impulse to recognize the presence of divine mystery in the world. Thus Schmaus (1967, p. 67) argues that the sinfulness of human nature could be one of reasons that discovering God in creation proves more difficult. So also it is with the wretched condition of the world itself. Even in revealing himself further in a way that transcends creation God has repeatedly impressed upon human the necessity of his interesting and understanding himself as a creature. So, we can see the revelation of God in creation as an introduction to the supernatural (special) revelation. It took place for the sake of the supernatural revelation second (Schmaus, 1967, p. 67). Thus in the word of Vat. II: "God, the beginning and end of all things, can be known with certainty from created reality by the light of human reason" (cf. Rom. 1:20); but the Synod teaches that it is through His revelation "that those religious truths which are by their nature accessible to human reason can be known by all men with ease, with solid certitude, and with no trace of error, even in the present state of the human race" (The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, nn.3-6).

So, you can now see that a general revelation offers a common ground or a point of contact between the believer and unbeliever. It is a just ground for God's justice for all including those who historically never heard the gospel in the full and formal sense. One appreciates this fact better if one is opportuned to receive special revelation, then one is enabled to see clearly what is in the general revelation.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

1. Do you think that God can reveal Himself to people of other religion?
2. What is the value of general revelation?
3. What is the relationship between general revelation and the justice of God?

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

General revelation is one important aspect of God's revelation. This revelation is made available to all people and the main medium of general revelation is the creation. Under general revelation we learnt that God can be seen through the greatness, beauty, and benevolent preservation of the created things and his providence to humanity and other living things. In this sense general revelation provides us with practical knowledge of God. This unit also explains how sin has prevented man from having the full knowledge of God through general revelation.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

This unit provided you with the explanation of general revelation which is made available through nature, history, and human conscience. The discussion of general revelation under these modes reveals to us the nature of God. God is actively involved in this world and he is also in control. This unit teaches us that general



revelation is important but it does not lead us to salvation and it is for this reason that there is need for special revelation.

### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. What is the meaning and nature of God's general revelation?
2. Discuss the three models of general revelation.

### **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

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## **MODULE 2: GENERAL REVELATION AND THE ANALYSIS OF SPECIAL REVELATION**

Unit 1: The Effects of General Revelation and Analysis of Natural and Experiential Theology

Unit 2: Special Revelation

Unit 3: Inspiration

Unit 4: Theories of Inspiration

Unit 5: Methods of Inspiration

## UNIT 1: THE EFFECTS OF GENERAL REVELATION AND ANALYSIS OF NATURAL AND EXPERIENTIAL THEOLOGY

### CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
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3.1.2	General Revelation and Salvation
3.1.3	The Positive Effects of General Revelation
3.1.4	The Effect of General Revelation on the Christian
3.2	The Meaning of Natural Theology
3.3	Experiential Theology or Experiential Revelation
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit ends the discussion by looking at its effects. The effects are a form of the summary of general revelation. Romans 1: 18-35 is very important in the discussion of general revelation. It is the summary of the doctrine of general revelation. The passage shows the level of human disobedience and human desire for autonomy.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- state the effects of general revelation on the Christians and non-Christians
- enumerate the negative and positive effects of general revelation as can be found in Romans 1:15-32
- explain the meaning of natural theology and its relationship with general revelation
- explain the eternal fate of those who are outside the Christian tradition

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 The Effect of General Revelation

##### 3.1.1 General Revelation and Corporate Responsibility

General Revelation would appear to impose some uncomfortable effect on non-Christian. It imputes to non-Christians the unpardonable excuse for not knowing God. This is derived from the fact that God already made himself known to the world in creation, in history and in human conscience. This is the trust of the last unit, as you have already learnt. However, our concentration in this unit will be on God's revelation in nature as projected in the Book of Romans chapter one. The traditional

approach has always given some heavy accent to the first chapter of the Book of Romans as a New Testament summary on the doctrine on general revelation. While we accept the influence of the book as a whole on other New Testament writings (1 Peter, Hebrews, James), and its dominant role in the Reformation debates, we may differ here a little from the popular belief. We must point out that there have been overall overvalue of the passage of Romans for doctrinal purposes. The central message of chapter one of Romans is not primarily on the “either of knowledge through a positive primal revelation or of knowledge by faith.” (Fitzmyer, 1990, p.835). The same point is further emphasised by Brown as he observes that the passage (Romans) has “led to a discussion of whether Paul espouses a natural theology: a discussion complicated by patristic theories of natural revelation and modern scholars’ insistence on the purity of Pauline eschatological theology (to which they see contrariety in an emphasis on the powers of human reasoning)” (556, n.17). However, some of the issues raised in the book of Romans with regard to the knowledge of God in nature include:

That eternal power of God and his divine nature, though essentially invisible, have been mirrored and perceived by human through creation (v.20). The statement is not even a ground for the propagation of natural theology, how much more a debate on the possibility of knowing God through creation. It is not about God’s revelation as such. So, to argue otherwise is to miss the spirit of the text. Rather Paul, as correctly noted by Fitzmyer (1990, p.835), echoes a current Jewish idea of the culpability of pagans in not acknowledging and reverencing God as they should have (cf. Wis 13:1-9; As. Mos. 12:13). Again, following the complexity posed by the Greek phrase thus expressing either purpose or result, we may interpret it as:

- i. Purpose: God did not intend that ‘pagans’ should sin; but if they did, he intended that it would be without excuse;
- ii. Result: The ‘pagans’ are not pardonable for if they were capable of knowing so much that they could investigate the world, how did they not sooner find the Lord of these things?

In either case, the human condition since creation argues against an atheistic attitude. Historically, all men knew God but they did not honour, worship or give thanks to Him (v. 21). Our focus here is on “knowing God.” It is a radical departure from the popular Jewish thought that the pagans are ignorant of God (cf. Jer. 10:25; Ps. 79:6; Wis. 14:12-22). The fact is rather the world has sufficient wisdom to have known God but did not come to know him (cf. 1 Cor. 1:21). So, the issue is more on the absence of a “real, affective knowledge of God” which the ‘pagans’ could not help but have. The inconsequential character of that knowledge, which did not develop into real religious recognition, is the root of their sin. Paul is here thinking of corporate responsibility. It is not merely about pagan philosophers, much less of some primitive positive revelation like the law, (cf. 2 Esdr. 7:21-24) or just of some first ‘pagans’. It is about all pagans, at least up to the days of Paul.

Of course, the ‘pagans’ claimed to be wise and think they are doing the right thing but became foolish instead, deliberately suppressing the truth about God. This thought is captured in verses 18, 22. Paul's complaint here is not only on pagan ignorance but also on the failure to manifest reverence and gratitude, which should have sprung from

the knowledge they had of him; instead their reverence was paid to created things. This has some resultant effects that have been captured in three points: (i) the futility of self-sufficient reasoning, (ii) the obscuring of vision in other religious matters, and (iii) idolatry (Fitzmyer, 1990). That is to say, instead of the ‘pagan’ worshipping the creator who has created them, they have turned to worship the things that He has created thus becoming idolatrous. Read verses 23, 25. Incidentally, the passage here is an allusion to the Ps., 106:20 and also Ex. 32. There is also an echo of Deut. 4:16-18. This became the corruption of religion and this corruption of religion led to the corruption of morality, and because of this God gave them up to their wickedness. From this we find the root of immorality and wickedness. Immorality and wickedness are found among people who refuse the right religion. Read verses 26-31. All these put the unbelievers in a position of “no excuse” and give us the justification why unbelievers will be punished for not believing in God (vv. 20, 32).

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

1. From what you read above, what do you think is the reason for increased corruption, immorality and robbery among the youth today? What solution can you propose for these in the light of what you read?
2. Will God be right to punish our forefathers who died before missionaries came and preached the gospel in Nigeria?

### 3.12 The Point of Departure from Tradition

i. You should have observed just as Fitzmyer (1990, p. 836), that, in the entire section in Romans as presented above, “Paul is not saying that every individual pagan before Christ's coming was a moral failure. He speaks collectively and describes a de facto situation; he does not mean that paganism was de iure incapable of moral uprightness. When Christian theologians teach the need of divine assistance for perseverance in a good, natural life, they go beyond Paul's perspective and have in mind the individual's fallen condition. The basis of their teaching, however, is Pauline: Humanity cannot do without the gospel” (cf. 7:7-25).

ii. The teaching of the Catholic Church in the dogmatic constitution of Vatican Council I *De fide catholica* that God has revealed himself both in creation and in the Scripture is scripturally intact and defensible. Again that God can certainly be known from created things by the natural light of human reason becomes self-evident even from practical experience. But the citation of Rom. 1:20 in the dogmatic constitution of Vatican Council I *De fide catholica*, in support of the thesis that God can be known with certainty by the natural light of human reason from created things [DS 3004] does not mean that Paul is saying exactly the same thing. The interest of Paul and the Council is not the same. Both are confronted with different challenges. Paul's is face with the challenge of justifying the righteousness of God before a world of Jewish-Gentile divide. The council, on the other hand, is opposing Fideism and Traditionalism and asserted the possibility of such knowledge of God, apart from faith and apart from positive revelation.

The difference in the texts of Paul and Vatican I is that the Council deals with the capability (active potency) of the human mind to know God and prescind from the de

facto use of it, whereas Paul asserts the fact that God is intellectually perceived and known from created things. He also speaks of human "impiety and wickedness" [1:18] and of human failure to acknowledge God properly [1:28]; from such attitudes the council prescinded. The further theological question about the human capability to know God without any divine assistance (e.g., grace) is beyond Paul's perspective (Fitzmyer, 1990).

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. What is the difference between Paul's teaching in Romans 1:20 and the dogmatic constitution of Vatican Council I *De fide catholica*
2. What are the possible implications of the claim that Paul's teaching in Roman 1 "does not mean that paganism was de iure incapable of moral uprightness."

#### 3.1.3 General Revelation and Salvation

What we have learned about general revelation is God can be known in nature and with certainty from created things by means of the natural light of human reason. In other words, creation is revelation. It should not be seen only as the forerunner of God's saving action. It is also a salvific event in itself. However, sin has marred the witness of general revelation and the testimony of God in creation is blurred. Therefore, the human person in the present situation of sinfulness needs a special impulse to recognize the presence of divine mystery in the world. Even God in revealing himself further in a way that transcends creation, God has repeatedly impressed upon human the necessity of human interesting and understanding human self as a creature. So, we can see that the revelation of God in creation as an introduction to the supernatural (special) revelation. Natural revelation takes place for the sake of the supernatural revelation (Schmaus, 1967, p. 67). In this sense, general revelation may be seen in a sense as insufficient for salvation for those who are opportuned to encounter the supernatural revelation. It is also important for you to note that:

- The handiwork of God in creation has been disturbed by sin (Gen. 3:17, 18 Rom. 8: 19-22).
- Man's perception of God in nature is distorted by sin (Rom 1: 18-21; 1 Cor.1:18ff).
- General revelation does not reveal Jesus Christ as the only true way to salvation (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2: 5; John 14:6)

The question that is often asked is "if Christ is the only way of salvation, does it then mean that all who stand outside the Jews-Christian tradition will perish?" It is hard to find an explicit answer to this question. From historical facts and testimonies of missionaries we can say that it does not mean that all those who receive no special revelation from God will perish. We must allow some possibility that God can reveal himself to people outside the Jews-Christian tradition. Think for example of people like Mechizedek and Jethro. There is also the story of Cornelius, a worshipper of God, whose prayers will be answered by special revelation from God (Acts 10:1-6). We are also reminded of Christ's words, "my other sheep." This expression is opened to different interpretations but it certainly means those outside the Jew-Christian

tradition (John 10:16). However, we may not interpret the passage of John literally that without Christ there is no salvation for anyone (John 14:6). The question of the person of Christ, who he is and what he stands for the world becomes another project that cannot be articulated in this course.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. Have you ever thought about the fate of our forefathers, who had no opportunity to encounter Christ and the Gospel?
2. If God wishes to save the entire human race through Christ, why then could some people, not the fault of theirs, be historically and socio-culturally excluded from encountering the person of Christ?

#### 3.1.4 Positive Effect of General Revelation

The positive effect of general revelation on non-Christians is that it gives and helps them acquire religious and moral values. These restrain the full explosion of sin. This then makes life in the society possible. This is what is called blessing of the common grace. Without going into the complexity of the meaning of grace, one basic characteristic idea about the concept is that it is a free gift that in every strict sense excludes merit in every form. Thus we observe that even the gratuitous divine gifts may still fall within the range of mere nature – natural graces as health, favourable weather, and deliverance from plague, famine and war. Even the whole creation is for humankind a gratuitous gift of the love of God, whom neither justice nor equity compelled to create the world. So, the emphasis here, though without losing sight of other aspects of grace, is the grace of creation (not in the sense of the Pelagians). So when we speak of grace, we mean not only that through which we become human, but also that through which we are Christians and the children of God – that is the grace of the scripture and tradition. So, grace emphasises more and above all, the good of a divine order such as divine sonship, indwelling of the Spirit, vision of God etc. It stands in intrinsic and essential in relation to the divine goods which are the end. So, the most consequential element of grace is the characteristic of its nature as gratuitous and supernatural.

The believer takes full advantage of the blessings of general revelation in orienting the believer's relationship with Christ and through the guidance of the scriptures and with the help of the Holy Spirit. The believer is enabled to understand the message of general revelation and appreciates it better. When general revelation is understood in the correct way, it can give real knowledge of God, not in addition to what the Bible teaches but supporting what the Bible teaches. In addition to what is said above, general revelation provides the framework for Special revelation. Without God's general revelation through his work of creation and providence, special revelation would make no concrete sense.

General revelation also provides a point of contact between the Christian and non-Christian when seeking to preach to the non-Christian (Acts 14:14-17; 17: 30, 31). It prepares humanity for reception of special revelation.

General revelation also establishes a ground for effective religious dialogue. The fundamental assumption is that no human person is foreign to the idea of God. Every

human person ought to have the knowledge, and therefore, could follow any discussion concern the business of God.

It also gives Christianity some leverage against secularised scepticism, and insists on the fact that philosophical truths about God are legitimate and true form of theology in particular and knowledge in general.

It goes further to confront the atheism. It leaves no room for those, who may be prone to denying either God's existence or the possibility of knowing God.

Also in the deep spirit of scepticism regarding human reason, but with all the greater emphasis on the role of faith, general revelation reminds us of the fact that "the origin and ultimate goal of all things could be known by the natural light of reason from the visible works of creation in the same way that a cause can be known from its effect, and that therefore his existence could be proved" (Schmaus, 1965, p.65).

A true understanding of general revelation can also invoke some sense of responsibility in our encounter with creation and nature. It can to greater extent assist in reducing the undue exploitation of nature, and inculcate sense of reverence even to fellow humans.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

1. Check in a theological dictionary and find out who the Pelagians are and what they stand for?
2. What do you understand by common grace?
3. Can common grace be seen in any sense as salvific?

### 3.2 Natural Theology

- i. We have argued that the Book of Romans cannot be the strong basis for the foundation of natural theology.

#### 3.2.1 Meaning and Nature of Natural Theology

Natural Theology is understood as that branch of philosophy and theology which attempts to study God in the light of human reason and the observations of the natural world or creation. Its point of departure from other theological systems is the enthronement of human reason. It believes that human can come to the knowledge of God through human intellectual ability. It has as its stress point an objective, valid, and rational general revelation independent of whether anyone perceives, understands, and accepts it. In other words, truth about God is actually present within the creation, not projected upon it by a believer who already knows God from other sources, such as the Bible. So, the fundamental of natural theology is built on the possibility of coming to the a genuine knowledge of God on the basis of reason without a prior commitment of faith to the beliefs of Christianity, and without relying on any special authority, such as an institution (the Church) or a document (the Bible) (Erickson 2006)

Natural theology is finely articulated by Thomas Aquinas, who incidentally was one of the classical exponents of the system. According to him, the truth about God can be

derived from another body of truths outside the Bible, which is based on the application of reason to the created world. Yet the human reason has limitation. It can only arrive at truths in the domain of nature while supernatural revelation becomes necessary for truth on the higher dominion – the realm of grace. The truth at the lower realm which pure reason (human reason) pursues include the proof of the existence of God, the immortality of the human soul, and the supernatural origin of the Catholic Church. More specific elements such as the triune nature of God is beyond its power, hence cannot be known by unaided reason. These are truths of (supernatural) of revelation not truths of reason. The truths are matters of faith (Erickson, 2006).

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. What do we mean by natural theology?

Is it not better to describe natural theology as natural philosophy?

#### 3.2.2 Proponents and Opponents of Natural Revelation

Besides Thomas Aquinas, who remained a classical adherent to Natural theology, other theologians and philosophers followed him in defending natural theology. They may differ in some areas in their line of reasoning, but they uphold the validity and certainty of human reason in attaining to the knowledge of God and proving some religious truths. Among these are William Lane Craig, Douglas Groothuis, C.S. Lewis, Alvin Plantinga, J.P. Moreland, Richard Swinburne, Paul Tillich, Emil Brunner

There are also many thinkers, theologians and philosophers alike, who reject natural theology, and consider the venture as pointless and ineffective. In this group we can find person as Greg Bahnsen, Karl Barth, Gordon Clark, Robert Morey, John Robbins, and Cornelius Van Til.

From the above list, you will observe that the acceptance or rejection of natural theology transcends the boarder of denomination. It is purely on the perception of most theologians. For example, Karl Barth, one of the Neo-orthodox and most influential Protestant theologians of the 20th century, sought to demonstrate that God can only be known through special revelation. Both Karl Bath and Paul Tillich, also protestant theologian, debated over the issue. Tillich argues that revelation never runs counter to reason. Rather one can come to knowledge of the existence of God through reason.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. Do you agree that proponents and opponents of natural transcend the boundary of denomination?

2. Review the names of the names of the opponents and proponents of natural theology listed above and identify them with their respective denominations.



### 3.2.3 Historical Background for the Development of Natural Theology

It is important to note the historical situation out of the notion of natural theology was developed. When Peter Abelard compiled a list of 168 propositions on which the Fathers disagree, he did not know that he was opening the door for a new theological system. It was in the bid to resolving some of the contradictions that reason was enthroned as a necessary tool even in the exercise of authority.

The church was also facing external challenges of heterogeneous cultures. The church was encountering more Jews, Muslims (especially in Sicily and Spain), and even complete pagans on a large scale. There ought to be dialogue with these groups. One must find a common ground in order to establish any sort of dialogue. And it was of no value to quote one's own authority to these persons. "The Jew would simply quote the Torah, and the Muslim the Koran, and all of them, including the pagan, would simply look puzzled when the Christian theologian cited the Bible or the teaching of the church. If any real impact was to be made on these persons, it would be necessary to enter some neutral arena where no special authority need be appealed to, and to settle the matter on terms accepted by all rational persons" (Erikson, 2006, p. 182). It is based on these facts that natural theology becomes necessity, and a veritable tool to atheism, anti-Christian movements and feelings.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. State the two most obvious challenges that led to the development of natural theology.
2. Do you think that natural theology really satisfied the purpose of establishing it?

### 3.2.4 The Rejection of Natural Revelation

We have already listed some of the proponents and opponents of natural theology. We shall now state some of the reasons why the opponents of natural theology insist on the impossibility and probably futility of natural theology. For them, religious belief cannot be linked with the success of natural theology, because there is not like natural theology. Theology is not natural but supernatural. Three major reasons for reasons for such attitude towards natural theology are as follows: (i) doctrinal reason, (ii) the sinful nature of human, and (iii) inability to prove the existence of God.

#### **Doctrinal Reason**

The rejection of natural theology is more on doctrinal issues. The opposition is from the doctrine of Sola Scriptura, which leaves no source but the scripture as the lone source of revelation and communication. Consequently, God, human, morality, justice, etc. can only be understood and explained from the scripture.

Karl Barth (1886–1996), one of the ardent critics of natural theology argues that the program of natural theology is based on human arrogance, and flies in the face of revelation, which is to be accepted on faith, not because it seems on balance to be probable. According to him, the vitality of natural theology is the vitality of human as

such. Natural theology is a self-thinking that considers the Creator without considering the Redeemer at the same time. It splits the idea of God and claims to know the true God by making an abstraction of the revelation. In fact, Barth contends that “one knows God through God and only through God.”

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), Friedrich Schleiermacher [1768–1834] and Rudolf Otto [1869–1937]) would reason along different paths but may come up to one conclusion: a rejection of natural theology. They argue that faith is rather the result of either a commitment of the will or some basic and non-rational apprehension of the holy. Here also John Barth would simply insist that faith is an act of divine grace, which has no rational ground. Consequently natural theology become a glorified futility.

The problem with such views is that they prevent anyone from giving a reason why they should adopt one faith rather than another. For example, why must I become a Christian instead of being a Buddhist, Moslem or Hindu?

The denial of natural theology, especially on the basis of the view stated above because it isolate religious belief from scientific ‘belief,’ so that religion and science have no relation to one another. Yet it seems odd to say that religious belief in a creator God is not affected by new discoveries about the nature of the created universe, or that religious beliefs (such as the belief that God is one rational purposive creator) have nothing to say about the nature of such a creation

### **Human Nature**

Furthermore, natural theology is rejected on the basis that humankind is so bound by sin that they can "know" nothing of God except that which is revealed to them.

The above claim speaks against life experience. Even in the midst of sin, there is always that natural longing for God, even without the knowledge of the Judeo-Christian Scripture. It further presents the age long question regarding the fate of other people who belongs to other faiths. It becomes clearer that the rejection of natural theology has more issues to clarify than the acceptance of natural theology.

### **Proof of the Existence of God**

It has equally been argued that most of the "proofs" for the existence of God are less convincing even to Christians. Consequently, there comes the fear that such inconclusive argument could even place the Christian religion in a very weak position, especially before other belief systems.

The influence of modern scepticism further complicated the matter and made the rejection of natural theology more appealing than its acceptance. For example, Emmanuel Kant could not see any relationship between faith and reason. For him, we have to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith. What he means is that speculative knowledge of transcendent reality including the things of God and God

himself is not futile but impossible. Consequently, we can neither affirm nor deny God by argument the existence of God. And if religion or faith has any value at all, it is practical value. Therefore, we are free to adopt faith or religion purely on practical or moral grounds.

However, we must note that natural theology is often no longer seen as the task of proving the existence of God, or of showing to any independent observer that God is the most probable explanation of why the universe is the way it is. But, we may reason along the contemporary drive for inter-disciplinary and inter-cultural approach to religion and religious matters. In this wise, we may propose the idea of pulling together, let say, assembling the best human knowledge in all the diverse areas of human activity, and show how it can reasonably be construed, and even shaped into a more coherent form, by the insights of religion, which may themselves derive from some distinctive source in revelation or experience. Natural theology will then be the attempt to show how science, history, morality, and the arts are so related that a total integrating vision of the place of humanity in the universe may be formulated. Such a vision will be religious insofar as it includes reference to an encompassing reality that is transcendent in power and value, and that may disclose itself in distinctive ways. This will not be proof, or even probability, starting from some neutral, completely shared ground. It will be an integrating activity of reason, both provisional in its formulations and constructed from a standpoint of specific basic postulates and personal value commitments. Within such a perspective, science will be able to make a positive contribution to natural theology, and natural theology will develop ways of integrating scientific activity into a wider worldview. This will be more of an imaginative art than an inferential or deductive science. It will not be the intellectual foundation or prelude for faith, but will involve the construction of a general worldview within which faith can have an intelligible place. That is not too far from the aims of Aristotle, though the distinctions between natural science, philosophy, and religious belief are now clearer (but only in some ways) than they were for him. In this form, natural theology becomes the speculative and constructive part of the post-eighteenth-century discipline of the "philosophy of religion." As such, it is not confined to one particular religious tradition, and its exponents may hold any or no religious beliefs.

### **Beyond the Polemic.**

Barth's polemic conception that natural theology is an attempt to subordinate the revelation to an authority foreign to its essence, in fact, led to a better interpretation of the teachings of Vatican I on the capacity of knowing God in the light of reason. The Council did not rule on any particular historic form of natural theology and did not claim that the natural knowledge of God must precede the knowledge of faith. It defended a principle, that of the rational moment of Christian faith, or more precisely its transcendental condition.

Again, in contemporary theology, the question of natural theology is no longer really a matter of denominational controversy. Theologians of various denominations are coming closer to see the rationale of natural theology in doing theology. For example, many protestant theologians have rehabilitated a certain natural theology while their

Catholic counterparts, on the other hand, have reasonable number of representatives of a kerygmatic theology. Natural theology is more used as a revelator between two types of theologies: theology marked by manifestation, which insists on the presence of God in all that is, and theology marked by proclamation, which denounces all attempts at idolatry in the name of the word of God.

That notwithstanding, there are also many philosophers of religion who would hold that systematic construction is not properly part of philosophy, the function of which should be primarily analytic and expository. Therefore, natural theology in all its form remains, like religion itself, a highly pluralistic and disputed discipline. It is clear, however, that this is an area in which science and religion fruitfully interact in examining the fundamental problem of the ultimate nature of existence

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

1. What are the possible reasons that could lead to the rejection of natural theology?
2. Do you think that natural theology is theological enough to bring any advantage to Christianity as a religion?
3. Give some reasons why natural theology should be supported.

#### **3.3 Experiential Theology or Experiential Revelation**

Experiential revelation or theology is another source of human knowledge of God. Generally, experience is considered one of the sources of knowledge deriving from direct perception of reality. It is knowledge that can be gained externally and internally. Experience is different from hearing or reflecting about something. It can never be transmitted or re-represented. In this way, experience is open to false claims, and judgment of its authenticity and truthfulness is difficult.

In theology, experiential revelation is one's personal encounter with God. It is the experience of God or his power in the life of an individual. It is an essential part of Christianity. There have been some Christian movements or groups that lay much weight on the primacy and authority of experience than other sources of the knowledge of God. Among them are the pietistic, revivalist, Holiness movements, and Pentecostals. These groups give preeminence to the experience of the believer. Some say, this experience must include speaking in tongues. They look at the Holy Spirit as the one who gives the experience. One liberal theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher said Christianity was about the humankind's experience of God and he de-emphasised God's action with regard to man. He said religion is not about morality or theoretical knowledge but the feeling of absolute dependence.

Those who emphasise experience do not reject the authority of the Bible but rather stress the fundamental and initiatory role of the Holy Spirit. The Charismatic group insists on a spirit-filled and living a separated life. Experiential theology or revelation arose as a reaction to sterile intellectualism and traditionalism. In addition, its emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and the Christian has continued to keep the doctrine of the Trinity on focus. This continued role bring to light the role of the Holy Spirit in conversion and redemption (Act 14: 15-18; Romans. 8; Gal. 4: 6-7). The emphasis on the Holy Spirit naturally leads to the

emphasis on Christ (1 John 4:2; 1 Cor. 12:3). In order not to misuse experiential theology, it must be understood and treated as a corporate affair of the Church as Paul states clearly in 1 Cor. 12; Rom.12. Its aim should be to build and edify members. It is important to know that it is easy to misuse this revelation. It is misused when it is understood and treated as individualistic. In this way it becomes subjective and therefore impossible for the Christian community to nurture and evaluate it. Second, experience and reflection or the Holy Spirit and the Word must not be separated but considered complementary. Third, the role of the Holy Spirit must not be overemphasized to shadow the other members of the Trinity.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

1. At this point attempt to list all the types of revelation we have discussed so far.
2. Make a chart of the strengths and weaknesses of experiential theology.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit helps you to see the effect of sin on humanity. Sin is responsible for man's foolishness, refusal to worship God, human idolatrous nature, and corruption of religion. Because of sin we cannot see God clearly in nature. When sin is taken away we can have a clear knowledge of God and know how to serve better. Knowing God clearly and serving him are the main goals of salvation. While this unit exposes you the possibility that some people are saved outside the Christian tradition, it does not teach that such will happen to all people.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

To understand and to comprehend God is, using the common understandings of these words, to approach God cognitively, analytically, rationally. The gift of a mind is among God's choicest bestowments. When the Holy Spirit's light infuses the human mind we can, with discernment, know God. The discerning mind understands two things about itself: (1) its potential to know the truth; (2) the danger of overreaching and misusing its potential.

We should not discount the value of reason in Christian theology (for it is a God-given gift), but neither should we overvalue reason. Blaise Pascal (1623-62), a French writer, understood this two-sided reality of appreciating the mind's obvious powers while carefully acknowledging the mind's profound limitations: "If one subjects everything to reason our religion will lose its mystery and its supernatural character. If one offends the principles of reason our religion will be absurd and ridiculous. There are two equally dangerous extremes, to shut reason out and to let nothing else in."

In this unit we looked at the importance of general revelation to the Christian and non-Christian. Here we saw the deficiencies of general revelation, man's attitudes towards his creator, and attempts to address the difficult issue of the fate of people outside the Christian tradition. All people can understand general revelation but the Christian who is enabled by the Holy Spirit of God is able to understand it better and see God more clearly.

**6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Account for the effects of general revelation on the Christian and non-Christian.
2. What is the relationship between general revelation and sin?
3. What do you understand by natural theology?

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**UNIT 2: SPECIAL REVELATION****CONTENTS**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

We have discussed the general revelation and two other related concepts. The deficiencies of these three concepts lead us to the discussion of special revelation. Special revelation is able to do what the three were not able to do, which is salvation. The aim of this unit is also to help you see the differences between general revelation and special revelation. Just like general revelation, God uses various means to reveal himself in special revelation. Many of these modes seem to have ceased. The one that is continuous is the word. There are others who believe that God is still revealing himself through visions, dreams, and miracles and others who do not.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- state the meaning of special revelation
- enumerate the goal of special revelation
- mention the differences between general revelation and special revelation
- give the examples of Theophanies
- discuss the various ways of god's direct communication with humanity
- explain the meaning of miracles
- identify the two aspect of the word.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Meaning of Special Revelation

We have just talked about God's revelation in nature, called general revelation. We have seen that reveals himself in creation and in nature (Rom. 1:19, 20; Acts 14:17). We also agree that every human being can observe fundamentally God's power and divinity in the things God has made and in his care over nature. But this general revelation does not necessarily speak of salvation in Christ, which can only be found in God's Word, or in Christ, the Word made flesh (Jn. 1:1). We refer to this second type of revelation as Special Revelation.

Special Revelation is therefore God's manifestation of Himself to particular persons at definite times and places, enabling those persons to enter into a redemptive relationship with him. Special Revelation is redemptive, for it publishes the good tidings that the holy and merciful God promises salvation as a divine gift to man who cannot save himself and that He (God) has now fulfilled that promise in the gift of His son in whom all men are called to believe. The gospel is news that the incarnate logos has born the sins of doomed men, has died in their stead, and has risen for their justification.

God is a transcendent being – outside of us, unlimited in space or knowledge and we cannot fully comprehend Him. God uses the principle of accommodation to make Himself known to us. Accommodation designates that characteristic of biblical literature which allows the writer, for the purpose of simplification, to adjust his language or explanation or description to the limitations of his readers without

compromising the truth in the process. This is to some extent anthropomorphism. In this we understand a transcendent God. Special Revelation make God a personal God who reveals himself by none and relatives to his people.

Special revelation is closely tied to the biblical history of creation and redemption, which begins with God’s calling. The chosen people of Israel are the special focus of God’s concern throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, and the Anointed One of God, Jesus Christ, is the perfection and culmination of all revelation. Special revelation tells us about God’s plan of salvation. This begins with his promise of salvation to Adam and Eve, that the Seed of the woman (Christ) will crush the head of the serpent (Satan, Gen 3). It continues in the tradition of Noah, the patriarchs, David, the prophets, and finally in the revelation of Christ. Not every human being has received God’s special revelation. This revelation is limited to those who receive the call to repentance and salvation (2 Ki. 17:13; Ps. 103:7; Jn. 1:18; Heb. 1:1).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

1. What is the main function of special revelation?
2. What do we mean when we refer to Christ as “the incarnate logos”?
3. Who are the Patriarchs?

3.2 Comparison of General and Special Revelation

We can at this point make a little contrast between general revelation and special revelation. General revelation, on one hand, is God’s communication of himself to all persons at all times and in all places. Special revelation, on another hand, involves God’s particular communications and manifestations of himself to particular persons at particular times. The modes of both revelations are diverse and multifarious.

We already observed that in general revelation, God reveals himself in nature, in history and in human conscience. It is, however, true that the Christian faith understands itself to be a response to a divine self-disclosure. Its claims that God has made himself known in a preliminary way in a history recorded in the sacred writings known as the Old Testament and in a final and decisive way in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. It is equally true that revelation, the doctrine of this divine self-disclosure, is the central methodological category of Christian theology (Exploring theology, September 15, 2009). But the same God reveals himself not only by communication and manifestation associated with and by consultation of certain sacred writings. He reveals himself in other forms.

The following table compares General and Special Revelation:

<b>General Revelation:</b>	<b>Special Revelation</b>
Comes by way of God’s creation and providence (Acts 14:17).	Comes by way of God’s prophetic Word, the Bible (Heb. 1:1, 2).
Reveals the existence, power and divinity of God (Rom. 1:20).	Reveals the love and graciousness of God in Christ



	(Rom. 5:8; Jn. 3:16).
Makes man aware of God’s moral law (Rom. 2:14, 15), but generally leaves man satisfied with his own moral status.	Makes man aware that he falls short of God’s moral law (Rom. 7:7) and reveals how he may live in a God pleasing way (Ps. 119:24; 2 Tim. 3:16).
Leaves man without excuse for his moral misdeeds (Rom. 1:20, cf. Rom. 1:32).	Declares the way of salvation through the cross of Christ (2 Tim. 3:15).
Makes people religious (Acts 17:27, 28).	Brings salvation in Christ (Rom. 1:16).
Is perverted by sinful man, who turns to idolatry (Rom 1:22; 1:25; Eph. 4:18).	Is received by all who are called by God, but rejected by others (Acts 2:39; Jn. 3:36).
Provides a point of contact in evangelism and mission (cf. Acts 14:17; 17:22ff.).	Makes the work of evangelism and mission most necessary (Rom. 10:14, 15).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

1. We have mentioned the phrase the “moral Law” many times in the above chart. What do we mean by the moral law?
2. The above chart presents the difference between a religious person and a Christian. What is the difference between a religious person and a Christian?

3.3 The Means of Special Revelation

In the history of God’s dealings with mankind he revealed himself and his Word in many ways. These can be summed up as follows:

3.3.1 Theophanies

Theophanies means God manifesting himself in visible form (God’s appearances). In the Old Testament, before the incarnation of Jesus Christ, he was called the “the angel of the Lord”; Gen. 32. Also we have the shekinah glory. Ex.3: 2-4, 24:15-18, 40:34-35.

Other visible manifestations include:-

- Fire and clouds (Gen 15:17; Ex. 3:2)
- Stormy winds (Job 38:1; Ps. 18:10-16)
- Zephyr (gentle breeze) (1 Ki. 19:12)

▪ The Angel of the Lord (Ex. 23:20-23). The word angel means “messenger”, and we believe this messenger was really the divine Word (Jn. 1:1) who later came as Jesus (see Mal. 3:1).

We observe from the list above that Yahweh is presented in the Old Testament in theophany of various sorts: fire and clouds, stormy wind, gentle breeze, and even as anger (messenger). Among all these, the most striking, McKenzie (1990, p. 1294) remarks, is “the presentation of Yahweh in the theophany of the storm (Pss. 18:8-16; 68:8-10; Hab 3:3-15; Judg 5:4-5; Exod 19:16,19; Ezek 1). “The elements of the theophanies suggest not only the storm but also earthquake and possibly volcanic eruption.” It (theophany) is “an Israelite confession of the power of Yahweh in nature.” But the power is not seen as blind, irrational force. Most frequently Yahweh appears in the theophany and reveals himself as the saviour of his people from their enemies. Thus in the theophany of Sinai, Yahweh comes as the deliverer who makes a covenant with Israel. His power in nature is a guarantee and assurance of his power and will to save Israel. According to later biblical developments the power of Yahweh is portrayed in nature as eschatological. It is shown as a power of judgment, an act of his moral will that affects all evildoers, whether they are of the stock of Israel or others.

In the N.T. Christ came as a unique manifestation of God as an actual human, with the human process and experience such as birth, pain, death, His life, teachings actions etc. were a message to us. He was truly God’s son, even the demons testified to it that he was the son of God (Matt. 5:7, Matt. 27:54).

Besides the Johannine Jesus standing out as the Logos, John allows his Jesus to make a definite claim that projects Jesus’ identity as the revelation of the Father. Thus, when Philip’s request for a vision of the Father in Jn 14:8 betrays the ignorance of the disciples, Jesus could not hesitate to assert the unity between the Father and the Son. It becomes clear that the nature of Jesus’ self-revelation, that is, the incarnation is the ultimate revelation of God. His words and works offer corroborating witness to God’s presence in him (vv. 10-11; cf. 5:36-37; 7:16-17; 10:37-38; 12:48-50). There could be nothing more than that to offer to prove God’s presence among His people (O’Day, n.d.).

It equally proves that “when John speaks of Jesus as ‘the Way,’ he is not thinking of Jesus was a heavenly figure who simply brings people into the realm of the Father or, as the Gnostics would have it, leads them into the pleroma (as in 1 Apocalypse of James 33:1-36). Jesus is the revelation of God.” Anyone who sees him (the Son) and believes will have eternal life (cf. Jn. 6:40). Thus he (Jesus) declares: “The one who sees me, sees the one who sent me (cf. Jn. 12:45). In other words, the link between Jesus words and those of the Father who sent him is grounded in the picture of Jesus as the agent of the Father (e.g., 3:34; 7:17-18; 8:28, 47; 12:47-49) (The gospel of John, NJBC, p. ).

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

1. Read Ex.3: 2 and explain what is meant by God appearing in the cloud.
2. Use Bible Concordance and list four other places that the angel of the Lord is

mentioned.

3. What is the significance of the theophany for the Israelites?
4. How is Jesus the theophany of God?

### 3.3.2 Direct Communications

We have earlier learnt earlier (cf. Mod. 1, Unit 4:3.2.3) that communication is one of the prominent elements identified with the nature of revelation. It is God himself who unveils himself by communicating to human through nature, his word and his direct encounter with human. We also observed that the predominant structure of communication includes action in the sense of deeds. That is to say, when God speaks, he acts. We also reminded ourselves that that speech is a form of action. Consequently we defined communication as language in action.

Equally, the Old Testament witnessed to God communicating directly in audible form to Adam and Eve, Moses, Joshua, Samuel and the prophets as a person will speak to another person. God also spoke directly to the prophets, thus, the prophetic saying, “The Lord spoke to me saying or the word of the Lord came to me saying” (Gen. 2:16; 9:1; 32:26; Ex. 19:9)

Mark makes it clear that the Father speaks immediately after the baptism (Mk 1 10:11) and also during the transfiguration (Mk 9:7) of Jesus. More important for us here is that the voice of the Father is heard. Whether Jesus was the only one that heard the voice or others around with him is not of interest to us. It rather demonstrates the ability, readiness and willingness of God to communicate with humanity.

Audible communication is not only the means used by God to communicate and unveil himself. These include the urim and thummim (Num. 27:21; 1 Sam. 10:20,21); dreams (Gen. 20:3-6; Num. 12:6), visions; This was often used in the case of prophets and sometimes the New Testament authors like John the Apostle saw visions. A vision came when one was asleep, while a trance came or when wake (Num. 12:6; Is. 21:6; Dan. 1:17; Obad. 1:1; Acts 11:5). God would sometimes communicate and reveal his innermost thoughts through his angels (cf. Dan.8: 16-17; Matt. 1:20)

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

1. Why is communication considered as the hub of revelation?
2. Read Num. 27 and state how Urim and Thummim were used.
3. List three dreams and three visions of the Bible that you remember.

### 3.3.3 Miracles

Miracles tend to be concentrated in three periods in Scripture: the exodus, the Elijah-Elisha period of Israel’s unfaithfulness, and the time of Jesus and the apostles, although miracles are scattered here and there throughout. Our thesis here is that God often reveals Himself to Israel and the Church through miracles.

#### The Meaning of Miracle

The biblical approach to the miraculous is different on several scores. First the Bible does not view nature as a closed system of laws. The ordinary workings of nature are

often attributed directly to God. In other words, the biblical notion of miraculous includes acts that are explicable on the level of human interaction as well as those that are not; thus it includes actions that would not be miracles in our present day understanding.

Secondly, if the Bible sees as direct divine actions events that are not outside the realm of nature or history then we must recognise that the element of the marvellous, which is so much a part of the traditional understanding of miracles, is not overly prominent in the Bible.

Etymologically, the term miracle, an English word, is derived from Latin: miraculum. It means "something to be wondered at." However the idea did not occur in the Vg NT. The Hebr words that are translated into English as "miracle" are *mopet*, "symbolic act:" and *ot*, "sign:" neither of which need refer to anything marvelous (Ezek 12: 1-6)

Traditionally, miracle is defined as actions beyond the ordinary laws of nature, or surpassing the power of all nature. (c. Brown, Miracles 11-12). They are actions of God wrought for the benefit of his own people. They often convey the sense of marvel, and are read, understood and interpreted with the eyes of faith.

The biblical idea of the concept would include acts that are explicable on the level of human interaction as well as those that are not; thus, it includes actions that would not be miracles in the strict understanding of the word. Bukt the difference is that those acts, whether miraculous or not are looked upon with the eyes of faith; hence the miraculous action of God is identified with them. , if the Bible sees as direct divine actions events that are not outside the realm of nature or history, then we must recognize that the element of the marvelous, which is so much a part of the traditional understanding of miracles, is not overly prominent in the Bible

Miracles function most often as an "audiovisual" of deeper spiritual reality that demonstrates God's power on behalf of his people. Often their impact is limited because they are not fully appreciated for all that they teach. Still, the Gospel of John can call them "signs," an indicator of their role as a witness to God's presence and activity (Bock, 2005, p 515). However, for a God who actively creates the world and engages with it as Scripture insists, miracles are a natural consequence of his presence (Twelftree 38–53)

Incidentally, Jesus miracles reveal all the characteristics of miracles in Scripture and are the key example of the category. Hence its theological significance could be applicable to other section of the Scripture.

The array of Jesus' miraculous activity is significant because it points to the scope of divine concern and presents Jesus as the revelation of God. Thus, when given the chance to confess who he is, Jesus points to the miracles as his "witness" and explanation. Several texts are important (Bock, 2005, p 516).

### **Jesus' Miracle as the Revelation of God and Jesus' Identity**

In Matt. 11:2–5//Luke 7:18–23, when John the Baptist asks if Jesus is "the one who [is] to come," the miracle-worker replies that John should be told what is being done: "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor." Using the language of hope from Isaiah's prophecies, Jesus claims that this is the promised

period of God's great work of salvation (Isa. 26:19; 29:18; 35:5–6; 42:18; 61:1). The fulfillment points out his identity and mission. What Jesus is doing shows who he is.

The second and third texts come from John's Gospel, where Jesus' works attest to his claims (John 5:36; 10:38). They represent the Father's work giving attestation to Jesus' claims and person. These Johannine texts conceptually parallel the Synoptics' texts of Jesus' reply to John the Baptist.

The fourth text is associated with Jesus' nature miracles. Here the question is raised after the stilling of the storm: "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" (Matt. 8:27 NRSV). The question is raised because the creation was seen to be in the hands of God (Job 40–42; Ps. 107:23–29), a point underscored already by the miracles God performed at the exodus as a sign to Pharaoh. When Jesus walks on the water, the testimony goes beyond what the miracle shows about God; it also helps to show who Jesus is. The resulting confession combined with worship is, "Truly you are the Son of God" (Matt. 14:33).

The fifth text is tied to Jesus' power over life itself. This is most dramatically developed in the story of Lazarus, where Jesus is portrayed as "the resurrection and the life" (John 11). Being the source of life is also another divine prerogative. The raising of Jairus's daughter also points in this direction, but the Synoptics do not develop the idea as John's Gospel does.

Sixth, there is a sequence of texts in Mark 4:35–5:43//Luke 8:22–56. Here the scope of Jesus' miraculous power is summarized in a linked series of four miracles: calming of the sea, exorcism, healing of a woman with a hemorrhage, and raising from the dead.

This sequence covers the whole scope of Jesus' power from creation to supernatural forces to human well-being to life itself. It shows Jesus has the power to deliver comprehensively. The sequence points to the "audiovisual" nature of the miracles. It raises the question as well of what human is like this.

Seventh are the Sabbath healings, where God acts through Jesus on the day of rest to show his "support" of Jesus. One dispute closes by making the point, "The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28). So Jesus' authority is seen over the most sacred day of the week as well as over the interpretation of the law. A miracle shows the way to the point.

Eighth is the discussion Jesus engenders about the significance of his miracles in Luke 11:14–23//Matt. 12:22–32. Here he says that if he casts out demons by the "finger" (Luke) or "power" (Matthew) "of God," then the kingdom (promised rule) of God has come upon them. Miracles are signs that point to what God is actively doing and picture that deeper reality. Thus, they are event and metaphor.

Nothing shows this linkage more vividly than the miracle of the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5:1–11. Here Jesus orchestrates a huge catch of fish and then tells his disciples they will be "fishers of men" (cf. 5:9; Mark 1:17). The miracle illustrates a deeper reality that points to God's relationship to his disciples. In the same way, the healing from leprosy shows God's power to cleanse through Jesus, the healing of a blind man shows Jesus' ability to give sight, and the raising (p 517) from the dead shows his ability to give life. So miracles are both event and picture of God's saving activity.

Miracles that lead to death, as in the plagues of the exodus, underscore God's authority to judge and our accountability to him. Interestingly, Jesus performed only a few miracles of judgment (such as the cursing of the fig tree) and his disciples used them rarely as well (such as the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:1–11; Paul's judgment of Bar-Jesus, 13:6–12).

Thus, the scope of these miracles suggests the comprehensive extent of God's authority and, in the case of Jesus' miracles, of Jesus' authority as kingdom-bearer. The power over life, demons, and the creation suggests a scope of authority in one person that can exist only because one shares in divine power. So, ultimately miracles serve to reveal the presence, power, and authority of God and those through whom he works. In the case of Jesus, where the scale of miracle is so great, the miracles point to his uniqueness.

The Bible uses three words to indicate miracles, usually translated as, sign, wonder and power. God said he gave signs to Israel in order that "they will know that I am the Lord and that they are my people" (Ex. 6:7). Miracles were also done by prophets and apostles to show they came from God (Jn. 2:11; 20:30-31; 2 Cor. 12:12; Acts 15:12). Similarly the signs Jesus performed were proof of his divine appointment (Acts 2:22). Miraculous Events – This is God at work in concrete historical ways within the world, affecting what occurs, the mighty deeds of God. Example is the call of Abraham, the provision of Isaac, deliverance from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea. Christ said if I do these things among you; believe that the kingdom of God is come upon you. To the disciples of John he said 'go and tell him what you see, the blind receive their sight'.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5**

1. List three miracles done by the prophets and three done by Jesus.
2. Attempt the definition of a miracle in your words.

#### 3.3.4 The Word

We talk about the word in two ways; Christ and the Bible. First, Jesus Christ; our clearest knowledge of God comes through the word. Jesus Christ is the personification of God's word (John 1:1ff; Rev. 19:13). Jesus Christ is God's word made in the flesh that lived among us (John 1:18; 2:45; 14: 9-11). Secondly, the word is also written down in the Bible. In the Bible, we find an infallible guide to the knowledge of God. Yet it must be realised that the Bible is not a resource book for an academic study about God. This is because "knowing" God in biblical language is much more than an intellectual or perceptual understanding of God. In the Bible, to know God means to acknowledge him as Lord and saviour. It means to have a living relationship with him (Ps. 36:10; Dan. 11:32; Hos. 6:6; 2 Peter 1: 5,8). It is therefore not surprising that the Bible does not speak of itself as a resource book of information about God but rather as a book written to lead man into a living relationship with God (John 20:31; Rom. 10:17; 2 Tim. 3:15-17). It is only this way that one can really know God. In the Bible we have God's revelation to Israel and to the early Church recorded for all time. Not everything God and His Son have said and done that is recorded in Scripture (Jn. 20:30; 21:25). But as John tells us, what has been written is recorded in order that you

might believe and “by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31). This clearly reveals the purpose of God’s written revelation, to bring the reader of God’s Word to faith and eternal life. The process by which God’s special revelation was put in the Bible is known as inscripturation. When we speak of God’s special revelation being inscripturated it means that the Bible itself **is** God’s revelation. Although the Bible is a record of what the various Bible authors have heard and observed (Hab. 2:2; 1 Jn. 1:1), these authors were themselves **inspired** in such a way that what they recorded became the Word of God. We shall talk about inspiration soon in details.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6**

1. From what you have just read, what is the purpose of the Bible?
2. What were the sources of the Bible authors?

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Though special revelation is different from general revelation in many ways, they are linked in some ways. While general revelation lays the ground for special revelation, special revelation helps us to understand general revelation better. While general revelation has many deficiencies special revelation does not. The two revelations come to us because of the loving grace of God. God has chosen to reveal himself to us in many ways to show the extent of his love. He wants everyone to have the opportunity of knowing him.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

As you have learnt, special revelation is the second and most important aspect of God’s revelation. It is not for all persons but only for the elect. The main focus of special revelation is to lead humanity to salvation. Special revelation has come through various means such as:

**Theophanies:** God appearing in the person of Christ, in his glory, and through natural occurrences.

**Direct communication:** This is God speaking through dreams, visions, angels, Christ, Urium and Thumuim.

**Miracles:** These were performed by prophets, Christ and the apostles.

**The Word:** These include the Bible and Christ who is the living word.

### **6.0 TUTOR- MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. What is the meaning of special revelation?
2. How does general revelation differ from special revelation?
3. Discuss the models of special revelation.

### **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

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### UNIT 3: THE DOCTRINE OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

#### CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
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5.0	Summary
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#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The last unit ended with the discussion of one of the modes of special revelation, the word. This unit is devoted to the discussion of the word in details especially the reliability and authority of the Bible. The Bible was written by human authors. These authors wrote under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In writing the Bible, the authors were allowed to employ their culture, professional terms, language, and different styles to convey the message of God. This unit will also give various proofs for the doctrine of inspiration from the Bible. It may also be necessary to recommend to students to go through the editorial works Brown, Fitzmyer and Murphy (1990, pp. 1023-33 and 1166-74), which forms one of the principal sources we shall not only be referring to, but in many cases adapt for the purpose of the discussion.

#### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to



- explain the biblical concept of inspiration
- state the biblical support for the doctrine of inspiration
- identify the key verses that testify to the doctrine of inspiration
- state the importance of the doctrine of inspiration
- discuss the difference between inspiration and illumination
- explain the biblical concept of inerrancy
- state the relationship between inspiration, inerrancy, infallibility

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Meaning of Inspiration

We have earlier observed that special revelation is God's communication to human. We also noted that God communicates to human the truth that God wants human to know for the purpose of human salvation. This communication should equally be preserved. That is to say, inspiration deals with the preservation of that revelation so that what is received from God is accurately transmitted to others beyond the original recipient. We can then add in this wise that revelation involves the vertical reception of God's truth, and in inspiration the horizontal communication of that revelation accurately to others. The question is how can we be sure the Bible is God's revelation to man and not merely the product of human ingenuity or merely human opinion? If what God revealed has not been accurately recorded, then that record is subject to question. The doctrine of inspiration answers that question and guarantees the accuracy of the Bible as God's special revelation.

##### 3.1.1 General Meaning

It is important for us to have in mind that the notion of inspiration connotes various different meanings. One of the primary meanings and which may equally be most fundamental is the act of drawing in, especially of the inhalation of air into the lungs. It is also used as the stimulation of the mind or emotions to a high level of feeling or activity. We can equally use the term inspiration to describe a painting full of wonders and admiration. But none of these really fits with the biblical concept.

In its theological usage inspiration is derived from the Latin Vulgate Bible where the verb inspire is used in 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21. The word inspiration is used in 2 Timothy 3:16 to translate theopneustos, a word that occurs only here. Theopneustos is derived from theos, "God," and pneo, "to breath." Literally, it means "God-breathed" and expresses the concept of exhalation by God. More accurately, theopneustos implicates the idea that Scripture is the product of the breath of God. The Scriptures are not something breathed into by God, rather, the Scriptures have been breathed out by God.

##### 3.1.2 A Biblical Definition of Inspiration

There is urgent need for us to understand and appreciate the biblical concept of inspiration, not only because it is fundamental to what we believe, what we teach and what we practice. It is also because of the wrong conception about the concept and its misuse. Inspiration may be described as God's influence on the human authors of Scripture so that using their own personal characteristics they composed and recorded without error God's revelation to human in the words of the original autographs. Analysis of the above description, as we shall see, will give us a better understanding of the concept and the information it conveys.

When we say that inspiration is "God's influence," it betrays the idea of the guiding relationships God had with the human authors of Scripture in the various material of the Bible. His influence could have varied in degree, but it was always included so that the Spirit of God guaranteed the accuracy of what was written.

Another important element in the description is "composed." It shows that the hagiographers were not simply mechanical copyists or stenographers who wrote down what God dictated to them. They were rather actively involved using their own personalities, backgrounds as they responded to the idea vocation of communicating God's word to their contemporary and future generations. So, their composition is influenced by God so also the choice of materials.

We also included in the description the phrase "without error," thus expressing the idea that the biblical claim of inerrancy. It is another way of reaffirming the claim that the scriptures is the word of God, and that the word of God is truth (John 17:17; Ps. 119:160).

(4) Though our translations of the Bible are tremendously accurate, being based on thousands of manuscript witnesses, inspiration can only be ascribed to the original autographs, not to manuscript copies or the translations based on those copies.

Inspiration is a supernatural divine influence on the hagiographers, by which they were able to receive from God the divine moral or religious truth, and are able to communicate same in writing with authority and without error to their fellow humans (Webster's 1913).

In addition, the Bible.org offers us some definitions, which may equally important for us in the discussion. According to the page, inspiration is a supernatural influence exerted on the sacred writers by the Spirit of God, by virtue of which their writings are given Divine trustworthiness (Warfield, 1948, p.131) and free from error (Edward, 1957) in their original writings (Ryrie, 1987). According to Enns (cf. Bible.org), there are several important elements that belong in a proper definition of inspiration: (1) the divine element—God the Holy Spirit superintended the writers, ensuring the accuracy of the writing; (2) the human element—human authors wrote according to their individual styles and personalities; (3) the result of the divine-human authorship is the recording of God's truth without error; (4) inspiration extends to the selection of words by the writers; (5) inspiration relates to the original manuscripts.

In short, of all the models of revelation, the Bible is much closer to us. We believe it is the word of God and it is by inspiration that the Bible is the word of God. Inspiration, in the sense we then apply it, is simply the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit on the hagiographers, which makes their writings an accurate record of revelation and the word of God. It also includes the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit on those who received special revelation from God as they wrote the Bible.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

1. Define the concept of inspiration from your own personal understanding.
2. Read through Brown, Fitzmyer and Murphy (1990, pp. 1023-33 and 1166-74) and state briefly your impression about the scriptures as the word of God.

### 3.2 Testimony of Inspiration

The Bible gives testimony about its inspiration itself. 2 Pt.1:20-21 says, “first of all you must understand this that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit from God.” Here Peter is affirming that the Bible has divine origin and it was not produced by the decision or will of man. That is to say that the impetus which led to their writings was from the Holy Spirit. Paul writes; “All Scripture is God-breathed” or inspired. (2 Tim. 3:16). Elsewhere he said to the Corinthians that the words taught are by the Spirit and later he wrote: “Christ is speaking through me” (1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Cor. 13:3). Paul commends the Thessalonians for accepting his words as the word of God (1 Thess. 2:13).

Inspiration was also the way by which God spoke through the Old Testament prophets so that they could proclaim: “Thus says the Lord” and “The word of the Lord came to me” (e.g. Ezek. 25:1, 3, 6, 8, 12, 13, 15). They also wrote at the direct command of God (Ex. 17:14; Is. 8:1; Dan. 12:4).

Christ and his apostles clearly regarded the writings of the prophets and other Old Testament authors as the Word of God (Mt. 15:4; Heb. 3:7, 1 Pet. 1:11, etc.).

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

In the time of Christ, what was the part of the Bible that was regarded as the Scriptures?

### 3.3 Other supports for Inspiration

There are also proofs for the inspiration of the New Testament. When Christ was here on earth, he promised to give his disciples the Holy Spirit who will lead them in all truth. In John 14:26, Christ said, “but the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all I said to you.” Again Christ said that the words of the apostles have the same authority with his words (Luke 10:16). In 2 Peter 3:16, Peter affirms that the letters of Paul

belong to the Bible. Paul also claimed divine authority of his writings as we see in Gal.1:8.

Others find support of inspiration in the fact that more than 600 Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in the New Testament and in the organic unity of the Bible. The contents of the Bible also testify to its unity.

Inspiration means what the Bible says about the earth and history is completely trustworthy. It means that the entire Bible has prophetic authority. Inspiration talks about God himself. It talks about his greatness and intelligent by which he is able to communicate himself to human beings. God is the creator of the world and man and because of this he knows everything about them. It therefore follows that whatever he has communicated about the man and the world through divine revelation is true and accurate.

In the inspiration, God over-ruled human limitations and sinful biases so that those writers of the Bible were able to write what God wanted them to write correctly. The Holy Spirit guided their thoughts so that what they wrote is able to accomplish its intended objectives.

The writers were not completely or totally passive nor in an unconscious state. Their distinctive style and professional language stands out clearly in their writings. Example, Luke was a medical doctor and he used medical terms not found in the other gospels.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

1. List two of the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the New Testament.
2. One of the sentences above reads; "what the Bible says about the earth is completely trustworthy." What does the Bible say about the earth?

### 3.4 Importance and Necessity of Inspiration

We may identify in the Pauline tradition of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 some definite statements concerning the importance and necessity of inspiration. But before reviewing these statements, it may not be out of place to reflect briefly on some of the implications of inspiration. The necessity of inspiration is that God does not repeat his revelation to every person. As such there is every need to preserve what was revealed to the use of the future generations.

We can say that inspiration is what preserves the revelation of God especially the special revelation which is the Bible. Inspiration helps us to rely on the truth that God communicated with the first recipients. The revelation of God and inspiration go together.

#### 3.4.1 Some Practical Implications of Inspiration

##### **i. Affirmation of the Authority of the Scripture**

According to the author of 1 Peter, the scripture is word of God conceptualised within the context of prophecy. As prophecy, it never had its origin in the will of human, but the human persons spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:21). The belief that the scripture is inspired by God, therefore, disposes us to

treat the scripture as the word of God. In other words, we cannot separate inspiration from the authority of the scripture.

### **ii. Different Level of Understanding of the Scripture**

Acceptance of inspiration makes us treat the scripture as authentic word of God, thus bringing in a deeper level of understanding of the scripture. It is seen as something of great significance for life. Thus Christ tells us that the fulfilment of the scripture (Mt. 5:17) cannot be compromised. It is, therefore, the notion of inspiration that makes the teaching of Christ clearer to us: That not a “yod or tittle” (the smallest characters in Hebrew writing) would disappear from the law until all was fulfilled (Mt. 5:18). He also told us that “Scripture cannot be broken” (Jn. 10:35).

### **iii. Knowledge about God:**

Knowledge about God could be found in the scripture. Discovering God through the scripture makes scripture of ultimate importance to us all. This is closely related to Paul’s words in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, “And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.” Everything we know about God, He has made known to us.

God has introduced Himself to us through His Word. The Bible not only shows us who God is, but proves it all to be completely true and accurate through His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus’ prayer in John 17:17 (“Sanctify them by your word...”) declares that one important reason that God gave His word was to change His people

### **iv. Near and Better Relationship with God**

As special revelation is God’s communication to man of the truth he must know in order to be properly related to God, so inspiration deals with the preservation of that revelation so that what was received from God was accurately transmitted to others beyond the original recipient. In revelation we have the vertical reception of God’s truth while in inspiration we have the horizontal communication of that revelation accurately to others. The question is how can we be sure the Bible is God’s revelation to man and not merely the product of human ingenuity or merely human opinion? If what God revealed has not been accurately recorded, then that record is subject to question. The doctrine of inspiration answers that question and guarantees the accuracy of the Bible as God’s special revelation.

### **v. Consciousness of the Nearness of God**

The idea of inspiration presents the scripture as word of God before. God now speaks to us directly, and we can feel his presence and nearness to us. It is one of the concrete ways through which God reveals himself to us. It is the privilege of the sons of God to have God talking to them directly.

### **vi. Source of Christian Actions**

If we believe and hold to the fact that the scripture is the word of God because it is inspired by God, then we are bound to listen to the instructions in the scripture. To do that means to follow the teachings of Christ. And one these is that we ought to live If

we are to follow the instruction of Jesus we must live by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God (Matt 4:4). This is not only possible but also imperative because of our belief in the inspiration of the scripture. Such belief should and ought to influence our daily decisions and actions as followers of Jesus. In other words, our life, decisions and action would depend so much on the meaning and application of individual words of Scripture.

### **vii. Basis for the Development of Christian Doctrine**

Our understanding the inspiration of Scripture is crucial to our faith, as our knowledge of all other doctrine rests on the Scriptures. It is the foundation upon which all of our beliefs rest. In other words, if we must remain and profess our faith as Christian, we must build our faith upon Scripture whose foundation lies on inspiration; otherwise we shall be prone to the whims and fancies. Above all, we cannot properly understand creation, sin, Bible history, prophecy, Christ's virgin birth, death and resurrection, heaven, hell, or salvation without first agreeing that every word of Scripture is God's Word, and therefore is without error and has all authority. We have no true spiritual knowledge of the world around us if we cannot cling strongly onto the inspiration, infallibility and inerrancy of the scripture.

### **viii. Change for Good**

The Word of God has the potentiality and power to protect against sin, and also the ability to help us receive the abundant blessings of God. It is important for believers to read and understand the Bible, and to find every avenue available to pour God's word into their souls -- to memorize it, meditate on it, and hide it in their heart. The Bible is God's gift to His people, and through it, Christians can understand the abundance of life in Christ everlasting

The Psalmist declared, "I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11). He understood the importance of studying and knowing God's word so that he could live according to His will and perfect plan. God has graciously revealed Himself through the Bible and calls us to read and know all that He has said

### **ix. Life of Fulfilment and Attainment of Salvation**

True learning comes from God's perfect word, the Bible, and must not be abandoned nor seldom looked into; it provides guidance and encouragement regarding eternal life and, more importantly, offers a glimpse to the reader of the magnificence and majesty of God.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. Discuss some practical implications of inspiration.
2. What message can you derive from the practical implications of inspiration

### **3.4.2 Four Practical Value of Inspiration in the Pauline Tradition**

The author of 2 Timothy emphatically asserts the Bible's inspiration ("God-breathed" in 2 Timothy 3:16) and provides a list of four practical uses of the scriptures: teaching,

rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. This is seen in the second part of the verse I Tim 3:16), and along with verse 17, “that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” Obviously, since all Scripture is God breathed, being the product of an all-wise, all-knowing, all-powerful and loving God, the author goes on to state that the entire Bible is profitable for four things:

### Teaching

“Teaching” is from the Greek didaskalia meaning “doctrine” or “instruction” It is used in both the active sense (i.e., the act of instructing), and in the passive sense (what is taught, doctrine). In the pastoral epistles, Paul uses it of the act of instructing (1 Tim. 4:13, 17; 2 Tim. 3:10), and of what is taught as in sound doctrine (cf. 1 Tim. 1:10; 4:6, 16; 6:1, 3; 2 Tim. 4:3; Tit. 1:9; 2:1; 2:7, 10). As many of these passages show, especially Titus 2:1, theological teaching, if it is to be truly profitable, must be in accord with sound doctrine, truth from the inspired word. Ultimately, teaching or doctrine, which looks at the content, refers to God’s fundamental principles for man’s life both eternal and abundant. It gives us the basics, the fundamental truths upon which life is to be built.

### Reproof

“Reproof” is the Greek elegmos which means “proof, conviction, reproof.” The most ending shows this is a passive noun which looks at the **result** of the process of the convicting ministry of the Spirit through the Word—personal conviction through exposure to truth. One might compare elegmos to another Greek word, elenxis, an active noun which looks at the **process** of reproof or exposing. Both need to go on in the life of a believer. The goal, however, is not simply the process. It’s the result—personal conviction. Like the light it is, the Bible reproves and exposes us to the various ways we violate the plan and principles of God in all the relationships of life, with God and with people as in one’s family, in the church, and in society. Once we have been reproofed and experience conviction (reproof) to the violations, we each face a very important decision. We can move toward God and **respond** to His correction and training, or we can **rebel** and **resist**. If we resist, then, as a Father, He disciplines us to draw us back to Him.

### Correction

This is the Greek epanorqwsis which means “setting up straight, setting right.” It stresses the restorative nature and capacity of Scripture and points to the more immediate work of the Word to set our feet back on course. The Psalmist wrote, “The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul” (Ps. 19:7a).

### Training in righteousness

“Training” is paidia which basically means “training, instruction, discipline,” not in the sense of punishment, but in the sense of the disciplines that train and develop

character, strength, skill, etc. This is undoubtedly more long range and refers to those truths that develop godly character and spiritual strength—growth truths and procedures like Bible study, meditation, and prayer.

But these four objectives have a greater goal or purpose. The purpose is that “the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17). The Bible offers us God’s comfort and His peace as it reveals His love, care, and mercy, but this is always in the context of conforming us into the image of His Son (Rom. 8:28-29) and equipping us for a life of good works (Eph. 2:10). Equipping us is designed to produce righteousness and ministry rather than self-indulgence.

The word “adequate” is the Greek *artios* which means “fit, complete, capable, sufficient: i.e., able to meet whatever is needed.” Being “fit” looks at the result or the intended result of a process, the aim in view. I think the process itself is seen in the word “equipped.” Note these three points about this word:

First, “Equipped” is the Greek *ezartizw* which means “to outfit, fully furnish, fully supply” as in fitting out a wagon or a ship for a long journey. It was actually used of outfitting a rescue boat. We might compare our Coast Guard vessels and their crews that are so well equipped to go out and rescue ships in trouble.

Second, “Equipped” is an adverbial participle which points us to the mode or the means of becoming “adequate” “capable,” or “competent.” We might translate the verse as, “that the man of God may be capable, by having been thoroughly equipped.” In the context, the equipping comes from knowing this God-breathed book.

Third, the verb “equipped” is in the perfect tense which, in Greek, often looks at the results of preceding action or a process. In the context, the process is that of studying, knowing, and applying God’s inspired Word while the result is ability for ministry through spiritual growth.

God’s goal in giving us His Word and our goal in studying and knowing God’s Word is to thoroughly fit us out that we might become fully competent servants of God for every kind of good work in the midst of a dark and needy world, like thoroughly equipped rescue vessels on missions of mercy.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. What are the practical values of inspiration according to the Pauline 2. tradition?

Do you think that the Pauline tradition in 2 Timothy exhausted the practical values of inspiration?

### 3.5 The Inerrancy of the Scripture



The fact of inspiration leads to inerrancy and infallibility of the scriptures. It makes the bible/Special revelation of God dependable, authoritative and authentic.

Biblical inerrancy is the doctrine that the Bible, in its original manuscripts, is accurate and totally free from error of any kind; that "Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact" (Grudem, 1994, p.9). Though as unscriptural but a later 19th century thought as it may be, some equate inerrancy with infallibility; while others do not (McKim, 1996; Geisler, 1980). But the terms inerrancy and infallibility may not necessarily mean the same. The word infallibility simply means "not liable to fail in achieving its purpose" (Bavick 601), while inerrancy means free from error.

The inerrant "truth" of the scripture is deemed ever all-important for the Catholic Church insofar as the Bible is a principal and So, the Council Fathers of Vatican II succinctly put it as follows: "The Books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching, firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation" (DV 3:11). But the Church is conscious of some factual, but not moral, errors in the Bible. Hence the phrase "for the sake of our salvation" would make the difference. The clause is, therefore, taking properly as specifying: Scriptural teaching is truth without error to the extent that it conforms to the salvific purpose of God. Decision about that purpose involves an a posteriori approach in the church, paying attention to literary forms and historical conditioning.

Within the protestant world, the understanding and interpretation of inerrancy is relative. For example, "Both evangelicals and fundamentalists insist on the 'inerrancy of Scripture' as being the most basic of all their fundamentals" (Collins citing Marty, 1995, 180). The role of the human authors is completely overshadowed by the idea of divine power. "Inerrancy follows from divine authority, period. For whatever God utters is without error. And the Bible is the Word of God. Therefore, the Bible is without error. But if this is so, then the inerrancy of the Bible cannot be lost by simply adding the human dimension. As long as it is God's Word, then it is thereby inerrant, whether or not it is also the words of men" (Geisler, 1985, 350-51). Consequently, the catchword is that "The scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:36). The saying becomes a scriptural warrant for the doctrine of inerrancy, since, if a single error is to be found in the Scriptures, the authority of the whole is undermined.

Enlightened fundamentalists, however, are not oblivious of the discrepancies in biblical manuscripts or in parallel narratives of the OT and the Gospels as detected by historical criticism. For this reason Hodge and Warfield would, in a seminal article, come up with a deeper understanding and interpretation of the term "error." According to the scholars, there are three criteria that must be met before something can be considered an error such as to destroy the inerrancy-inspiration of the Scriptures. The error must:

- i. occur in the "original autograph" of the biblical text;
- ii. involve the true meaning and intention of the text, "definitely and certainly ascertained"; and
- iii. render that true meaning "directly and necessarily inconsistent" with some "certainly known" fact of history or science.

But these criteria deprive biblical inerrancy of rational verification, for pertains to a text that is no longer extant.

Another decisive move in defence of biblical inerrancy comes from the meeting of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy produced the Chicago Statement in 1978. The Council affirms that the total truth and trustworthiness of Scripture, which should always be interpreted as infallible and inerrant. God's "penmen" were not limited to the knowledge available at their time. Although inconsistencies, irregularities, and discrepancies must be dealt with, Scripture remains inerrant "in the sense of making its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed." The signatories to the document also stress that since there are no extant original manuscripts of the Bible, the existing copies cannot be considered inerrant, but are faithful copies of the original manuscripts.

A more popular conservative-fundamentalist position or biblical inerrantists would go further than the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy", thus arguing that the original text has been perfectly preserved and passed down through time. According to their thinking, inerrancy is rather the belief that the Bible is fully true in all its teaching or affirms and in all of these it is without admixture of error. This extends to the areas of both history and science. It does not hold that the Bible has a primary purpose to present exact information concerning history and science. Therefore, the use of popular expressions, approximations and phenomenal language is acknowledged and is believed to fulfil the requirement of truthfulness. Apparent discrepancies, therefore, can and must be harmonised.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. What is the official position of the Catholic Church on the inerrancy of the Bible?
2. What is the difference between the position of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy and the conservative-fundamentalists?
3. What are the point of agreement and disagreement between the official Catholic position and the position of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy?

### 3.6 The Truth of the Bible

We already observed that some conservative Protestant theories of inspiration make the truth of the Bible (its inerrancy or infallibility) the nub of biblical inspiration. However, I. H. Marshall, an evangelical, has raised some pertinent issues that worth mentioning in this discussion.

- i. First, the Bible uses language in a great variety of ways
- ii. Then there is the fact that the question of truth may be answered in different ways at different levels of understanding
- iii. An understanding of the Bible as "truth from God" may also lead to a failure to appreciate passages where God is not speaking to man
- iv. A further question about biblical truth may be-"true for whom?"

Marshall concludes "that the concept of 'truth' is a complex one and that it is not easy to apply it to every part of the Bible (Marshall, 1982, 54-57).

So, the position of Marshall brings us back to the earlier observations by Cardinal Koenig of the Vat II Council, who during one of the conciliar meetings pointed out errors in the biblical books, which "are deficient in accuracy as regards both historical and scientific matters" (Vorgrimler; 1969, 3: 205). Indeed, the Scriptures themselves never claim to be inerrant. Finally, serious philosophical reflection on the nature of biblical "truth" and "error" must take into full consideration literary form and the level and function of language. You can then appreciate the reason for the absence of the term 'inerrancy' in any conciliar text of the Catholic Church, although it could be found in some papal encyclicals.

We must therefore appreciate the discussion on inerrancy. There is much to be gained from a positive reflection on the truth of the Bible, which is ultimately salvific truth. Christians of various backgrounds should be able to approve and accept the language of Vatican II about Scripture's teaching without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation - a compromise between those who wanted to affirm the truth of the Scriptures without further qualification and those of kerygmatic orientation who envisioned the entire reality of the Scriptures within the context of salvation history. "It is apparent that the doctrine and life of Jesus were not simply reported for the sole purpose of being remembered, but were 'preached.' .. ." As for "truth" in the biblical sense, "The 'truth' (emeth) of God is primarily bound up with his faithfulness" (Loretz, 1968, 83-84). From this perspective the antithesis is not simple error, but deception or infidelity. The truth of the Scriptures lies not so much in that its passages are without error, but in that through them God manifests his fidelity to his people, bringing them into loving union with himself.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

1. What is the difference between inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible?
2. What are the possible implications of the remarks of I.H. Marshall?
3. What are the contributions of Vatican II to save the Bible from the hands of extremists – those who wanted to affirm the truth of the Scriptures without further qualification and those of kerygmatic orientation who envisioned the entire reality of the Scriptures within the context of salvation history?
4. What is your understanding of “the truth of the Bible”?

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

The study of the doctrine of inspiration is to help you know more about the nature of the Bible. The doctrine tells us how the Bible was written, the authority behind it, and the value of the Bible to us. It assures us of the reliability of the biblical materials, be it about history or science. This doctrine naturally leads to the doctrine of inerrancy. It explains why the Bible has no errors and can be trusted in its fullness.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

You have learnt how God undertook the project of writing the Bible. God used human beings in writing the Bible. These men were filled with the Holy Spirit who enabled them to write God's word. The role the Holy Spirit played makes the Bible the word

of God and not human. It is because of the role of the Holy Spirit that the Bible is a living book and a book that is able to achieve the purpose for which it was written. The work of the Holy Spirit did not stop with inspiration; He is now working with us in the reading and understanding of the Bible. This is called illumination.

### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is your understanding of the doctrine of inspiration?
2. Give the Old and New Testament support for the doctrine of inspiration
3. Account for the importance and necessity of the doctrine of inspiration.

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## UNIT 4: CONTEMPORARY THEORIES OF INSPIRATION

### CONTENTS

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2.0	Objectives
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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In unit three we took time to explain the doctrine of inspiration, its necessity and its importance. This unit will lead to the different theories propounded by orthodox and liberal theologians. Some of the theories authenticate the authority of the Bible while others undermine the biblical message. Some of these theories are not accorded biblical support while some are based on mere philosophical deductions. The main aim of the doctrine of inspiration is to distinguish the Bible from other books and show that it is the real word of God, it is reliable and trustworthy. You will notice that organic inspiration is the only correct theory among these theories. It should also be noted that what is presented here is by no means exhaustive.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the different theories of inspiration proposed in the history of the Church
- recognise the deficiencies of the various theories
- mention the personality, style, profession, culture of the writers that are reflected in their writings
- state a few elements of truth in the wrong theories.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 A Protestant Perspective

##### 3.1.1 Consequent Behaviour

We can observe at this point that the silence of majority of the liberal Protestants on the matter of inspiration may be suggesting some level of 'denial of inspiration at least by silence.' However, conservative Protestant scholarship has produced most of the recent literature on inspiration, and invariably contributed much to the debate. A unique contribution has been made by Abraham (1981), an evangelical, who takes his cue from a meaning of the English word "inspire" rather than from the Scriptures themselves or inerrancy. An excellent teacher, he argues, can so inspire students that they are led to consequent behaviour (including, perhaps, the writing of a text). Analogously, God, through his revelatory and saving activity, so inspired the biblical authors that they were led to consequent behaviour, specifically the writing of biblical books.

#### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. Do you agree with the view of Abraham?
2. What further contributions can you make to the argument of Abraham?

##### 3.1.2 The Conursive Theory.

Warfield (1951) and Packer (1958) are articulate spokesmen of the concursive theory of inspiration. The primary interest is on the role of the spirit in the composition of the bible. And Packer would use the phrase "conursive action" in his explanation. According to him, it may futile to occupy ourselves with the 'how' of the bible just as it is with the 'how' of 'creation.' Just as the process of cause/effect and the doctrine of creation/providence are different ways of speaking about the existence of the physical universe, so inspiration and human composition are different ways of speaking about the existence of the Scriptures. They are theological and human understandings of the same material phenomenon; they do not exist on the same plane. Just as creation/providence is a theological statement that the cosmos derives its origin from God, so inspiration is a theological statement that the Scriptures derive their origin from God. The doctrine no more provides Christian believers with an explanation of how inspiration occurred than does the doctrine of creation/providence provide an explanation of how creation took place.

I. H. Marshall explains concursive action in this way:

On a human level we can describe its [the Bible's] composition in terms of the various oral and literary processes that lay behind it - the collection of information from witnesses, the use of written sources, the writing up and editing of such information, the composition of spontaneous letters, the committing to writing of prophetic messages, the collecting of the various documents together, and so on. At the same time, however, on the divine level we can assert that the Spirit, who moved on the face of the waters at Creation (Gen 1:2), was active in the whole process so that the

Bible can be regarded as both the words of men and the Word of God. This activity of the Spirit can be described as "concurrent" with the human activities through which the Bible was written. (Marshall, 1982, p.42)

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. What is the implication of Packer's position on inspiration for biblical research?
2. Do you think that Packer and Marshall are saying the same thing?

#### 3.1.3 Neo-orthodoxy.

The views on inspiration of K. Barth (1886-1968) have been followed by many mainline kerygmatic Protestant thinkers. Barth accords a unique place to the Bible insofar as it witnesses to God's act of revelation in Jesus Christ, who is primarily the Word of God. Inspiration is not a quality of the scriptural text itself, but an affirmation of a divine ability to use the Scripture to communicate revelation to human beings, either individually or in groups.

In other words, the Bible is not objectively inspired, but subjectively. Again, that the Bible is inspired is simply because the individual soul and heart is touched by the word. Above all, the inspiration of the Bible is not found in the Bible itself but in the subjective response of the reader.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Search for two other kerygmatic Protestant thinkers who share the same view with Barth.

#### 3.2 A Roman Catholic Perspective

The Catholic approach to the question of inspiration, especially with the inception of Vatican II, is marked with a high sense of realism. Integral to Vatican II's understanding of the biblical texts was an appreciation of their human quality and the processes by which they were produced. These texts, which are the "word of God," are expressed in human words. So, the purpose of the multiply different exegetical methodologies would, or at least ought to, be to highlight the humanity of the Scriptures without distorting the divine message. With that humanity as a starting point, recent Catholic theories on inspiration focus on one of four aspects.

##### 3.2.1 Psychological Theories

The influential Benoit has distinguished **scriptural inspiration** (which lead the authors to produce texts) from **dramatic historical inspiration** (which took place in the events of salvation history) and **prophetic-apostolic inspiration** (which took place in the oral proclamation of these events). Using Thomistic categories, Benoit makes the human psyche the locus of inspiration. Logically subsequent to revelation to which it is related, inspiration is an impulse to write and produce a book. It bears upon the author's judging what matters are to be included, how they are to be formulated and arranged. Throughout the entire process God is active as the

originating cause of the scriptural work. It is important for us to note that Benoit's emphasis is essentially on the individual biblical authors.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Do you think that the position of Benoit on inspiration robs the individual hagiographers of freedom?

#### 3.2.2 Social Theories

Form criticism has shown us that biblical books cannot simply be considered as literary production of isolated individuals. It is more of a community product. The individual writers were members of faith communities which had more than a passing influence on the formation of the biblical literature itself. That is the heart of the varied social theories of inspiration, which recapture an earlier view of the author as the functionary of a community, drawing on its traditions and writing to edify it. Barr (1983), one of the critics of fundamentalism, argues that if there is inspiration at all, then it must extend over the entire process of production that has led to the final text. Inspiration therefore must attach not to a small number of exceptional persons. It must extend over a larger number of anonymous persons. It must be considered to belong more to the community as a whole.

Within the Roman Catholic circles, social theories of inspiration have principally been associated with the names of J. L. McKenzie, D. J. McCarthy and K. Rahner, who emphasised the interdependence between a biblical author and his community.

However, the more radical form critics would reduce the "author" to virtually an anonymous scribe. This has led to the practical abandonment of the psychological theories of inspiration. If the biblical literature is the complex expression of community faith, inspiration is much more complex than divine influence upon an individual author. This disconcerting way of looking at biblical composition virtually silenced discussions of inspiration by biblical scholars and theologians within the mainline churches. Fortunately, the emergence of redaction criticism has redressed some of the inadequacies of an (exclusively) form-critical approach. The writer, who produced the final biblical book, even though influenced by and drawing upon predecessors and the community, was an author and a theologian in the proper sense.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. What is the difference between the psychological and social theories of inspiration?
2. Which of the two theories appeals more to you and why?

#### 3.2.3 Literary Approaches

Some recent approaches to biblical study, that is, the literary and structural approaches, stress the reality of the text itself, thus opening the way for a text centred form of theorizing about inspiration. Although a text enjoys a certain semantic autonomy, two essential human activities are related to a text: writing (and rewriting) and reading (almost a form of mental rewriting): The doctrine of inspiration affirms



that the Holy Spirit is responsible for the biblical text as text, i.e., with regard to both these human dimensions.

i. As for writing, the Spirit is active in the long process whereby a biblical text has been produced within a faith community (i.e., including formulation of traditions, partial texts, early drafts, and rewriting).

ii. As for reading, inspiration is predicated of the biblical text precisely because there is a faith community who, under the influence of the Spirit, will read and identify with this biblical text.

To this extent, a literary theory of inspiration echoes the active meaning of the *theopneustos* of 2 Tim 3:16 and accentuates dimensions of inspiration highlighted by Calvin and Barth.

Other dimensions of textuality are important for a full understanding of inspiration, e.g., the three basic functions of language: to inform, to express, and to impress.

The Bible may inform its readers by imparting knowledge and communicating truth, but that is only one of its functions. It also expresses something of the dynamic reality of God and affects or impresses the recipient(s) of the language communication in a variety of ways. The inspiring Spirit would be involved in the totality of these language functions. Indeed, the greatest contribution of the literary approaches to an understanding of inspiration may be their emphasis on the total reality of the text.

Another dimension of textuality to which literary analysis draws attention is the fact that text is "a production of significance." Frequently texts derive part of their meaning from the larger textual unit to which they belong. An individual saying of Jesus is part of a Gospel, which is part of the NT, which is part of the Bible. This reality resonates with the traditional doctrine that predicates inspiration of "the books of both OT and NT in their entirety, with all their parts." The Bible as a whole is inspired, and so by implication the parts are inspired. The tradition does not state that because the individual sentences (= texts) of the Bible are inspired, the Bible is considered to be inspired. (Concentration on the inspiration of an isolated text can produce a type of fundamentalism.) This holistic understanding of textuality has no small bearing on an adequate understanding of the notion of biblical truth. Inerrancy should be related to the total biblical view of a topic.

Many factors highlighted by the literary analysis of Turner (1984) portray the Bible as "paracletic literature." According to him, "The Bible as paraclete is an advocate in the sense that it is a witness to Jesus Christ. It is often used as a sort of counsellor; certainly it is a helper, consoler and comforter" (427).

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. What is the relationship between the hagiographers and the reading community within the context of the literary theory of inspiration?
2. How do the functions of language explain the understanding of inspiration?
3. What do you think is the wisdom behind the Catholic position that "the Bible as a whole is inspired, and so by implication the parts are inspired, but not necessarily the individual sentences of the Bible?"

#### 3.2.4 Ecclesial Aspects

Other theories of inspiration focus upon the relationship between the Scriptures and the church, thus placing inspiration as one of the within the Church, that is, "charism of the written communication of the word of God as a constitutive element of the church" (Collins, 1983). In other words, the ecclesial-theological theories of inspiration are not without analogy to the consequent theories of inspiration. Hence Rahner calls our attention once more to the fact:

Since scripture is something derivative, it must be understood from the essential nature of the church, which is the eschatological and irreversible permanence of Jesus Christ in history. Then God is the inspirer and the author of scripture, although the inspiration of scripture is "only" a moment within God's primordial authorship of the church (Rahner, 1978). Rahner's perspective places God's authorship of Scripture in the context of a broader and more accurate understanding of "authorship," through his approach has been criticized by many proponents of composition inspiration as focusing too exclusively on Jesus, to whom the Scriptures bear witness.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. Do you agree that inspiration is one of charisms within the Church?
2. What are possible implications of making inspiration one of the charisms within the Church?

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The various theories in this unit reveal human feeble attempt to understand what God is doing. They also reveal that they are many people even in the Christian circle who do not take the Bible serious. Such people teach that the biblical authors wrote without supernatural help and the Bible is just like any other ordinary book. Such thinking undermines the authority and trustworthiness of the Bible. What is clear from biblical testimony is that whatever the Bible teaches is infallible.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

The Bible is a book that testifies about itself. It tells us that the Holy Spirit inspired those who wrote it. However, the Bible does not mention the method of inspiration and it is this absence that has led to the different theories of inspiration. The summary of these theories is as follows:-

- Intuition—the authors wrote on it because of the special gifts they had.
- Mechanical—the authors were used as machines or computers.
- Dynamic—the Holy Spirit through the authors
- Partial—not all the Bible is inspired only some parts.
- Subjective—it is the passage that speaks to you that is inspired

### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Differentiate between mechanical and dynamic theories of inspiration.
2. Discuss the organic theory of inspiration

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## UNIT 5: METHODS OF GOD'S REVELATION

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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last two units you learnt the doctrine of inspiration which is about God working

through the authors who wrote the Bible. The Bible has its reliability from this doctrine. This unit leads you to discover the methods God used to communicate his message to the authors and the general audience. This method is rooted in the nature of God. As we have already mentioned, God is spirit, not humans like us, and more than we can describe and understand. However, he has allowed us to describe him in our language and understanding. This method also reveals our standing before God. Humans are feeble and far inferior to God. If he does not come to our level we will not understand him.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the term anthropomorphism
- identify the body parts that we use to describe God
- identify the human emotions and actions that we attribute to God

also

- state human offices and positions attributed to God
- explain progressive revelation
- give examples of progressive revelation.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Principle of Accommodation

We have earlier mentioned the principle of accommodation. It is equally important that we give a little more time to the concept. However, it will be important for us to examine briefly the concept of anthropomorphism because of the central role it plays in the explanation of the biblical concept of accommodation.

#### 3.1.1 Anthropomorphism

The term, therefore, is purely of religious origin. It was first used to refer to the attribution of human physical or mental features to deities. By the mid-19th century, however, it had acquired the second, broader meaning of a phenomenon occurring not only in religion but in all areas of human thought and action, including daily life, the arts, and even sciences. Anthropomorphism may occur consciously or unconsciously. Anthropomorphism, derived from the Greek *anthropos* (“human”) and *morphe* (“form”), is the interpretation of nonhuman things or events in terms of human characteristics. This we find universally in all cultures, where people have attributed human characteristics to deities, often including jealousy, pride, and love. Even deities with an animal form, or with no physical form at all, are thought to understand prayer and other symbolic communication. So, we see human using human language to describe God as if God is human or even an instrument of manipulation.

Despite efforts by some theologians to reduce the influence anthropomorphism in religion, it has been widely acknowledged that anthropomorphism cannot be eliminated without destroying religion itself. This is simply because of the nature

religion and human. Object of religious devotion must have features to which humans can relate. For example, language, widely considered a human characteristic, must also be present in deities if humans are to pray to them (Guthrie, 2011). This we find all over the Judeo-Christian scriptures. Some of the aspects of anthropomorphism found in the scriptures, which equally portrays human effort to appreciate the revelation of God, include the deployment of:

- i. human faculties and body parts
- ii. human emotion and actions
- iii. human vocational and occupational role
- iv. associating God with non-living things

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

1. How is anthropomorphism related to religion?
2. Do you subscribe to the claim that the elimination of anthropomorphism in religion is tantamount to the destruction of that religion?

### **Examples of Human Faculties and Body Parts**

The followings are examples that talk about God as having human faculties, body parts, sensations, affections, and actions. We read that God has a soul and Spirit (Lev. 26:11; Matt.12:28). God also has physical organs such as face (Exodus 33:20, 23; Matt. 18:10), eyes (Ps.17:8; Hebrews 4:13); eyelids (Ps.11: 4); apple of an eye (Ps 17:8; Zac. 2:8); ears (Ps. 55:3); nose (Deut. 13:10); mouth (Deut. 8:3); lips Job 11:5); tongue (Isa. 30:27); neck (Jer. 18:17); finger (Exd. 8:19); arm (Exod.15:12); hands (Num. 11:23) right hand (Exd.15:12); heart (Gen. 6:6) intestines (Isa. 63:15); bosom (Ps. 74:11; and feet (Isa. 66:1).

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

1. What do we mean when we talk about God's right hand?
2. What are the other body parts that can be attributed to God that are not mentioned here?

### **Examples that Attribute Human Emotion and Action to God**

There are many other verses that attribute human emotion to God such as rejoicing (Isa. 62:5); sorrow (Ps.78:40); grief (Ps. 95:10); provocation (Jer.7:18-19); mercy, compassion, grace, and others like he has zeal, is jealous, repents, hates, has wrath, and is revengeful (Deut. 32:11; 16:22; 32:35; Ps. 2:5). There are also other human actions that are attributed to God; investigation (Gen. 18:21); searching (Ps.7:9); knowing (Gen.3:5); intending (Gen.50:20); forgetting (Sam. 1:11); remembering (Gen. 8:1) speaking (Gen.2:16); calling (Rom. 4:17); commanding (Isa. 5:6); rebuking (Ps. 18:15); answering (Mal.2:14); resting (Gen.2:2); working (John 5:17); seeing (Gen.1:10); hearing (Exod. 2:24); smelling (Gen. 8:21); testing (Ps.11:45); sitting (Ps. 9:7). Others are arising, going, coming, walking, meeting, visiting, passing, abandoning, writing, binding, sealing, engraving, striking, chastising, working, healing, killing and making alive, wiping, washing, cleansing, anointing, adorning, clothing, crowning, girding, destroying, inflecting, judging, condemning, etc.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

1. What are the things that can lead to God's grieving?
2. From above, do you think that we do here on earth affect God? If so, in what way?

**Examples of God as Having Occupation, Office, Position**

There are various others that denote certain occupation, office, and position. This include bridegroom, (Isa. 61:10); a man (Isa. 54:5-6), a father (Deut.32:6); a judge, king, warrior, mighty hero, an architect, builder, shepherd, gardener, and physician. The Bible also describe God as having a seat, throne, footstool, rod, scepter, weapon, bow, arrows, shield, chariot, banner, book, seal, treasure, inheritance, etc.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

1. If God is the bridegroom, who is his bridesmaid?
2. What has God done that he is called 1, a warrior 2, an architect 3, builder 4, gardener?
3. Which of the books can be called God's book?

**Examples Comparing God with Non-Living Things**

He is also expressed in terms of living and non-living things. For example, he is compared to a lion, the sun, morning star, light, a lamp, fire, spring or fountain, food, bread, water, ointment, a rock, refuge, a tower, a stronghold, a shadow, a road, a temple, etc.,

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5**

What does God do to be compared with a loin, rock and spring?

It may therefore no longer t be a surprise for us to observe in the Scriptures that God is addressed like human. Human tries to understand God from human perspective by making reference to God from human point of view. Accommodation, on the other hand, would be read and interpret from

discuss its details because it is one of the important aspects of God's revelation to humanity. Principle of accommodation is the description of God in the way that we can understand. It is basically God coming down to human level. It is describing God in earthly and human relations.

**3.1.2 Meaning of Accommodation**

In our earlier description of anthropomorphism, we understand it as human effort to transcend the self in order to understand God and revelation with the aid of human and non-living instruments. In terms of accommodation, the focus is shifted from human

to divine – God. It is now God condescending to level in order that human can contend with the revelation of God.

Accommodation (or condescension) is, therefore, a theological principle that God, while being in his nature unknowable and unreachable, has nevertheless communicated with humanity in a way to which humans can understand and respond. Biblically, it implicates the communication and preservation of revelation. How did God communicate himself and his message to the hagiographers? How could God, who is so transcendental condescended to the level that He could be understood? How are we sure that what was revealed to the hagiographers were effectively communicated using human language, which is naturally imperfect? How can the perfect (God) be communicated with the imperfect (human language)? It would therefore appear a contradiction and inconsistency that the Christian God, as revealed in the Bible, is often described in terms of his supreme transcendence and the inability of limited, finite man to comprehend and know the God who is unlimited and infinite - the contradiction being that even this knowledge can be known by humanity and recorded in scripture. These are some of the challenges that the principle of accommodation sets out to confront. Although this may seem illogical, the status of the Christian God's unknowability is only true insofar as God acts not to reveal himself. In this line of thinking, no humans can ever hope to even understand or know God via their own powers of discernment. Consequently the principle of accommodation is that God has chosen to reveal aspects of himself to humanity in a way which humanity is able to understand. God also accommodates or makes allowance for humans to understand experience revelation and the mystery of God out of grace and through human language and at human level (McGrath, 1978).

The idea of accommodation was one of the early approaches adopted by Judaism and Christianity in their respective interpretations of the scriptures. In other words, it "has a long tradition of use within Judaism and subsequently within Christian theology, and can easily be shown to have been influential within the patristic period" (McGrath, 1998, p. 208). However, it was the 16th century Protestant Reformer John Calvin who popularised it, especially within the protestant domain. It was used by Calvin to answer some of the then century's discoveries in natural science, foremost Copernicus' theory of heliocentrism that conflicted with medieval theological traditions of reading the Bible "through geocentric spectacles". In this sense, it is another alternative method of biblical interpretation (cf. a "critique on scriptural accommodation" in this unit).

### 3.1.3 The Significance

The principle of accommodation is one of the various ways adopted by Christians to explain to understand and explain the mystery of God and the divine revelation. It is found in various forms in different features of Christian theology, especially the influence of God in the reception, preservation and communication of His revelation to humankind, thus the composition and canonisation of the Scripture. While the Scripture claims that humans are limited and sinful and can make mistakes, God has

nevertheless influenced the writing of the Scripture to ensure that no moral errors were committed. This belief is generally held in all Christian tradition.

Again, in spite the natural linguistic barrier this barrier, God accommodates human through power of the Holy Spirit to compose and “translate” God’s words (revelation) in order to reveal his nature to human. The logical truth is then that God speaks every language and can communicate with every persons of every culture taking into consideration the peculiarity of each culture in His Self (God’s) revelation within that culture. This is the working of the Holy Spirit, not human. This, of course, can be demonstrated in the different facets of the Christian life and doctrine such as in:

i. the Bible

ii. Jesus Christ

iii. the Holy Spirit

iv. the Sacraments

v. the proclamation of the Gospel

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

State briefly the significance of the principle of accommodation for the Christian theology.

#### **3.1.4 Patterns of Accommodation**

##### **The Bible**

The Scripture is the word of God ‘incarnate’ in human language. It represents represent God’s accommodation of revelation to human capacity (Thompson, 2005). The idea is boldly written in the history of Christianity. The general belief is that both the Old and New Testament are divinely inspired. The principle of accommodation allows for both the ability of the Bible to communicate objective spiritual truths about the nature of God, as well as the ability of the hagiographers to act as God's means by which this is to be communicated to humanity. While it is true that the authors themselves were limited and prone to mistakes, accommodation allows for the perfect and truthful God to work in, with and through the human agents in order to reveal Himself so comprehensive to the ability of human.

The Scripture would be so realistic to the scandal of innocent pious believers. It does not hide fact of human imperfection, human weakness and limitation. Thus Ezekiel 1:28 finds the prophet struggling to put down in words his experience as he stood in the presence of God; 1 Corinthians 13:9-12 mentions that what we see now - what God has chosen to reveal to us - is "but a poor reflection". The fact that God has



chosen to use the limited in order to reveal the unlimited may seem hard to understand, but is easy to accept once the notion of an infinite, all-powerful God is presupposed.

Linked to this idea is the added complication of human languages. Could we hold to the idea that only the original Hebrew Old Testament text and the original Greek New Testament text can be clearly identified as inspired word of God, and yet remain consistent? Could the English, French, German, Igbo and other vernacular bibles be considered as inspired?

However, the principle of accommodation allows us to believe that despite this natural linguistic barrier, God still has the ability and power to use such translations in order to reveal Himself to people. This means, of course, that Christians must not necessarily speak or understand the Ancient Hebrew and Greek in order to hear what God has to say, though they may be an added advantage.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. Do you agree that God can reveal Himself in the Scripture only through the ancient Hebrew and Greek language in Old and New Testaments respectively?
2. Could the English Bible be regarded as the revealed word of God taking cognisance that it is only a translation of the original language?

### **Jesus**

The belief that God has finally, fully and sufficiently revealed Himself to humanity, despite the failings and limitations of human, is given its supreme form in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Traditional Christianity, as expressed in the historic creeds, proclaims the Trinity as being part of the orthodox Christian faith. The divinity of Christ, who is believed to be fully human and fully God, shows how the Godhead has accommodated itself to human minds and experience. Many Christians see in the person and work of Christ not only the supreme form of accommodation, but the centre and reason for it as well.

By becoming human, Jesus Christ accommodates himself to the human condition. Through his life, his teaching and ministry, Jesus Christ is seen as God speaking and communicating fully and sufficiently to humanity - not through the abilities and strength of human but the grace of God. In this sense, God is the principal actor and human only a participant through the grace of God, for it is not human who "discovers" Christ, but Christ reveals himself to human. Through accommodation, the human person is able to accept, appreciate and proclaim the Gospel – the work, life, passion, death and resurrection of Christ, as well as the parousia.

**SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Why do you think that the presence of Jesus among us is a form of accommodation?

**The Holy Spirit**

Traditionally, the Holy Spirit is one of the three equal persons of God – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son but of the essence.

Scripture underlines the role of the Holy Spirit as a divine person. It qualifies the Holy Spirit with a personal pronoun, not as an impersonal force. He teaches, guides, comforts and intercedes (Jn 14:26; Rom 8:14, 26). He possesses emotions, intellect and will (Eph. 4:30; 1 Cor 2:10-14; 1 Cor 12:11). The Holy Spirit spoke to Philip and gave counsel to the church at Jerusalem (Acts 8:29; 15:28). He was sinned against and lied to (5:3, 4)

The Scriptures also attest to the deity of the Holy Spirit. He is spoken of as God and is identified with the title of Lord (Acts 5:1-4; 28:25; Heb 10:15; cf. also Isa 6:8-9; Jer 31:31-34). The Christian who is indwelt by the Spirit is indwelt by God (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; Eph 2:22). The Holy Spirit possesses the attributes of deity, such as omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence and eternity (1 Cor. 2:10-11; Hebs 9:14; Ps 139:7; Zech 4:6). He does works only God can do, such as creating, regenerating and sanctifying (-Jn 3:6; 2 Thes. 2:13; Gen 1:2). He is fully associated with the other persons of the Trinity (Matt 28:19, 20; 2 Cor 13:14).

The Holy Spirit also plays a major role the salvation of human. It is the Spirit who brings the unbeliever to conviction and causes the unbeliever to see the truth of the gospel in the light of Christ (Jn 16:8-14). Those who respond to this conviction and place their faith in Jesus Christ receive eternal life and a new nature (Jn 3:3-7; Titus 3:5). The Holy Spirit unites the believer with Christ and places him in the body of Christ, the church (1 Cor 12:13). He also unites the believer with Christ in His death, enabling him to live victoriously over sin (Rom 6:1–10). The Holy Spirit controls the believer who yields to God and submits himself to God's Word (Rom 12:1,2; Eph 5:18; Col 3:16). When these conditions are met, the believer lives in the power of the Spirit and produces the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:16, 22, 23).

We can better understand and appreciate the recreating, sanctifying and unifying role and work of the Holy Spirit by applying the principle of accommodation. Thus, by the indwelling and working of the Holy Spirit in the individual, the Trinitarian God is again accommodating himself so that humanity may experience and know Him. When an individual comes to understand the message of the Gospel and the knowledge of God, it comes only because God has freely chosen to make that knowledge known to human. But since humanity is naturally imperfect, weak and limited in articulating fully the divine nature of God and His Self-revelation, God by His grace

accommodates human in order that human can effectively appreciate God's revelation. Such knowledge is imparted directly through the work of the Holy Spirit.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Describe the role of the Holy Spirit

What makes

#### **The sacraments**

Generally, the mystery of the sacraments as the saving act of God and his love for humankind manifests itself fully in the context of accommodation. The sacrament is understood as an outward efficacious sign instituted by Christ to give grace. Jesus Christ himself is the sacrament, as he gave his life to save humankind. His humanity is the outward sign or the instrument of his Divinity. It is through his humanity that the life of the Trinity comes to us as grace through the sacraments. It is Jesus Christ alone who mediates the sacraments to allow grace to flow to mankind.

Consequently, the sacrament remains the visible and invisible reality, a reality open to all the human senses but grasped in its God-given depths with the eyes of faith. The visible reality we see in the Sacraments is their outward expression, the form they take, and the way in which they are administered and received. The invisible reality we cannot "see" is God's grace, his gracious initiative in redeeming us through the death and Resurrection of his Son. His initiative is called grace because it is the free and loving gift by which he offers people a share in his life, and shows us his favour and will for our salvation. Our response to the grace of God's initiative is itself a grace or gift from God by which we can imitate Christ in our daily lives.

Thus, the saving words and deeds of Jesus Christ are the foundation of what he would communicate in the Sacraments through the ministers of the Church. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church recognizes the existence of the sacraments by the Lord Jesus Christ. Through the Sacraments, God shares his holiness with us so that we, in turn, can make the world holier.

In the Catholic doctrine, there are 7 sacraments: the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist), the Sacraments of Healing (Penance and the Anointing of the Sick), and the Sacraments at the Service of Communion (Marriage and Holy Orders). In most Protestant circles, only two sacraments are recognised, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Both have a special significance in that they were symbolic representations instituted by Jesus. In the sacraments, therefore, God is somehow able to accommodate himself and his gospel in the sacramental actions. Through transubstantiation Christ becomes present in the form of bread and wine, and commune with his people in a special and unique way.

However, the basic challenge to sacramentalism is this: How can divine grace depend on matter, something passive and unfree? Isn't it unfair for God's grace to depend on anything other than his will and mine? (Kreeft, 1988).

In fact, matter is sacramental, and the world is a sacrament. We receive God through every material reality (though not in the same special way as in the sacraments proper). The sacraments remind us that the whole world is a sacrament, a sacred thing, a gift; and the sacramental character of the world reminds us of the central sacrament, the Incarnation, continued among us in the seven sacraments of the Church, especially in the Eucharist. The sacramental view of the world and the Catholic doctrine of the sacraments illuminate each other like large and small mirrors. Both the sacrament of the world and the sacrament of incarnation and Eucharist remind us that we too are sacramental, matter made holy by spirit. Our bodies are not corpses moved by ghosts, or cars steered by angels, but temples of the Holy Spirit. In our bodies, especially our faces, matter is transmuted into meaning. The eyes are the windows of the soul (Kreeft, 1988).

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. What is sacrament?
2. How does the idea of the sacrament fit into the principle of accommodation?

### **Preaching of the Gospel**

For Barth, theology begins with the self-presentation of the triune God, a free and gracious act, never a static thing waiting to be discovered. Only God can make God known, and God remains the active sovereign subject of his revelation, regardless of the particular form it takes. The Son is the essential and objective form of God's self-communication to the world; the Spirit is the subjective power of the word without which the word is not recognized or received. Hence, the word of God is not a static message, but a dynamic event—less propositional content than personal address. Barth adds that there are only two forms in which the church today meets the word of God: Scripture and preaching. There is thus a unity-in-differentiation of the one word just as there is a unity-in-differentiation of the one God: the revelation itself (the Son), the witness to that revelation (the prophetic and apostolic testimony), and the preaching of that witness. The Bible and human preaching become God's word when God actively communicates himself to human recipients through the divinely appropriated human discourse: "The Word of God is God Himself in Holy Scripture" (Barth, 1956, p. 457). Theologians of the so-called New Hermeneutic go further to argue that the word of God is an event of personal encounter (a "language-" or "word-event"), occasioned by the reading or preaching of Scripture (Vanhoozer, 2005).

That is to say, through the communication of God's Word (logos and rhema) comes the message of the Gospel (euangelion). As an individual listens to Word and Gospel, God as Holy Spirit (pneuma) moves and works in people's hearts and minds. It is

through the regenerative work of the Spirit that the listener is able to then respond to this message in repentance and faith. Such a concept is sometimes called monergism.

Gospel preaching, therefore, is one of the most important facets of the principle of accommodation, for in it humankind can experience God's redemptive power through the work of the Spirit. Through this monergistic activity, God is able to effectively cause people to come to faith. Preaching is therefore one of the ways the people through which human can experience God and His self-revelation. The hearer experiences God as Trinity:

- i. The message, or word, is given to us by the Father.
- ii. The message is about what the Son, Jesus, came to do.
- iii. The message is only able to be received through the work of the Holy Spirit.

And the Church, through her preaching, witnesses to the word. Thus the preaching the Gospel becomes the prime concern of the Church, for it is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). It explains the central role of the scripture both in liturgical and private life of the Christian. It explains the spirit of the New Testament; it explains the mission of the Church both as a witnessing Church, called to listen to the word of God, and also to witness to that very word. In sum, as the Scriptures represent God's accommodation of revelation to human capacity, so also does proclamation and preaching represent God's accommodation of revelation through the Church to the world.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. From your understanding of the principle of accommodation, do you think that the Church has any role to play in making the word of God manifest in the world?
2. How does preaching fit into our explanation of accommodation?

### **3.2 Progressive Revelation**

Progressive revelation has to do with the nature of God's revelation. It simply means that God's revelation of his redemptive plan for humanity, revelation of himself, and his will is gradual. It means to say that later developments weigh heavier than earlier ones and later developments were much clearer and much more vivid than earlier ones. God gradually lifted the veil over his plans and reveals them in stages. It also means that the earlier revelations were in anticipative or transient forms while the later were in the final and fulfilled forms.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6**

What was the most important thing that the people in the Old Testament anticipated?

### 3.2.1 The Maternal Promise

Progressive revelation is understood better by examples and there are many examples in the Bible. . Let us take a look at the redemption plan for humanity. We find the plan beginning in Gen.3:15. This is known as the maternal promise. This maternal promise already contains in principle the whole plan of salvation. This plan is then gradually developed by means of types, symbols, ceremonial laws and Scriptural teachings. The whole Old Testament points forward to Christ. The New Testament tells us of the great redemptive act of Christ in the four records of the gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). The book of Acts of the Apostles tells us of the early history of the Church. The Epistles explain the great redemptive acts of Christ (Death and resurrection). The book of Revelation portrays for us the final consummation of the great salvation. Therefore, we see that the plan of redemption is progressive in the Bible.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7**

1. What can you see in Gen. 3:15 that marks the beginning of God's plan for salvation?
2. Mention a few types and a few symbols that form part of God's plan of salvation.

### 3.2.2 The Birth of Jesus Christ

Related to this is the birth of Christ. Again Gen. 3:15 mentions the fact that a savior will be born. Moses talks about it in Deut. 18. The promise is revealed to Abraham. Among the prophets it became clear that he will be born from the tribe of Judah from the lineage of David. Isaiah tells us that Christ will be born by a virgin and Micah tells us that Christ will be born in Bethlehem. In the New Testament the event itself took place. Christ was born by a named virgin in Bethlehem the city of David.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8**

1. In what way what the birth of Christ revealed to Abraham? Read Gen. 12: 2, 3.
2. Read Isaiah 7: 10-14 and summarize the virgin birth story recorded there.
3. Do you see any similarities between that story and the one of Jesus Christ.

### 3.2.3The Sacrificial System

The Old Testament sacrifices were clearly pointing to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Various sacrifices were offered in the Old Testament. There were daily sacrifices offered in the court. Incense were offered twice daily in the outer tent while the high priest offered an animal sacrifice once a year in the holy of holies (Heb. 9:1-10). Sacrifices were to achieve forgiveness and atonement for sinners. In the New Testament, Christ offered an atoning sacrifice once and for all. His sacrifice brought an end to the sacrificial system and marked a fulfilled of the whole idea behind sacrifices.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 9**

1. What is the event in Christ's life that is considered his sacrifice?
2. Read Hebrews 7:11-26 and make a comparative chart of the Old Priests and their

sacrifices with that of Christ.

### 3.2.4 Sermons on the Mount

Sermon on the Mount portrays development of various doctrines and teachings. Christ is here taking the disciples and the new Christian community to another plane. By Christ saying, “You have heard it was said to the men of old...but I say to you” (Matt. 5: 21, 27, 33, 38, 43), he was making statement of the essence of the doctrine to replace earlier usage and understanding. It is clear from biblical history that marriage for example has undergone much development. When there were few people on earth people married their close relatives as the population increased abolished. The issue of how many wives one has to marry has also undergone development in the Bible. Likewise the issue of divorce.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 10**

Read Mat. 5: 31-32 and show the development of divorce.

Read again Matthew 5 -7 and list the teachings and the doctrines that Christ gave them new interpretation

### 3.2.5 The Doctrine of Resurrection

The doctrine of resurrection is also found in the Old Testament, however, the meaning, anticipation, and better understanding of the doctrine is found in the New Testament. Few verses in Psalms make references to the doctrine without mentioning it by name. The Old Testament saints are expecting deliverance from death or sheol. David says “But God will redeem my life from the grave, he will surely take me to himself” (Ps. 49:15). In Ps.17:15), the Psalmist is confident that he will be in the presence of God when he awakes. “As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with beholding thy form.” All these verses do not clearly affirm bodily resurrection. In another verse (Ps. 16: 8-10), David is talking about the assurance of salvation. Peter and Paul quote this passage in Acts and interpret it as a prediction of Christ’s resurrection.

The first to allude to bodily resurrection is Isaiah. “But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning, the earth will give birth to her dead” (Isaiah 26:19). Prophet Daniel goes further and talks about resurrection of believers and unbelievers and the fate of each group. Then we have the vivid version of the dry bones by Ezekiel showing the process of resurrection (Ezek.37).

Jesus and the New Testament testified, witnessed, and taught the resurrection. When Jesus was addressing the Sadducees who denied the resurrection of the dead, he made it clear that they deny it because of their lack of knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures. “Now about the dead raising, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob?’ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Mark 12:24-27). The writer of Hebrews applauded Abraham for believing that God has the ability to raise the dead (Heb.11:29). In the Gospels the resurrection of Christ and

others happened. The Epistles move beyond the witness of resurrection to the importance of it to the Christian faith.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 11**

1. Describe the process of resurrection found in Ezek. 37.
2. Read 1 Corinthians 15 and note the importance of the doctrine of resurrection to believers.

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The discussion of the principle of accommodation and progressive revelation are meant to help you understand the biblical materials better. The use of human language to describe God does not affect God's dignity nor make him equal with humanity. These things are just metaphors and attempt to describe what God means to us or we wish him to be for us. Progressive revelation on the other hand shows God's wisdom in dealing with feeble humans.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit we have surveyed the methods of God's revelation. Again the methods show us the nature of God and that of humanity as well as God's love and desire to have communion with humanity. It is because of this love and desire that God has chosen to lower himself to human level. In revealing himself to us, God used the language and adopt the methods that are appropriate and suit our understanding.

### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. What do we mean by the principle of accommodation?
2. Discuss the maternal promise.
3. Narrate the progressive revelation of the birth of Jesus Christ.
4. Beginning from the Old Testament, discuss how God gradually disclosed the doctrine of resurrection

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**MODULE 3: OTHER MEANS OF REVELATION: ATTRIBUTES, NAMES AND IMAGES**

Unit 1: Classification of the Attributes of God

Unit 2: Attributes belonging to the Essence and Existence of God

Unit 3: Attributes Relating to God's Life

Unit 4: Names of God

Unit 5: Images of God

**UNIT 1: CLASSIFICATION OF THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD****CONTENTS**

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Definition of Attributes
3.2	Incommunicable and Communicable Attributes of God
3.3	Absolute and Relative Attributes of God
3.4	Natural and Moral Attributes of God
3.5	Immanent or Intransitive and Eminent or Transitive
3.6	Explanation of Immanent and Transcendent
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit continues with another important aspect of God's revelation called the attributes of God. Attributes tell us who God is and how he relates to his creatures. Attributes tell us that God exists apart from humanity and the world. He has qualities that humans do not have and has freely chosen to share some of the qualities with human beings. The implication of this is that God wants human beings to be like him in some measure. This is why he created man in his image. God has many attributes and we will not be able to discuss all of them here. This unit will attempt to classify. The classification here is by no means exhaustive. You may meet different classifications in other books.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define God through his attributes
- list the qualities or characteristic of God
- write out the qualities that we share with God and those that God does not share with us
- list the ways in which God relates to humanity
- identify the moral and non-moral qualities of God
- explain God's transcendence and immanence

**3.0 MAIN CONTENT****3.1 Definition of Attributes**

Besides what is revealed in the names, the Bible also reveals other characteristics of God. These characteristics are usually called **the divine attributes**. Some of these

attributes are found in a weaker form in human beings made in the likeness of God. Others belong to God alone. Attributes of God are qualities of God which constitute what he is; they are characteristics of his nature, - permanent qualities of God – objective characteristics – part of his very nature, his being, his essence.

It is based on the attributes that the Westminster Catechism defines God by saying “God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

The Westminster Catechism is the statement of faith of the Presbyterian Church. What is the confessional document of your Church?

#### **Classification of Attributes**

Many scholars have attempted the classification of the attributes of God. Below is a discussion of some of the classifications.

#### 3.2 Incommunicable and Communicable Attributes

The incommunicable attributes are those that find no analogy in creatures. These are the ones that God has to himself alone and does not share with humans. They include self-existence, infinity, immutability, oneness, simplicity, immensity, etc. The communicable attributes are those that find analogy in the creatures. These are the qualities that God has given to us too, even though not in the measure they are found in Him. To some extent, as Christians, we are to strive at them. For example holiness, righteousness, mercy, goodness, spirituality, intellectuality, etc.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

List any other quality of God that you think men share to some extent.

#### 3.3 Absolute and Relative

Absolute refers to the essence of God as considered in itself. God is in himself, apart from others. God is the absolute being and is the ultimate ground of existence. He is the infinite one, who does not exist in any necessary relations, because he is self-sufficient; but He is also relative. For He can freely and does freely enter into various relationships with His creatures. Absolute attributes include self-existence, immensity and eternity. Relative includes omnipresence and omniscience, God is everywhere with us, knows and sees whatever we do.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

List the kinds of relationships you think God has with his creatures.

#### 3.4 Natural and Moral

Natural belongs to the very constitutional nature of God, that these are original in God. Such as self-existence, simplicity, infinity etc. Moral refers to those that qualify God as a moral being. Such as truth, goodness, mercy, justice, holiness etc. Because of the several objections raised in connection with the word Natural (That all the attributes are original in God) others prefer to call them moral and non-moral attributes.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

1. Who can you classify as a moral being?
2. In what ways does your ethnic group show their morality?

#### 3.5 Immanent or Intransitive and Eminent or Transitive

Immanent refers to those that do not go forth and operate outside of the divine essence, but remain immanent – i.e. spreading only within the Godhead. There are immensity, simplicity, eternity etc. Immanent refers to those that go forth and produce effects eternal to God such as omnipotent, benevolence, justice, etc.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

What is the importance of attributes like omnipotence and omnipresence of God to us?

#### 3.6 Explanation of Immanent and Transcendent

Other terms which are used to describe God are Immanent and Transcendent. Transcendent – God is distinct; he is separated from the world, he is exalted and independent of the creation. In simple terms God maintains a distance from his creation and He is superior to it in many significant ways. God is sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up – Isaiah 6:1-5; 55:8-9; 57:15; Ps. 113:3-6; John 8:23.

Immanent – God's presence and activity in nature, humanity and history. He is universally and providentially involved. Immanent means nearness – God is immanent in the lives of his people, God dwells in them as his holy temples. Christians become more like God in thoughts and actions as they continue to live in his presence. On the other hand, God is present to the unrighteous in a different way. Jer. 23:24 says he is everywhere in the universe. Paul says "In him we live, move and have our being" (Acts 17:27, 28). It should be noted that any extreme position on any of these two terms is very dangerous and leads to heresy.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

1. In this study, we have mentioned two views that identify God with the creation. What are these views?
2. Read Isaiah 55: 8-9 and note down the ways that God is different from his creation

**4.0 CONCLUSION**

In the study of the attributes of God we see the nature of God, the way humanity has to approach him, and how we should live our lives. The attributes teach us that God is far removed from us yet he is near and approachable. He is involved in the activities of this world, he is in control of the history, and his presence is felt in human lives. This is against Deism which we have described earlier in this study.

**5.0 SUMMARY**

Human beings understand things better when they are able to define them. Attributes are definitions of God. They tell us who He is and how He relates to His creatures. The classification of the attributes in the unit is to help you see the dual nature of God. The attributes tell us that God does not need the creation for Him to exist because He existed when there was no creation. His relationship with us is voluntary.

**6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. What do you understand by communicable and incommunicable attributes of God?
2. Attempt the explanation of immanent and transcendent.

**7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

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**UNIT 2: ATTRIBUTES RELATING TO GOD'S ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE****CONTENTS**

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Immutability
3.2	Infinity
3.3	Eternity
3.4	Self-sufficient (Independence)
3.5	Spirituality
3.6	Oneness or Unity of God
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor- Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the last unit you learnt about the attributes of God and their classification. In this

unit, we begin the explanation of each of the attributes. The unit starts with the attributes dealing with God's essence and existence. Attributes under this category tell us that God is devoid of change, has no limitations; He is timeless, independent, not material and has unity of being and purpose. From them you can see that there is no one like God. They also show us our dependence on God, knowledge of who we are and the things we do, and that humans are nothing before God and thereby humbling us before God.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discover the un-changing nature of God
- identify the attribute that testifies to the non-limitation of God
- explain the real meaning of eternity
- write the difference between God's independence and human independence
- explain what we mean by the oneness of God.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Immutability

God is devoid of change. He is immortal, perfection in his being, purpose and promises. His knowledge and plans, moral principles remain forever the same. Improvement and deterioration are not found in God. Ex. 3:14; Psalms. 102:26 – 28; Heb. 1:11, 12; Jams. 1:17. This does not make Him an actionless God (immobility). God has entered into a relationship with human beings. Their actions sometimes change what is around him but his being remains the same. It does not also mean that what we do here does not affect God or that He does not feel it. God grieves when we sin; he is really affected by what we do. Immutability does not mean God will not correct his people – He will punish them but his plan for them is not changed. Some of the terms used of God to show change may be only anthropomorphic. He is free from growth or decay. He is the absolute being with absolute perfection. See Ex. 3:14; Ps.102: 26-28; Isa. 44:4; 48:12; Mal.3:6; Rom. 1:23; Heb. 1:11, 12; Jas.1:17.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Look into the history of the Israelites especially their journey to the Promised Land. How does this history show that God does not change?

### 3.2 Infinity

God is not limited. There are no limitations to his divine being or attributes. He is unlike anything we experience. Infinity of God can be thought of in many ways. He is not limited by the universe, not conformed to the world in power, knowledge or wisdom.

**Space** – We cannot limit God to a particular space – we mean his

omnipresence. The question of whereness and location is not applicable because God can be found everywhere. (Ps. 139). In the same way, God can be worshipped anywhere.

**Time** – Time does not apply to God, he was before time began. We cannot ask how old he is, for he was, he is and he will be. (Ps. 90:1-2; Jude 25). God is timeless, he does not grow or develop – there are no variations in him. This is to say that God knows what is happening with us now. God is conscious of what is happening now, what happened in the past and what is going to happen. To God, one (1) day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. Very important is that God does things in a logical order.

**Knowledge and Wisdom** – His knowledge is immeasurable – Psalms. 147:5; Prov. 15:3; Matt. 10:29-30. Everything is completely transparent before God, He knows every truth, He has access to all information – Rom. 11:33; Pas. 104:24.

**Power** – Omnipotence. God can do all things which are proper objects of his power. The all-power quality of God is found in his name **El-Shaddai**. Gen. 17:1 - The Almighty God. God has power over nature, history and humans. He is able to do all things that are in accordance with his nature. This does not mean that God sins or participate in evil

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

1. The seasons of the year testify to the fact that God does things logically. What other things show that God is logical?
2. The implication of God's omnipresence means God can be worshipped anywhere. What is the implication of omniscience?

### 3.3 Eternity

Eternity means, God is timeless and exists through endless ages. Ps. 90:2; 102:12; Eph. 3:21. Things like past, present and future do not apply to him. It means He has neither beginning nor ending. He is beyond temporal limits and relations.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What is the difference between infinity and eternity?

### 3.4 Self-Sufficient (Independence)

By self –sufficient we mean God is the originator of life and He is the giver of life to all things. “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has also granted the Son life in himself” (John 5:26). Another verse that strongly supports this is Acts 17:25, 25. In it Paul says, “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not lie in shrines made by man, nor is he saved by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything.” It means God is not dependent upon his creation; rather, the whole creation is dependent upon him. The Bible testifies that he is the one that provides rain



and food for all things. He does not need the advice or counsel of anyone because His knowledge and understandings are above all he has made (Job 38: 41; Isa. 40: 12, - 14). God is independent in his work of redemption. The ultimate goal of the whole work of creation is found in God alone. He alone has the power, knows the way and is able to do it.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

1. Job chapters 38 through 40 and Isaiah chapter 40 best summarise the self-sufficiency of God. Read these passages and what the authors mean by God's self-sufficiency.
2. If God is independent in his work of redemption then it means human beings have no part to play in their salvation. Explain this.

#### 3.5 Spirituality

God is spirit not matter. He is found everywhere; he is incomplex, indivisible and unique. He has no body or physical existence. It is this spirit that was breathed in man to give him life. Part of us is spirit John 1:8; 4:24; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15-16.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Name two creatures that have spiritual bodies.

#### 3.6 Oneness or Unity of God

This attribute expresses the fullness of God's being. It is an attribute of relation. It means that even though they are three persons, yet God is one (Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:6). It also means that the attributes of God do not clash. There is no contradiction in him, in what he does, says, wills or plans. For example, God's justice does not clash with his love, nor love with punishment or election and reprobation. In God, there is complete harmonious fullness of love, mercy, justice, compassion, and omnipotence. The unity of God can be seen in his creation, all the three persons were involved in the creation, they took counsel together and it was a complete creation. God has a united plan for the world and humanity. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose."

The unity of God involves humanity in some sense too. His fullness dwells in us (Col.2:9) He wants his church to be one as it is expressed in the trinity (John 17:21) and there is unity in the final consummation In which the angels, the redeemed church and the whole creation are united to bless, honor, and glorify God (Rev. 5:13ff).

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

1. What are the ways in which you think the many churches we have today can unite and become one?

2. What is the name for those groups that are in one God

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

We have learnt from discussing the attributes of God, His abounding love and grace. While He does not need us to exist, He chose to create us and he cares for us. Many of the attributes of God such as omnipresence, omnipotent, omniscience are for human benefits. Through these he cares and protects us. Humans also benefit from attributes such as independence and oneness. They assure us that God's plan for us will not change and he will do whatever he wills.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

The set of attributes discussed in this unit show the difference that exists between God and man. They tell us that God is not like man. While God does not change, human beings change. When God is not limited by space, time, knowledge, and power, humans are. While God does not depend on anything to exist, humans depend on God, other humans and the material world to exist. In a similar way, while God is a unit, humans are made of body, soul and spirit.

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the attribute of immutability.
2. Discuss the various aspects of God infinity.
3. Compare God's independence and human independence

#### 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

- Bavick, H. (2004). Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation, Vol. 2. Translated by John Vreind. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
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### UNIT 3: ATTRIBUTES RELATING TO GOD'S LIFE

#### CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Righteousness
3.2	Justice
3.3	Love
3.4	Wisdom

3.5	Holiness
3.6	Others Attributes
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This third unit continues the discussion on individual attributes of God. Most of the attributes here are also qualities that God demands from human beings. God demands righteousness, justice, love, wisdom, holiness, truthfulness, and faithfulness. These things are things that God has and He has also given them to us in some measure. God's demand is that humans exhibit these in their relationship with Him, fellow humans, and the creation. In this unit, you will learn the way God and humans use them.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:-

- discuss the relationship between righteousness and holiness explain what holiness means according to 2 cor. 6: 14-17
- state the biblical meaning of justice
- differentiate between knowledge and wisdom.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Righteousness

Righteousness is related to the holiness of God. It has to do with moral purity. This term commands adherence to the law. God is not under any law but law is in the very nature of God and his laws are a true expression of his nature. Psalms. 19:7 – 9. God commands and does what is right; and has a positive effect on the believers who obey. He does not contradict the laws He has established. He does what is right. Measuring up to the standard of the law – Gen. 18:25; Jer. 9:24.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What do you think are the positive effects of the Law to a believer?

### 3.2 Justice

Justice has to do with God's administration of his kingdom in accordance with his law. God requires all moral agents to conform to his laws. God judges us according to the law which he has given us. He said he will punish sin and he punishes sin, the same thing applies to his promise of faithfulness and steadfast love. As a judge, he is fair; he shows no partiality or favoritism. When it is difficult for us to understand God's administration of his justice we should never conclude he is unjust (Ps. 37).

Justice of God should not be evaluated on short-term basis; it may be in this life or the life to come.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What is the difference between the Justice of God and the justice practiced by humans?

### 3.3 Love

God is love; and this means that God is eternally sharing and giving himself. God exercised love even before the creation. The persons in the Trinity love themselves. In John 14:31; Matt. 3:17, love is seen in other attributes such as benevolence, grace, mercy and persistence. In benevolence, God takes care of his people's ultimate welfare (John 3:16; Deut. 7:7-8). God cares and provides for His people. In Grace, he deals with people based on His goodness and generosity and not on their merits or worthiness. He requires nothing from us (Eph 1:5-8; 2:7-9; Titus 2:11; 3:3). God's mercy is His tender heartedness, covering compassion and concern for man. (Pas. 103:13; Matt. 9:35-36; Mark 6:34). God's love is unconditional and his patience is unlimited. Look at the life of the Israelites in Pas. 96:15; Rom. 2:4; 9:22; 1 Pet. 3:20.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

If love means sharing and giving, what then has God shared or given us to show his love to us?

### 3.4 Wisdom

Wisdom is one aspect of knowledge. While knowledge comes through studying, wisdom comes from an intuitive insight into things. Wisdom is practical but knowledge is theoretical. The wisdom of God is his intellect and has to do with the fact that he works all things to their appropriate ends. His wisdom is manifested in creation (Ps. 19:1-7; 104: 1-34); in taking care of all things (Ps. 33:10; Rom. 8: 28); and in the redemption plan and execution of it (Rom. 11:33; 1Cor.2: 7, Eph. 3: 10).

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Differentiate between wisdom and knowledge.

### 3.5 Holiness

In the Old Testament this is the most prominent reference to God. The word "Holy" means to be separated or cut from. God is absolutely distinct from all his creatures and is exalted above them in infinite majesty. In virtue of His holiness He has no

communion with sin. He also demonstrates in his moral creatures. We are also called upon to be holy, separated, cut off and withdrawn from ordinary usage (Ex. 15:11). The passage that best describes holiness is 2 Cor. 6:14 – 17.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5**

Read 2 Cor. 6: 14-17 note down what is considered holiness or un-holiness.

#### **3.6 Others**

Truth – God is consistent in all his ways. Everything he does agree with his nature. He is faithful and trustworthy (John 14:6; 17:3).

Faithfulness – He keeps his promises, he proves to be true (Num. 23:19; Ps. 89:2, 1 Thess. 5:24).

Personality – God is personal. This means, He is capable of self-determination and a responsible doer of an act. It should be noted that all the members of the trinity are persons. God has self-cognisance, will, intellect and self-determination (Exod. 3:14; Gen. 3).

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6**

List any four attributes that we have not discussed and explain them briefly.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Most of the attributes discussed in this unit fall under the communicable attributes of God. That is the ones that humans share with Him in some measure. Believers have some of this attributes in ways different from unbelievers. God requires humans to exhibit these attributes before Him and their fellow humans. Attributes of Justice, love, truth, and faithfulness are for the good of the society generally. As God relates to us in love he also wants us to relate to others and the whole creation in love.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

Some of the attributes here look similar but are not the same. The demands and expressions of each differ. For example, righteousness deals with keeping the Law. Love is about sharing with one another. Wisdom is intuition and insight while holiness means to be separated from the common/ordinary. While righteousness, justice and holiness have something to do with the law, love and wisdom do not. In another sense, we can look at love as law itself, for the Bible talks about the law of love.

#### **6.0 TUTOR- MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. What is the difference between God's righteousness and justice?
2. Show the difference between wisdom and knowledge of God.
3. Using 2 Cor. 6: 14-17, define holiness and explain this attribute of God.

#### **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

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## UNIT 4: GOD'S REVELATION IN HIS NAMES

### CONTENTS

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2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	The Meaning of God's Names
3.2	Names Relating to God's Being
3.3	Meaning of Jesus' Names
3.4	Some Prominent Names of God
3.4.1	I AM Who I AM
3.4.2	Yahweh
3.4.3	Elohim
3.4.4	El Elyon
3.4.5	El Shaddai
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Here we move from the discussion of attributes to names of God which also describe Him. Names in many cultures are very important and convey a lot of meaning. In the Bible, many of the names given to people and places have special meanings and history. They also convey authority, relationship and reputation. In the same way, names of God reveal who He is. So this unit will look at the names of God and Christ, and explain their meaning for our welfare and salvation.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the meaning of the word 'name'
- discuss the meaning and reasons of individual names and places in the bible
- define individual names of God
- state the message that the names of God convey.
- state why the Israelites were not using the name Yahweh
- identify the meanings of the names 'Christ.'

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 The meaning of God's Names

One of the ways God has revealed and expressed Himself to humanity is through His names. Our knowledge about God comes from his names. His names are identical with his nature. Usually, names are a way of human describing or talking about God in human terms or human language. The Hebrew word for name literally means sign or a distinguishing mark. The Greek and Latin words for name also mean sign. A name is a sign of a person bearing it but not a definite description of the person's history, character or occupation. Names are sensitive and the use of it may mark a change in relationship because names are linked with reputations.

Names are personal and it is usually unpleasant when one's name is garbled. A name stands for a person's honour, worth and personality. In earlier times names had transparent meaning and actually revealed the identity of the person or thing.

In the Bible, many names have meaning as well as reasons why they were given. Some of these include Eve (Gen. 3:20); Cain (Gen. 4:1); Seth (Gen.4:25); Noah (Gen. 5:29); Babel (Gen.11:9); Ishmael (Gen. 16:11); Esau and Jacob (Gen. 25:25-26); Moses (Exod. 2:10); and Jesus and Immanuel (Mat.1: 21-23). We also have many people's names changed in order to act in different capacities. Those affected in this category include Abraham (Gen. 17:5); Sarah (Gen.17:15); Israel (Gen. 32:28); Joshua (Num.13:16); Jedidiah (2 Sam.12: 25); Mara (Ruth 1.20) and Peter (Mk. 3:10).

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

1. Read the following verses Gen. 3:20; 25:25-26; and Ex. 2:10, and write down the meanings of these names.
2. Read Gen.17:5; 32:28; Ruth 1:20-22 and Mk 3:10 and find out the reason why the names of the people involved were changed.

#### 3.2 Names Relating to God's Being

What we have said above is also true about the names of God. There are links between God and his names. The names are given by God himself and are no means accidental or arbitrary. The names are part of God's revelation to mankind. His personal characters find expressions in his names such as "I Am." His names reveal his supreme concreteness and his dignity glory, honor, redeeming power, service, and relationship. He enters into relationship with human beings through his names. The names of God are God himself therefore must not be blasphemed, desecrated or used in vain. Rather they must be invoked, passed on the next generation, magnified, known, feared, exalted, sought out and sanctified.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

1. Which of the commandments is about the name of God?
2. Some of God's names reveal some relationship. Identify those names and the

relationship conveyed by them.

### 3.3 Meaning of Jesus' Names

The names of Jesus also work in the same way. They reveal his relationship and position in the Trinity his work, mission, and relationship to humanity. The names of Jesus help us not just to gain more knowledge about himself but also about God. They guarantee the truth of our knowledge of God and the benefits associated with knowing God and they tell us where to get salvation. In the Bible it is clear that salvation is given, miracles are performed, forgiveness is received, eternal life is given, we become children of God, prayers are said and heard and baptism is to be done in the name of Jesus. Some of Jesus' names include, Immanuel, Lamb of God, Lion of Judah, Savior, Messiah, Christ, Rabbi, Teacher, Master, Son of Man, Son of God, and the Lord.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

1. Which of the names of Jesus reveal his main mission in this world?
2. Briefly explain the following names in relation to the work of Jesus: Immanuel, Rabbi, Son of God, and Messiah.
3. Which of the names above reveal Jesus' relationship with the Father?

### 3.4 Some Prominent Names of God

The Bible makes it clear that God cannot be known or designated and grasped under a single name. We shall discuss a few of the prominent names of God.

#### 3.4.1 I AM Who I AM

This name means that God is the self-existent, self-sufficient and eternal. It emphasises the ontological nature of God and sets forth the faithfulness of God. (I AM (or will be) who I have been, or I will be who I will be). It connotes the reality of his being against idols, eternity and unchangeableness the constancy and certainty of his nature and word. The tense used here in Hebrew language means all times (past, present and future). Self-existent means he has no origin and he is not answerable to any one, while self-sufficient means God has no needs and depends on no one.

The name I AM, means God is who He is and he is the same yesterday, today and forever. It means God will be what he will be. For the Israelites, it means God will be what he was for their fathers; he will be that now and remain that for them. He will also be everything for his people. When he used this name for Moses, he meant also that he is not a new and strange God but the God of their fathers and the same way he was with their fathers he will be with them and the generations after. The name reveals his nature and character: He is the unchangeable, faithful, eternal and self-sufficient one. It also reveals his relationship with his people. He will not change in his grace, love and assistance to his people and will remain faithful to his promises.



### 3.4.2 Yahweh

This name is usually represented only by the consonants YHWH. It is the name that is usually represented by Jehovah. The Jews believed that God has manifested himself in this name in a special way. They refer to it as the most preeminent, glorious and proper name. The name describes the essence of God, the one who causes things to be and who bestows life. It was too sacred that they were forbidden to pronounce it. So they substituted Adonai (which means Lord or Master) for it.

**Ha-adon:** Related to Adonai is Ha-adon, which means Lord of Lords or Lord of all the earth. It refers to God as the ruler to whom all things are subject and to whom humans beings relate to as servants (Gen. 18:27).

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

1. In what ways are we dependent on God?
2. Give one or two examples of God's faithfulness to his promises.
3. Who are the group of worshippers that mostly identify themselves with Jehovah?
4. Summarise the things that God does under the name Yahweh

### 3.4.3 Elohim

El is the general name for God or any god. The Hebrews used the compound name **Elohim** for their God. It means the mighty one and it speaks of his majesty or plentitude (Gen. 1:26-27). The name refers to God as the strong one or the object of dread. This is a plural name for God. It is a witness to the doctrine of the Trinity and the plural also denotes God as the fullness of life and power.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

What do we mean when we say God is Plural?

### 3.4.4 El Elyon

This Hebrew name means the most high, the strongest, mighty one and the one who is exalted high above everything. This is the name Melchizedek used in Gen. 14:18. Balaam used it in Numbers 24:16 while the king of Babylon used it in Isaiah 14:14. Other passages that used this name include Mark 5: 7; Luke 1:32; Acts 16:17.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

Check the passages above and note down how this name is used.

### 3.4.5 El Shaddai

This name was used more in the time of the patriarchs (see Gen. 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; Exod.6:3; Num.24:4). It was also used by Job and Psalms and a few times by the Prophets. In the New Testament it is used in 2Cor. 5:18; Rev.4:8. The name means the Almighty God or All-sufficient God. It has the connotation of the one who bountifully supplies all things.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8

In what ways has God shown his might in history?

**4.0 CONCLUSION**

This unit looked at the general biblical use of names, particularly, the names of God and Christ. In the beginning God commanded man to name the things He has created. In the same way God revealed and continues to reveal Himself through names. These names are a testimony that man is able to describe God, His works, majesty as well as His awesomeness. The lesson we learn from the Israelites is that God can be honored or disrespect through the way we use His name. It is believed that the names of God stand for who He is.

**5.0 SUMMARY**

The way names are used and applied in the Bible is similar to the way Africans used names and apply them. As you have learnt, names of God express relationship (Gen. 32:27-29), character and history (Gen. 25:23-25; 1 Sam. 25:25; 1 Sam. 4:21), authority (Zer. 14:24; Luke 10:17; John 17:11), reputation (Prov. 22:1; Ps. 34:3; Ezk. 20:9), and reveal the nature of God (Ex. 3:14; Judges 6:12). Some of the names reveal one aspect or nature of God more than the other, so care must be taken to study the context carefully.

**6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. In details, explain the name I AM who I AM.
2. How did the Israelites understand and use the name YAHWEH?

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**UNIT 5: GOD'S REVELATION THROUGH IMAGES****CONTENTS**

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## 7.0 References/Further Reading

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, you will learn activities of God and what humans think about Him, and also the kind of language biblical authors adopted. The biblical authors used many images in describing God and other things. As you will discover, images have impact on human thinking, worship, and behavior. To understand images, you must take note of the time, culture, and experience of the authors. The description of God using images arises out of a particular situation, need, and experience. Images are not difficult to understand but the ones foreign to our culture must be interpreted with care.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- state the important of images in understanding God
- state the power and what images can achieve
- show the difference between natural and cultural image
- discuss anthropomorphism and athropopathism
- discuss the social roles of God

**3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

## 3.1 Explanation of the Use of Images

The Bible is written in oriental style which is full of images. Both God and the biblical writer choose the use of images to tell us about God. Africans learn through images and the knowledge of images about God in the bible will help our preaching, hence through them the gospel becomes more vital and impressive. An image is a likeness of something. Like portraits, images are verbal portraits often in the form of similes or metaphors. Images interpret, but only in part – not all of the qualities of an object are to be considered in what the image represents. They depict and evoke feelings.

Images are packed with power. They focus and distil some particular facet of the life and character of God. In this way, images are like names of God – authorised and revelatory emblems of God. We ought to resist the temptation to translate images of God right away: translation dissipates some of the power and character of the image.

The images of God have enormous power to direct our worship, thought, stimulate our feelings and even alter our behaviour. They have the power to sharpen our longings and even mediate in our conversion for good or ill. The reason is that we tend to become like what we worship. Just as they have the power to portray and reveal, they also have the power to deceive and distort. So, all images could both lie and tell the truth.

Images limit themselves to some particular aspect of the character of God. In so doing, they run a risk. We have to bracket those associations and implications of an image that are not intended, e.g. “God is our rock”, does not mean God is inanimate.

Images are inevitably shaped by mind, time, culture and experience of their human authors. Else they wouldn't have meant anything to their original audience. But we live in another time and culture, and those of our human authors of scripture. Example – what did “God is my shepherd, father king or our covenant Lord” mean?

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

1. Summarise the limitations of images.
2. Check a dictionary to find out the meaning of oriental
3. What character of God are we referring to when we say God is my shepherd

### 3.2 Natural and Cultural

We refer to things that God made himself and those that are products of human culture as activities: Rock Ps. 31:2; 42:9; 92:15. Light – Ps. 27:1; I Sam. 60:1; I John 1:5; Matt. 4:16. Fire – Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29; Heb. 12:29. Water – Jer. 2:13; Ps. 42:2. Dry root – Hos. 5:12, Fortress, stronghold, tower of refuge – 2 Sam. 22:2; Ps. 13:3; 61:3; Neh. 1:7; Shield 2 Sam. 22:2. Lamp 2 Sam. 22:29; Temple – Lev. 21:22. Even animals lion – Amos 1:2; Joel 3:16, Leopard Hos. 13:7; bear Hos. 13:8 etc.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What does it mean when we say God is a dry root and water?

### 3.3 Anthropomorphism

This has to do with the realm of human beings. Note that we have discussed this in details. This is expressing the activities of God borrowed from human beings (language) God speaking in Gen. 1:3; 1:28 to Moses and the prophets. God breathing (Gen. 2:7) walking (Gen. 3:8), resting (Gen. 2:20), writing (Ex. 31:18), shooting (Ps. 64:7) and laughing (Ps. 2:4). Then God as having hands, arms, nostrils, face, mouth, voice, ear, eyes. Even as a woman or mother – Luke 15:8-10.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

1. How and for what reason does God use the following parts of the body: eyes, face, ears, and voice.
2. In what ways does God speak to us today? In addition to your answer see Heb.1: 1-3.

### 3.4 Human Personality

This can be referred to as anthropomorphism, and this has to do with mental, emotional and characters of God. These include Knowing – Gen. 3:15; I Sam. 2:3; Ps. 44:21, Remembering – Gen. 9:15, 16; 2 Kings 20:3, Regretting, Gen. 6:6; 1 Sam. 15:11, grieving, feeling, patient, gracious, loving and merciful, etc.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Group the things mentioned in the paragraph under mental and emotional qualities.

## 3.5 Social Images

Here the Bible talks about God as playing the roles of a Father- Ps. 103:3, Mother, Judge, Lord, Warrior, Archer, King, Husband, Builder, Friend, Potter, and Barber – Is. 7:20. God is also associated with the roles of Watchman and Shepherd – Isa. 42:13; Heb. 11:10; Rom. 9:21; Isa. 42:14.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

1. With the use of a Bible Concordance, find out the verses that talk about the image of God as Mother, Barber and Archer.
2. Explain the context in which these roles are attributed to God.

**4.0 CONCLUSION**

One of the most fascinating aspects of images is that they bring one close to a particular culture. They help you go into another person's culture and expose you to cultures that are not yours. Images are artistic language to paint visible pictures on our minds. In dealing with images you must seek to understand what that image meant for people at that time, avoid assumptions in the interpretation of images, and critically analyse the context.

**5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have learnt the guidelines of interpreting images and that images could both lie and tell the truth." This sentence must be taken seriously. This unit has classified images into four categories to help put them into perspective. All these images reveal God's dealing with human beings either helping or punishing. God is the God of love as well as of justice.

**6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Discuss the images of God together with their implications.
2. Discuss any two aspects of the images of God

**7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

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