

Section B: Christianity: Origins and Contemporary Expressions

The following notes have been adapted from 'Christianity: Origins & Contemporary Expressions' – Thomas Norris & Brendan Leahy (Veritas, 2004)

Please note that the following article is background information only on this topic. It in no way constitutes a sample or exemplary answer on this topic.

Part 1 The Return to Origins

Topic 1.1 The Pattern of Return

Outcomes:

- Provide two examples of the contemporary trend of returning to origins in secular and religious traditions
- In the examples above * state the purpose of returning to the founding vision * explain the effect of rediscovering the founding vision
- Briefly outline returning to origins as a pattern in Christianity in two of the following: * Céili Dé * the Mendicant Orders and their founders * Luther * the Evangelical movement in early 19th century Protestantism
- The Second Vatican Council
- Liberation Theology

Think about some of the groups we belong to...family, class, school etc. Why do we join? Why do we stay? What does it mean to belong to that group? Has belonging to the group changed me in any way?

It is important that we rediscover the energy and commitment of belonging to groups. Americans finding their roots and people tracing their family ancestry...are examples of people engaging in this search to understand the collective to which they belong and from which they hail, eg. We look back at the famine in Ireland and it influences today our attitude to suffering in the world. Ireland donated millions towards the tsunami relief fund. We seek to reconnect with our past through photos, reunions, stories told at funerals etc. Storytelling is essential. Schools have a mission statement: a summary of the core values of the organisation and its aims and objectives. The statement is comprised of statements from representatives of all members. It must be revisited and evaluated in the light of experience. It acts as a guide for checking on progress and guides us into the future. Returning to the founding vision is important for groups, but it often happens at a time of crisis. Sometimes things hang in the balance...decisions lead to a new direction. We go back to the original vision in order to go forward holding true to the original inspiring spark that gave rise to the initiative. N. Ireland Peace Process/Good Friday Agreement: politicians look back to see what they all agreed upon and examine the foundational text to plot the way forward. They go back to the text to see in it the voice of the people, most of whom voted in favour of it. The text embodies the conclusion of a journey of dialogue that led up to it so it contains the spirit, the principles and objectives that people can look to as a roadmap for how to move forward.

Local bible study groups work towards a deeper understanding of scriptures, reflecting on how scriptures speak to us today. This helps us see things in a new way and it may even challenge the church from within. Post 9/11: Christianity seeks to promote a vision of the world that is based on the realisation that we have only One God who is father to us all and that we are all brothers and sisters.

In Christianity our starting point is Jesus who is not trapped in history but is relevant to us today. It is Jesus himself more than simply his message that Christians want to give to the world. Contemporary Christianity is witnessing a new search and a discovery of how best to communicate the Christian message. We need the experience of God in order to communicate God. Karl Rahner, a German theologian, said that Christians in the 3rd millennium will be either mystic (have and be able to relate their experience of God) or they simply won't be.

The founding vision of Christianity is not based on rituals, prayers or customs but on the life that Christians are called to live. Its goal is uniting the one world family in God and for God thereby giving the world's technological and global advances a "soul". Christianity is not a religion of the book only. The Bible is the Holy book that recounts the founding vision in Christianity. But the Christian vision is accompanied by Jesus, the Visionary himself, the founder of Christianity. Christian faith is a living today reality. The Holy Spirit is the one who helps Christianity as a living religion. The Spirit has been active throughout Church history, guaranteeing our contact with the origins of the Christian story in 2 ways:

- Through sacraments and the preaching of the faith
- Through the charismatic/prophetic dimension of the Church...prophetic impulses along the Church's journey.

Throughout its history the Church community has witnessed the emergence of numerous prophetic figures who cause the gospel novelty to erupt again in each new era...Benedict, Francis and Clare of Assisi, Catherine of Sienna, Teresa of Avila, Ignatius Loyola...brought renewed contact with the Gospel.

Christian return to origins is also a movement to the future. He is drawing us, like a magnet, towards our fulfilment in Him. Jesus is the end point as well as the beginning point, the Alpha and Omega. So our return to origins is going forward to what we were originally meant to be in God's plan: totally united with the whole world reconciled in Jesus Christ. Mt 18:20 "where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them".

Return to origins as expressed in the Céili Dé movement:

"Servants of God" / Culdees began in the 8th century by Maelruain and Dudlittir, both abbots of monasteries in Tallaght and Finglas. They emerged from dissatisfaction with monastic life and reflected a disenchantment with the general practice of Christians at this time. The focus was on the renewal of the monastic tradition. It emphasised the importance of study and the hermetic life. Prayer, labour and study became the 3 profitable things of the day. Vows of poverty and perpetual chastity were taken. Sunday was respected as a day of rest and prayer. The Ceili Dé had a somewhat radical nature, e.g. setting up a monastic community at Sceilig Mhicil off the coast of Kerry. However, the Céili Dé movement was not sustainable since it was never highly structured and did not develop uniformly. This was its central weakness. It was more interested in new spirit rather than new structures. It was a current of renewal rather than a movement setting up new structures. Although critical of the laxity and secularisation they saw in the monasteries around them, they didn't establish new monasteries. They set about reforming the monastic movement from within. Tallaght and Finglas were the "Two eyes of Ireland". All of the monks there were part of Céili Dé. Céili Dé spirituality attributed great importance to the Word of God, e.g. gospels were read during mealtimes. Also important was devotion to the saints. Hagiography was important for them. They promoted recognition of Patrick as a "national" figure and encouraged devotion to him. This bore good fruits. They worked to ensure that there were more and better educated priests. They stressed the importance of following the guidance of one's "anam chara"/

soul friend. Maelruain saw this as of great importance. It was through the context of soul friendship that private confession took root in the Irish Church and later spread through Western Christendom. Christianity moved forward renewed by this wave of renewed life that had blown through the Church at that time.

Return to origins as expressed in Luther:

Martin Luther is associated with the word “reform” in the Church. Born in Eisleben, Germany and educated at Erfurt and Magdeburg. He became an Augustinian monk after an event in a storm where he prayed to St. Anne to protect him. He taught the bible at the University of Wittenburg and lectured on the Psalms and St. Paul’s letters to Romans and Galatians and also the Letter to the Hebrews. He struggled with the issue of his own salvation. This was a dark period in his life where he was acutely aware of his sinfulness. He asked how he could find a merciful God. No one could overcome the contradiction alone. He saw that instead of doing the good only out of love and with absolute selflessness, even when we do good there is ultimately always a secret tendency in us to do what we’re doing for our own good. (Romans 7:19 – I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.) We’re afflicted by a “curvature”, a turning back on ourselves that hides itself even under the most noble of motives and actions. His liberating discovery was that God ‘bends down’ towards our weakness and nothingness and recreates us on condition that we believe/abandon ourselves to him with complete trust. 1518 his famous Heidelberg Disputation: God’s love does not find (in the world) what he loves but he creates it. That makes God’s love different from ours. For him it was scripture, not Church teaching, that mattered. Hence we get three famous principles associated with Luther: sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia (scripture, faith and grace alone). He reacted against practices which he considered had no foundation in scripture and were merely manmade: indulgences, some sacraments, praying for the dead, the position of the Pope. He promoted the priesthood of all believers. His desire was to reform, not to split the Church. He outlined the foundations of his new theology in five treatises published between May and November 1520: Treatise of Good works; the Papacy at Rome; Address to the German Nobility; Babylonian Captivity of the Church; Freedom of a Christian Man. He saw the printing press as “God’s latest and best work to spread the true religion”. Pope John Paul II spoke of the need for Catholics to seek a new evaluation of the many issues raised by Luther and his message.

Topic 1.2 Jesus and his message in contemporary culture

Outcomes:

- **Give one example of an image of Jesus from two of the following:**
 - * contemporary music
 - * art
 - * film
 - and
 - * literature
- **Provide a brief analysis of these images in terms of their inspiration and relevance for contemporary culture and society**

The message of Jesus is counter cultural. Contradictory values: Greed, success, superficiality, dominance, violence versus selfless love, service, justice, peace, equality.

Jesus in contemporary art: Georges Rouault, a French artist, made the face of Jesus the main subject of his art. Rouault is considered to be one of the most important twentieth century Christian artists. He depicted Jesus among the poor and proletariat life in Paris and the destitute. His more mature paintings were icon-like. He shows that Jesus is tortured but never defeated by sin, is meek and compassionate.

A figure in modern art in Ireland is Mainie Jellett. Jellett was a believer from a Church of Ireland background, who took seriously her faith in and personal relationship with Jesus Christ, lived in an ecumenical spirit. In her painting *'The Ninth Hour'* we see the crucified Christ with John and Mary at the foot of the cross (Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery). Jesus is faceless in the painting, allowing us enter a spiritual universe. The crucified Christ was important for Jellett. She attended the commemoration of Jesus' crucifixion each Good Friday.

Jesus in contemporary film: The first 'Jesus' film was 'The Passion Play at Oberammergau' in 1898. Other well known films have followed, including:

- Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*
- Denys Arcand's *Jesus of Montreal*
- Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*
- Andrew Lloyd Weber's *Jesus Christ Superstar*
- DeMille's *King of Kings*
- Pier Paolo Pasolini's *The Gospel According to Matthew*
- Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*

Each film has its own image of Jesus, and not without controversy.

Mel Gibson's 'The Passion of the Christ': Traditional image of Jesus is used – Jesus as the suffering saviour. It is reminiscent of the Medieval Passion Play tradition. Some non scriptural sources were also used. Only brief attention is given to the resurrection. The film arose out of Gibson's neglect of his faith for eighteen years. After a retreat experience he turned to God in prayer and realised that Jesus had taken away our sins on the Cross. This conviction led to produce a film showing the redemptive, passionate love of Jesus sacrificing his life for people.

[Christ like figure in films...outsiders e.g. superman, E.T.; followers, begin work at the age of 30, a close follower betrays him, resemble/dress like Jesus at some point. See book: Roy Kinnard and Tim Daly – *Divine Images: a History of Jesus on the Screen*, 1992, Citadel Press...traces range of films depicting Jesus over past 100 years.]

Pier Paolo Pasolini – 'The Gospel According To Matthew' – is a modern classic. Pasolini was a Marxist, fascinated with Christ and his gospel of poverty. In terms of text, Pasolini's film is the purest of the Jesus films since it takes Matthew's gospel and uses this straight text throughout the film. Special effects are kept to a minimum. Hand held cameras were used to give a realistic, 'you are there' feel. Black and white cinematography was used with an inventive use of music from Back to Congolese song and Billy Holliday. Jesus was portrayed as an outcast driven by anger at social injustice. Enrique Arazoqui (Jesus role) was a leftist Spanish economics student. Christ is a stern revolutionary. The film depicts a gospel of the poor.

Jesus in contemporary literature: There are many images of Jesus available in modern literature, including: Works by Walker Percy and Flannery O' Connor (American authors), C.S. Lewis, possible Christian 'inklings' in the Harry Potter Books, and the theme of Christianity in Tolkien's trilogy – *The Lord of the Rings*. J.R.R Tolkien offers literature where faith is implied rather than imposed, suggested rather than preached. Christ is not mentioned explicitly in the trilogy of the Rings, but the reality of the Christian story is evident in the text. The theme of good versus evil is evident in the trilogy, echoing a theme of great importance in the life of Jesus. Jesus' perseverance, struggle and selflessness shine through in Frodo and Sam, representing Christian heroism. Perhaps the implicit image of Jesus in the Rings trilogy is that of defeated victor. What comes across as all important is the spiritual depth, being faithful to the end, surrender to the power of God and the development of faith, hope and love – all virtues and values of Christ that last.

The poet Patrick Kavanagh offers a sacramental image of Jesus present in the bits and pieces of everyday living. For Kavanagh, Christ is always very near to us. Jesus' presence exists in our relationships, life events and our circumstances. Jesus is not simply present in a distant spiritual sanctity. He takes seriously the Christian themes of Incarnation and Redemption and these impinge on daily living, for Kavanagh.

The contemporary challenge for the Church is to enable people to 'see' Jesus and his founding vision through the way we live, since Jesus himself told us "by this all will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another".

Part 2 The vision of Jesus in context

Topic 2.1 The impact of Rome

Outcomes:

- **Identify one way in which Roman rule impacted on each of the following: * the political system in Palestine at the time of Jesus * the social system in Palestine at the time of Jesus * the religious system in Palestine at the time of Jesus**
- **Briefly outline the responses of the following groups to Roman rule: * Zealots * Sadducees * Pharisees * Essenes**

Background: From 336 BCE to 323 BCE Alexander the Great conquered the entire known world of that time, as far as India. He took Syria, Tyre, Gaza and Egypt, founding Alexandria in 331 BCE. He also conquered the Persian Empire, which had been an ongoing threat to the Greeks. This resulted in a process known as 'Hellenization' (Hella = Greek word for 'Greece') – a diffusion of Greek language and culture. Palestine was heavily influenced by this process. Jews in Alexandria wished to translate their Old Testament Scriptures into Greek during the next century. The translation is known as the 'Septuagint' (Latin for seventy, since the translation was allegedly done by seventy learned Jews). Antiochus Epiphanes began persecuting the Jews in the second century BCE. The Temple in Jerusalem was pillaged in 170 BCE (1 Maccabees 1; 16f). There was a widespread massacre of Jews in 167 BCE, followed by the abolition of all Jewish practices. He established the cult of the Olympian god 'Zeus' in the Temple, provoking Jewish revolt from 166 to 160 BCE under Judas Maccabaeus. The Jews were heavily defeated. Nevertheless, Jewish affiliation to the land, kingship and religious identity increased. In 63 BCE the Romans (under Pompey) conquered Palestine. Roman rule was initiated, bringing order and stability – much to the relief of most people. However, the Jews were not happy. Land and religion were strongly linked in Judaism. Jews feared the threat of polytheism from Rome. Land was a sign of God's covenant with the Jews. The land and its produce belonged to God. Therefore to give its produce through taxes to Rome was being unfaithful to their God. So, paying taxes to the Romans was disagreeable to them. Roman rule challenged this fundamental belief.

The Romans never really understood the Jews. It was Roman policy to appoint native rulers in their colonies where possible. Samaria and Judea had hitherto been ruled by Herod Archelus, who was deposed after the restlessness of the people. He was a tyrannical leader, instilling fear among his subjects. Jews and Samaritans both appealed to Rome to remove him. He was deposed and a Roman governor was installed instead: Pontius Pilate, a Roman procurator, was appointed by the emperor to rule Judaea from 26-36 BCE. This was the beginning of direct rule from Rome. Direct rule was abandoned in favour of the division of Palestine into three regions. Judaea, the southern province, ruled at first by Roman prefects and later by procurators. Its capital was Caesarea. Pontius Pilate was

procurator of Judaea from 26 to 36 CE. The Northern region was Galilee. This was placed under Herod Antipater I, a native prince. Herod the Great was made King of the Jews. Jesus was born in Herod's reign. Herod died in 4 BCE. His 3 sons each got a portion of the kingdom to rule over: Palestine – Northern province of Galilee ruled by Herod Antipas (son of Herod the Great). He was a “puppet” prince – he took orders from Rome and collected Roman taxes from the Galileans. Jesus lived in Galilee at a time of considerable turmoil and political unrest. Jewish disaffection against Rome was widespread. The Roman procurator in Judaea always needed to be mindful of these tensions when thousands of Jews from Galilee arrived each year to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. To this effect, he moved to Jerusalem from Caesarea during each Passover and stationed troops in a castle overlooking the Temple courts. The central geographical region of Palestine was Samaria. Samaritans were a mixed race people. They claimed greater loyalty to Moses and the Law than the Jews themselves. Viewed as heretics and aliens by both the Galileans and Judaeans, they were truly despised. Samaritans had their own priesthood and were disconnected from the Temple in Jerusalem. Pilate ordered their massacre in 35 CE in Gerizim.

Thus the socio-economic climate of Palestine was heavily influenced by history and politics.

Power structure: The Procurator appointed and dismissed the High Priest (head of state). He represented the Jewish people before God. He had little power but he presided over the Sanhedrin – the High Council of 71 members. Then there was the Executive committee of priests and laymen, and then the scribes and Pharisees (experts on the law). The socio-political groupings were the zealots, Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Baptisers (penitential movement). These groups shared a history and belief in One True God. All worked for the Law of Moses as recorded in the Torah. They had different interpretations of this Law, in their attitudes to the Romans, in their Temple rituals and in what they believed they were called to do in their covenant with their God.

Sadducees – most powerful group in the “government” – they followed the path of least resistance. They were mainly conservatives – those who opposed radical or sudden change. The Priestly class centered on the Temple, they were the most aristocratic. They denied the afterlife. For them there was much to be gained through allegiance to the Romans. They had held positions of power and status before the arrival of the Romans and so by co-operating with the enemy they were rewarded by being allowed to maintain their positions. Attracted powerful and wealthy – interest in maintaining the status quo and power. Because the Temple was the centre of Jewish life, positions of power and status were directly connected to the Temple. Many Sadducees co-operated with the Romans in order to survive. The puppet government used by the Romans to administer the law and collect taxes among the Jews.

Pharisees – These were the most influential group, but posed no threat to the Roman Empire. They were formed after the Hellenistic reform period. They were free to follow their sacred Law as long as they paid their taxes. Did not follow militant path of zealots nor the co-operative stance of the Sadducees. Both stances threatened the survival of the Jewish people. Zealots risked death, with physical and violent ending. Sadducees risked a cultural loss of identity. Pharisees felt that the only way to ensure the survival of the chosen people of God was through the Law of Moses. Only through strict and absolute observance of this law and its rituals would the Jewish people maintain their distinct identity. This made them recognisable. ‘Their scrupulous observance of the Law was an attempt at extending the sacredness of the temple to everyday life. Motivated by a zeal for Judaism, the Pharisees developed a detailed programme of life – Sabbath observance, dietary laws and tithing – that helped Jews preserve their distinctiveness no matter where they went or what their walk of life was.’ (Norris & Leahy, p72). A whole body of Pharisaic teaching developed parallel to biblical law. Keeping holy the Sabbath was an important fundamental law upheld by the Pharisees. The national identity of the Jewish people would be forever safeguarded by the strict observance of the law. They were correct in their belief that the law was their means of survival. They did survive. The zealots and sadducees did not.

Zealots – militant, radical, violent and subversive – no place in the Sanhedrin. Active part in deliverance of God's chosen people. Duty to oppose the presence of Romans and struggle against all that was seen to challenge the Jewish

faith/state. Zealots interpreted the coming of the kingdom of God in political terms. They believed that armed revolt was essential to combat the unjust oppressors (Romans). They sought to re-establish the Davidic monarchy by force. Zealots had particular allegiance to the Maccabees and their revolt in 164 BCE – drawing on this history of violent resistance they channelled their political fears and frustrations in this direction. They harboured a deeply felt sense of injustice and frustration e.g. payment of taxes to the Romans.

Essenes – identified with the Qumran community, discovered in 1947 with the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Essenes had withdrawn from the world into a monastic type group. For them the only way to be faithful to Yahweh was to withdraw from the compromised world of first century Judea, and live a life of prayer and religious contemplation. They believed that the religious authorities had compromised with the Romans. Essenes awaited the dawning of a new age and arrival of a better world. They lived in strict isolation and waited on the intervention of God to bring about a better world. The community was highly apocalyptic in its thinking and practice. Their community was based on the expectation of an imminent establishment of the kingdom of God. They employed a rigorous code of ethics and lifestyle.

Imperial Rome was polytheistic. Emperor had divine status – he was considered to be a god. A cult arose. Alien to Jews who were monotheistic – allegiance to One God only: Yahweh. Jerusalem was a large urban area. Traditional kinship patterns associated with the past nomadic way of life soon disappeared. Traditional way of life as nomadic people was closely connected through family lines but had disappeared. Jerusalem became the religious, political and cultural centre of Judaism due to the Temple. This was the centre of religious, social and political life. Now the People of God looked to the Temple and their religious leaders for guidance on how to be faithful to the covenant. The Law of Moses was the Law of the Land in Jewish understanding.

Baptisers – They baptised people in the river Jordan, preaching penance and conversion. Baptism signified conversion as people waited for the ‘day of the Lord’. John the Baptist was among this group. Jesus was ‘baptised’ by John the Baptist, thereby affiliating himself to John’s penitential movement.

Topic 2.2 Evidence for Jesus of Nazareth

Outcomes:

- **Outline the key points in the religious evidence for Jesus from two of the following:**
 - any two of the evangelists
 - Paul
 - Josephus
- **Outline the key points in the secular evidence for Jesus from Tacitus and Pliny the Younger**
- **Evaluate the evidence according to the following criteria:**
 - primary or secondary source
 - authoritative source

Religious sources: Evangelists, Paul, Josephus.

Jesus was a flesh and blood character who lived in Palestine during the reign of first 2 Roman emperors: Augustus (Lk2:1/ and Tiberius (Lk3:1). Jn 1: 14 God’s very own son became this Jesus. God is unlimited, immortal, eternal and omnipotent. But in becoming man, Jesus, whom the gospels love to present as a shock to those who grew up with him (Lk 4:23-30), the Unlimited has joined Himself to the limited, the Immortal has become mortal, the Eternal

has intersected with time and the Omnipotent is wrapped in swaddling clothes. “Here, the impossible union of spheres of existence is actual” – T.S. Eliot. There are no primary sources for the life of Jesus. No primary sources for Socrates either! This is not unusual for ancient history. Gospels reflect some history (e.g. Jesus spoke Aramaic). Secondary sources written later. Writers may have had access to primary sources in compiling their document. Gospels are authoritative sources of information about Jesus. Historical to a certain degree. Like other biographies at that time. Mt and Lk used Mk in writing their documents. Mt and Lk share a large body of sayings of Jesus and incidents that are not found in Mk. Scholars came up with the theory of another source, which contained this information to which Mt and Lk had access. This document is known as Q. There is no copy of Q in existence. It is a theory that helps explain the differences and similarities between the synoptic gospels. John did not use Q, nor the earlier gospels, in the writing of his gospel. He drew from eyewitness accounts and other sources for the life of Jesus.

Josephus: Jewish historian. Flavius. 37 – 100 C.E. He describes Jesus as a “wise man, a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of men who receive the truth with pleasure”.

Gospels: The weight of scholarship has turned back to the original appellation of “biographies”, but of a certain kind. New research shows a very close connection between the Gospels and the format of ancient Greek and Roman biography. The Gospels are the lives of Jesus, but in this ancient sense, not as in modern autobiographical novels. Richard A. Burridge, an American scholar, shows that the majority of New Testament experts see the Gospels as genuine biographies. It takes 10 lives in ancient Greek and Roman heroes and studies them. Gospels are lives in the sense that was normative and typical in the Greco – Roman milieu. Burridge: Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus, a characteristic element of the Bios genre. Prologue of Luke (1:1-4) is an actual historiographical introduction similar to the biographical literature of the time. The subject of the Gospels is Jesus alone. The other characters revolve around him. Concentrate on last 3 years of his life, last 4 days – like Burridge’s 10 ancient biographies where the first 30 or 40 years are treated either very briefly or even omitted. In John’s Gospel, one third of the gospel is dedicated to Jesus’ final week, his farewell and his passion and death.

Formation of the Gospels:

1. Jesus’ earthly existence, words and deeds. Public ministry laid the foundation of new movement of people that surrounded him. These words and deeds, seen and heard, witnessed and experienced by many were to be the basis upon which the gospels would eventually be written.

2. Kerygma / Apostolic preaching (30 years) – Jesus’ death and resurrection; apostles went on with renewed courage to proclaim Jesus had risen from the dead. In their preaching and teaching and encouraging they told about Jesus from their first hand experience and witness. 1 Jn 1:1-3 They had been with him, seen him heard him, touched him. Holy Spirit – Pentecost. Understood everything much more clearly. They transmitted memories, sayings and stories to the community. As they communicated they also understood anew. Guided by the Holy Spirit. Apostolic preaching lasted about 30 years before a gospel was written.

3. Writing down of the Gospels: (Lk 4:1-4) – 30 years. Each evangelist wrote for a particular community. Matthew – Jewish centered community – so his gospel reflects that dimension of Jesus’ life and mission. Lk – more Gentile (non Jewish) community. This explains why episodes differ slightly. Gospels are the inspired Word of God and are therefore authoritative. Their accounts were based on the evidence of first hand witnesses. The gospels were read when Christians met for worship.

Paul: wrote 1st letter to community at Thessalonica between 49 – 51 C.E. before the gospels were written. He began writing about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus to help the newly founded Christian communities. Paul wrote to them to answer questions and to give guidance (1 Thes 4:1-2) – he encourages the followers of Jesus to live as Jesus did.

Secular sources of evidence:

Tacitus and Pliny the Younger.

A great recent scholar has claimed that “at no time was any (Roman) emperor free from anxiety about the Christian question” – C. H. Dodd: *The founder of Christianity*; London, 1971, p15.

3 Roman writers explicitly mention the Christian question in the second century: Pliny the Younger, Tacitus and Suetonius.

Pliny: Governor of Roman province of Bithynia in Asia Minor, 111 C.E.. Wrote famous letter in 112 C.E. to the emperor Trajan about some of his problems. He asked advice on how to deal with people called Christians, whom he found in the province in great numbers. Through his informants he learned that they were a clandestine society. He arrested some and brought them to trial. The resulting examination found no evidence of crimes. At worst, they were the dupes of a “degraded and extravagant superstition”. However, they refused to offer sacrifices to the emperor, being people of “inflexible obstinacy” for which they deserved punishment. He discovered some of their practices – “meeting before dawn on an appointed day and saying with one another a form of words to Christ, as if to a god”. He denounced the superstition as a “contagion spreading through villages and country till the temples were emptied of worshippers”.

Tacitus: 115 C.E. Roman historian. Hostile reporter of Jesus. Friend of Pliny’s. Engaged in writing the history of the Rome of the Emperors, the famous, “Annals”. He came to the reign of Nero (54-68C.E.) and the Great Fire of 64 C.E. in his work. Christians were scapegoated by Nero and blamed on starting the fire. So cruelly tortured that an initial public dislike began to turn to sympathy. Annals, xv, 44 – a vast multitude were convicted, not so much of firing the city as of hatred of mankind. Here we have an account from the hand of an informed author of the beginnings of Christianity in the execution of Jesus under the Roman Governor of Judea.

Suetonius corroborates the testimony of Tacitus.

The 3 Latin writers are unsympathetic in tone, but still informative of the facts.

Topic 2.3 The Teachings of Jesus and their impact on the Community

Outcomes:

- **Outline the Jewish understanding of the Kingdom of God at the time of Jesus**
- **Outline four key characteristics of the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus**
- **Provide an example of each of these characteristics from the preaching of Jesus**

Good people such as Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Edel Quinn, Maximilian Kolbe and Oscar Romero all made real connections between their words and deeds. Their witness is a source of inspiration for many. In modern times, people listen more willingly to credible witnesses than to teachers. We tend to listen to teachers who are also good witnesses. ‘The link between word and deed, the message and the action, stood out in the public life and activity of Jesus’ (Norris & Leahy, p73). This is a key factor in the authority of Jesus. ‘The peoples were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law’ (Mk 1:22). Acts 1.1 reminds us that ‘Jesus began to do and to teach’. Before asking others to live by his word, Jesus first put it into practice himself. ‘It was this harmony that was the secret of the deep impression that his presence made upon the men and women, young and old, whom he met along the roads and in the towns of first-century Palestine’ (Norris &

Leahy, p74). So the teaching of Jesus is inseparable from his identity the Son of God. The synoptic gospels all agree that the centre of Jesus' own life was the Kingdom of God. Mark's gospel immediately pronounces this concept from the outset: 'After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the good news from God. "The time has come", he said, "and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News"' (Mk 1:14-15). The Kingdom of God does not refer to a physical place and is not bound to a system of truths and commandments. Translated sometimes as the 'rule of God', it may refer to where God rules. But the various types of political and professions power seizures should caution us against the use of this particular translation. In the words of Moltmann, 'We should like to know first how God rules' (Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, London, 1994, p.8)

'Fortunately we can see how God rules in the person, the deeds and the words of Jesus: since Jesus himself is the Kingdom of God, as the Fathers of the Church loved to stress. The Kingdom of God is thus the hidden but powerful presence of God in Jesus restoring wholeness and life to humanity' (Norris & Leahy, p75).

In order to understand the concept of the Kingdom of God, Moltmann suggests a three-fold approach: 'see-judge-act' (Moltmann, p.9 f). To *see* the Kingdom of God is to look at Jesus' public ministry, since his public life is a manifestation of the Kingdom. To *judge* is to construct the correct questions about what Jesus meant. To *act* is to apply the principles of the Kingdom to our daily lives so that the Kingdom becomes part of us and we become part of the Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God in parables: Jesus used stories or comparisons from nature and human life to preach the Kingdom of God. Mk 4 contains a sequence of nature parables (the Sower, the Mustard Seed etc).

In the parable of the Sower the seed is scattered by the sower in the hope of a rich harvest. In a similar way the Word of God is spread and sown in the lives of Christians. The good soil, consisting of a generous response and time, will produce a harvest.

Lk 15 identifies the 'Lost and Found' group of parables. They consist of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Son and the Lost Coin. The finding of what was once lost brings great joy, just as the repentance of one sinner is a source of joy. These parables illustrate central themes of the Kingdom of God. In the words of Moltmann: the Kingdom 'is nothing other than God's joy at finding again the beings he created who have been lost. And what is the 'repentance' that the sinner has to perform? It is nothing other than the being-found, and the return home from exile and estrangement, the coming-alive again, and the joining in God's joy' (J. Moltmann, p.12). Lk 15:3 tells us of the complaints of the scribes and Pharisees: 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them'. To their shock, Jesus was telling them that God's love encompasses all, especially those estranged. God's mercy, goodness and love is abundant.

The Kingdom of God in the healing of the sick: Jesus demonstrated the healing power of the divine spirit in his dealings with others. Mk 1:32f tells reads: 'That evening at sundown, they brought to him all those who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered together about the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons'. The context for Jesus' healings is that they are part of the coming of the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God in the companionship of Jesus: Jesus publicly shared table-fellowship with those marginalised, such as the sinners and the tax collectors, much to the disapproval of 'respectable' people ('This man receives sinners and eats with them', Lk 15:2). Jesus clarifies his actions with reference to a proverb, the Scriptures and then the rationale underpinning his action: 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of the words: *What I want is mercy, not sacrifice* (Hosea 6.6). And indeed I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners' (Lk 9: 12-13). The Kingdom of God is thus present in mercy, and personified in Jesus. It is

communicated who all he meets, especially the marginalised. Thus the sinners, the lost and the marginalised are brought into the Kingdom of God through their transformation.

The Kingdom of God in the poor, the children and the women: Among the most defenceless and vulnerable in society were the poor, women and children. We see enormous generosity from Jesus towards these people. ‘The poor not only have nothing, they are nothing on the scales of this world’ (Norris & Leahy, p79). Jesus brought good news to the poor, including the hungry, the unemployed, the enslaved, those who had lost hope and those in suffering. ‘What Jesus brings to the poor is not primarily the aid of charitable works but the realisation of their true dignity as children of the One he called ‘Abba, Father’. In that way they could discover their indestructible worth in the eyes of the Creator (Norris & Leahy, p79). The poor are liberated to bring peace to the oppression that had enslaved them. Thus they belong to the Kingdom of God.

Jesus also affirmed the worth and dignity of women. In Mk 7:24-30 he heals the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman. He heals the woman with a haemorrhage in Mk 5:34f. He cultivates the friendship of Martha and Mary in Lk 10:38-42. He praises the poor widow in Mk: 12:41-44. Jesus offered true emancipation to women. In Jn 4 we see Jesus’ encounter with a Samaritan woman at a well. Viewed as inferior, a heretic and an adulteress she is met by Jesus in the longest recorded dialogue found in the Gospels. Jesus thus transcended cultural taboos and prejudices by conversing with this woman, demonstrating a somewhat revolutionary stance that was most certainly counter-cultural. For Jesus, all are created ‘in the image and likeness of God’ (Gen 1:27). ‘Jesus destroys the many forms of religious and cultural apartheid that set persons and groupings of persons in opposition to one another and to his Father’s design’ (Norris & Leahy, p.80). His mission and desire is encapsulated in Jn 17:21: ‘May they all be one’. Children at the time of Jesus were viewed as merely defective adults. Fondness for them was simply unintelligible. While the disciples turn them away, Jesus welcomes them: ‘Let the little children alone, and do not stop them coming to me; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs’ (Mt 19:14; Mk 10:13-16; Lk 18:15-17). Jesus upholds the child as the norm for all others. This illustrates Jesus’ message that there is one Father of his children, and God is that Father. ‘The naturalness and the trust of the child best embody the indispensable dispositions for entry into the Kingdom’ (Norris & Leahy, p.81). ‘The one who brought the Kingdom of God close to us brings the poor and the children close to us too. They are his family, his people, for they too represent God’s Kingdom in this world of violence’ (J. Moltmann, p.19).

Theological clarifications:

Is the Kingdom of God present or future?

It is experienced in the present in the companionship of Jesus: where those who are lost and aimless are found, where the unjust are transformed and care for the weak, where the poor have their dignity restored, where women and children are afforded the dignity of being treated as equal children of God. Like a seed, the Kingdom begins in the tiniest of ways, and grows to have great power. It is an object of hope. ‘In that way the Kingdom involves the tension between something that exists already and still has to mature into fullness and completion’ (Norris & Leahy, p.82).

Does the Kingdom of God belong to this world or the next?

The origins of the Kingdom are not of this world. The Kingdom is **in** this world but is not **of** this world. It is a gift from the Creator of this world and it became enfleshed in the person of Jesus Christ. Yet it encompasses heaven and earth. Thus in the Our Father Jesus prayed ‘on earth as it is in heaven’.

Is the Kingdom of God exclusively the affair of God or are we also involved?

The philosopher and theologian, Eric Voegelin, points out that the great ideologies of recent centuries all derived from one aspiration: the desire to bring the Kingdom of God on earth entirely but as a purely human achievement (Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, Chicago, 1952). God would not be necessary since a Superman type figure of this world would be capable of inaugurating such an earthly kingdom (e.g. Comte, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche). There is always the danger that some Christians may be so focused on the future coming of the Kingdom that they will overlook involvement in building the earthly kingdom. Perhaps Nietzsche's conclusion that the Christian is a useless, separated, resigned person, extraneous to the progress of the world, arose from observing some Christians that were so heavenly minded that they did not devote enough time or energy to their earthly responsibilities. Although Jesus embodies the Kingdom of God, it is also the responsibility of Christians to build it.

Is the Kingdom of God a theocracy or is it union with the living God?

The term 'rule of God' is almost suggestive of theocracy. However, the accurate notion of the Kingdom of God excludes suggestions of control. Freedom is central to the Kingdom since it realises the hunger for love, truth, beauty, freedom and mystery. 'When God ventures forth to us in his Son made flesh of our flesh then there is the fullest participation of the divine in the human, and there is the correlative possibility of the human to venture into the expansive space of the divine, so that the human participates in the divine' (Norris & Leahy, p85).

There is a real urgency in welcoming the Kingdom of God, according to Jesus: 'The Kingdom of God is close at hand; repent and believe in the gospel (Mk 1:15). The Kingdom is an imperative flowing from the gift of God, an unparalleled treasure. If it is not grasped immediately it may well pass us by. This moment is therefore the time to enter the Kingdom. We can not delay, attached to what is not of God (see the story of the rich young man, Mk 10: 17-22). God comes from the eternal into the present moment. 'He is radically with us and He is radically for us' (Norris & Leahy, p.86). His future is our future. We receive this future now, when the Eternal intersects with Time. The Kingdom becomes the focus and ideal of Christian existence. In Mark's Gospel the proclamation of the Kingdom is immediately followed by the calling of the first four disciples. The vocation to discipleship is a response to the gift of God. Faith embraces this gift. 'To participate in the reign of God, then, means nothing less than undergoing 'an interior revolution'; how threatening all this is, and yet, as Jesus pointed out, unless we undergo a complete transformation we will not make any progress, spiritually speaking...' (Elizabeth-Anne Steward in *Jesus, the Holy Fool*, Franklin, Wisconsin: Sheed & Ward, 1999, p.90)

Topic 2.4 Jesus as Messiah (Not included in this book)

Part 3 The Message in Conflict

Topic 3.1 Conflict with establishment

Outcomes:

- **Identify two key elements of Jesus' person and message that were perceived as a threat to Roman imperial values**
- **Identify two key elements of Jesus' vision of renewal and restoration that threatened the Jewish religious establishment**

'They hated me without reason' (Jn 15:25). Why did Jesus encounter strong hostility and opposition, so much so that he was put to death on a cross? Paul, who once persecuted Christians, wrote: The human race has nothing to boast

about before God...(for it)...crucified the Lord of Glory' (1 Cor 1: 29; 2:8). Jesus' crucifixion, for Paul, represented the depravity of humanity.

We must be careful not to generalise by linking Jesus' death with the Jewish people. Jesus himself was Jewish, as were his apostles, early followers and his mother. The Gospels do not claim that all Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus. Instead, they clearly testify that the sinfulness of humanity underpinned Jesus' death. 'It was his confrontation with evil, which must be eradicated from all hearts, that ultimately led to his death on the Cross' (Norris & Leahy, pp 90-91).

The claims of Jesus of Nazareth:

Jesus went above the Law of his day and taught people with authority. Mk1:27 tells us that he had 'a new teaching and one proclaimed with authority'. The Sermon on the Mount in Mt 5 exemplifies this point. It contains six successive teachings following a similar pattern: 'You have learnt how it was said to our ancestors...' followed by 'But I say this to you...'. Such teaching was provocative and radical, to say the least, and was interpreted as such by the religious establishment of that time. It was perceived as threatening and undermining of the entire Jewish Law. Jesus quotes Moses in the Sermon, but only by way of correcting him. In doing so, Jesus was seen to be placing his word above that of Moses – a most challenging threat indeed, since the authority of God was understood as central to the authority of Moses. Jesus claims to proclaim God's last word, thus fulfilling the word of God in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Jesus also differed from other prophets in his speech. Prophets of old used formulas such as 'The word of the Lord came to me...'. Jesus departed from this tradition. In fact, Jesus did not distinguish between his word and God's (see Mk1:22; 27; 2:10). Jesus claimed that he was the Messiah, and that he had come not to abolish the Law but to reinterpret it. Witnesses to Jesus' preaching accused him of blasphemy since he saw himself speaking with God's voice and authority (see Mk 2:7).

Norris & Leahy (p92) point to a third reason why Jesus' behaviour was perceived as a threat: 'He linked the decision to accept the Kingdom of God specifically to the decision for or against himself, his word and his work'. Evidence for this is found in Mk 10:32-33

When Jesus says: 'Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven'. Jesus is thus claiming to embody the Kingdom of God. Jesus' calling of the twelve disciples is further evidence of his authority in action. They did not choose Jesus, for Jesus chose them. Mk 3:14 states that 'he made Twelve'. Jesus would appear to have been a mix of contradictions. He spoke with the authority of God and embodied the Kingdom of God. Yet he came as one who humbly serves, was gentle, homeless and without worldly riches.

The actions of Jesus:

If the teaching and claims of Jesus were shocking to many, his actions may be interpreted as revolutionary. He stirred up amazement in others by associating himself with the marginalised – sinners, the sick, those in the grip of evil and those affected by any type of twisted religion. He was seen as ritually unclean by the scribes and Pharisees because of his association with the sinners and outcasts. He shared table fellowship with them so show God's unconditional and expansive love and mercy. He offered a life-changing mercy and true transformation for people such as Zacchaeus the tax collector (Lk 19:1-10). Such actions provoked deep responses from the Sadducees and Pharisees. These responses included suspicion initially, and then conflict and wrath. He was accused of being a 'glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners' (Mt 11:19). Not alone was he considered by the religious establishment to be a sinner, but also a blasphemer. It has been noted that 'The charge of blasphemy

expresses not so much a rational judgment as a passionate, almost instinctive, revulsion of feeling against what seems to be a violation of sanctities. There must have been something about the way he spoke and acted which provoked this kind of revulsion in minds conditioned by background, training and habit. It was this, over and above reasoned objections to certain features of his teaching, that drove the Pharisees into the unnatural (and strictly temporary) alliance with the worldly hierarchy, whose motives for pursuing Jesus to death were quite other' (C.H. Dodd, *The Founder of Christianity*, pp78-79). In Mk 7 they challenge Jesus for his cavalier attitude to the regulations of the Mosaic Law which were added by the rabbis (the washing of hands before eating). In addition to quoting the prophet Isaiah (Is 29:13) 'This people honours me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me', he warns of the impending destruction of the Temple, the very core of Jewish religion and practice.

The outreach of Jesus:

Jesus demonstrated strong outreach towards non-Jews (e.g. Romans) and even heretics (e.g. Samaritans). This is evidenced in Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well in Jn 4. In sending the woman into the town to announce him to others, he was sending out the message that salvation comes from the Jews but is for the whole world. In Lk 7:9 we find the extraordinary faith of the Roman centurion whose son was near death. All he asked was that Jesus would give the command for a cure and that Jesus did not need to visit in person. Jesus praises the officer's faith, thereby provoking animosity among the religious establishment of his time.

Casting the fire of God on the Earth:

'I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled' (Lk 12:49). This fire is God's undying love, enfleshed in Jesus, bringing healing and mercy. Jesus is pro-active in his ministry. 'He wants to see lives changed, society remade, and history redirected according to the mysterious prototype of an eternal love that had appeared in space and in time, and walked in flesh and in blood...' (Norris & Leahy, p96). Mk 1-8 portrays Jesus as tackling the four 'plagues': sickness, sin, Satan and spoilt religion.

1. Sickness: Once he announced the Kingdom of God in Mk 1 Jesus almost immediately cures Simon Peter's mother-in-law, a leper and the sick of Capernaum. Rather than merely trying to prove a point, the healing miracles bring true freedom to those whom Jesus encounters. The effect of the miracle is that the person is freed to love and serve. The fever left Simon's mother-in-law and 'she began to wait on them' (Mk1:31).

2. Sin: Sin causes spiritual and moral paralysis, assaulting people at the core of their humanity. Mk 2 describes Jesus' cure of a paralysed man, lowered through the roof on his stretcher. He also heals/forgives him from his sins – a much greater freedom. Jesus restores the man to wholeness by offering both.

3.Satan: Jesus had many encounters with 'unclean spirits'. In Mk 5 he meets the man from Gerasa. He was possessed by evil spirits. Before the healing, the man would 'cry out and cut himself with stones' (Mk 5:5). After the miracle, he had his full senses and desired to be with Jesus (Mk 5:18), thereby showing that he was indeed in the Kingdom of God.

4. Spoilt Religion: Jesus reclaimed all that was true religion – religion given to the Patriarchs, clarified by the Prophets and applied to daily life in the Wisdom literature. In Mk 7:13 we note that the Pharisees had nullified God's Word for the sake of their legalistic tradition,

People wondered 'Who can this be?' (Mk 4:41) after the Calming of the Storm, when the wind and seas obeyed him. Jesus asks them in Mk 8:29 'Who do you say that I am?' This is followed by the Transfiguration, where Jesus is made truly manifest.

Topic 3.2 The Death and Resurrection of Jesus

Outcomes:

- **Explain why Jesus was put on trial**
- **Give an account of the sentencing and death of Jesus as a historical event**
- **Outline the faith response of Jesus' contemporaries to his suffering and death**
- **Outline the impact of the resurrection on the disciples using evidence from *the gospel accounts of the resurrection *their new understanding of Jesus and their search for suitable images *their sense of mission *their new awareness of community *their understanding of Jesus as the mediator of salvation**

'As Jesus and his mission of inaugurating the Kingdom of God progressed, so too did a gathering opposition to his message' (Norris & Leahy, p98). Jn 1:12 tells us that his own people disowned him. This must have been emotionally very painful for Jesus. He foretold three times the impending rejection he would undergo (Mk 9:31; Mk 8:31-33; Mk 10:32-34). His followers were terrified of the spectre of the cross. It represented the ultimate in degradation of the victim. The Roman orator, Cicero (104-143 CE) points to the horrid significance of death by crucifixion (Cicero, *In Verrem*, 66, 170). The Jews also feared crucifixion for the Hebrew Scriptures stated: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree' (Deut 21:23). The covenant and salvation were perceived to be beyond the one who was crucified. For the Jews and Gentiles the crucified person was seen to be damned.

Jesus had provoked consternation in claiming to be the Messiah. The Messiah was understood to be the one who would usher in the eschatological Kingdom of God. For many, the Messiah represented the political and military role of the Son of David – a part not desired by Jesus. When Jesus entered Jerusalem in Passover week and entered the Temple he again spoke with God's authority, and an apparent superiority to Moses. At the meeting of the Sanhedrin it was noted that Jesus worked signs that drew attention from the people, at the expense of the Scribes and Pharisees. It seemed likely that the Romans would intervene by attacking the Temple and Jerusalem. The High Priest, Caiaphas stated: 'it is better for one man to die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed' (Jn 11: 49-50). At the Last Supper, Jesus ordains the Twelve as his priests. This is the point of the institution of the Eucharist and of ministry in and for the Church. Judas then betrays Jesus. Judas' kiss identifies Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The first trial took place before the Sanhedrin. It had a religious function – to discredit Jesus in the eyes of Israel. It also served the function of eliminating Jesus by death. The Sanhedrin did not have the power to carry out this death – only to pronounce it. Therefore, they needed the help of the Roman Governor, Pilate, and a second trial which would convince Pilate that Jesus posed a political threat to Rome. The Sanhedrin asked Jesus two questions: Firstly, whether he was the Messiah. Jesus appeared not to use this title of himself because of its political connotations. Secondly, Caiaphas asked Jesus 'Are you the Son of God?'. Jesus replies that he is. Caiaphas tore his garment – a sign that the sin of blasphemy had been committed. The verdict was passed. He deserved to die (Mk 14:64). Due to the political overtones of Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, the priests could go to the political trial with Pilate with 'a powerful trump card: claims to be the King of the Jews' (Norris & Leahy, p103). Pilate interrogated Jesus, particularly about his 'kingship'. Jesus explains that his 'kingship' is not of this world, based on power. John's Gospel contrasts the power of love with the love of power in a subtle manner. Pilate knows that Jesus is innocent, but has him scourged at the pillar, crowned with thorns and humiliated. Then he is presented to the crowd. The canvassing of the Scribes and Pharisees persuaded the crowd to shout in favour of the release of Barabbas, the rebel zealot. Pilate pronounced the death sentence though crucifixion. Paul states in 1 Cor 2:8 'The human race has nothing to boast about to God, for it crucified the Lord of glory'.

In the past it was thought that the most painful part of the death of Jesus was the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mk 14:36-37) when Jesus asks God if it is possible to remove this cup of suffering, to do so, before submitting to the will of God. Current thinking suggests that the pinnacle of Jesus' suffering came when he cried out from the cross on Golgotha: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mk15:34). Both Mark and Matthew agree on this sentence. Mark offers it in Aramaic: *Éloi, Éloi, lama sabachtani*'- (the beginning of Psalm 22).

The Resurrection:

The central message preached by Jesus had been the Kingdom of God. His earliest followers however, focused their preaching however on the resurrection of Christ. In 1 Cor Paul states that 'If Christ has not been raised [from the dead], our preaching is useless and your believing it is useless'. The Resurrection is thus the kernel of Christian faith. He tells the early Christians in Rome that their salvation depended on their belief that God raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 10:9). The Apostles preached that the Kingdom of which Jesus had preached had in fact arrived through his resurrection and glorification. The earliest Christian creed, in 1 Cor 15:3-5 was written soon after the events of Jesus' death and resurrection. It predates Paul, who passes it on to the Christian community in Corinth. It emphasises that Jesus' resurrection reverses his death (Norris & Leahy, p109) and that both are in accordance with the scriptures. Lk's story of the two disciples' encounter with the risen Jesus on the road of Emmaus (Lk 24) is also a journey through the Old Testament. 'God fulfils his plan for humanity through the death and resurrection of his beloved Son' (Norris & Leahy, p110). The creed also mentions the eyewitnesses of the Risen Lord, including Cephas and the Twelve Apostles. Paul adds names to the list: five hundred on one occasion, the Apostle James, all the Apostles and Paul himself. For Christians the Resurrection represents a definitive no to the power of our death.

The Gospels highlight the appearances of the risen Christ and the Empty Tomb. The post-resurrection appearances may be found in the four gospels: Mk16:9-20; Mt 28:9-10, 16-20; Lk 24:13-53; Jn 20 & 21. They do not harmonise regarding time and place, yet all agree that 'the encounters with the risen Lord took place in the physical order of reality' (Norris & Leahy, p112). Jesus was seen, heard, touched and spoken to. In Lk 24 the disciples are invited to look and touch for themselves, to show that he was not a ghost. It is important to stress, however, that Jesus was not merely physically resuscitated or alive in the way that Lazarus was when he was raised from the dead (Jn11:1-43), nor Jairus' daughter (Lk 8:49-56) nor the Widow's son at Naim (Lk 7:11-17). Unlike these three, death had no power over Jesus. He was raised into a new order of being. This is a complex concept for us to grasp. The resurrection means that Jesus, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, lives always and fully in God. When Jesus appears, the witnesses fail to recognise him until there is a word or gesture from him. This is clearly evident on the road to Emmaus. It was Jesus who took the initiative by coming up and walking alongside Cleopas and his friend (probably his wife, according to St. Ambrose). They recognise Jesus during the meal in Emmaus, where Jesus blessed and broke bread with them. The story demonstrates Jesus' new way of being with us. By elevating our humanity into the realm of the eternal, the resurrection offers hope.

The four evangelists agree that on the third day after the crucifixion the tomb where Jesus was laid had been found empty. The resurrection is announced by a young man in a white robe (Mk 16:5), by two men in dazzling apparel (Lk 24:4) and by an angel (Mt 28:2). The resurrection message is associated with women. Women at that time were not permitted to be witnesses in public courts – a fact suggesting the truthfulness of these resurrection narratives. The women themselves offered various reactions. Initially they are perplexed. They soon have faith in the resurrection when the 'angelic messengers' announce that Jesus has risen. 'Once again, it is the appearances that ground faith in the resurrection' (Norris & Leahy, p115). Accusations of stealing the body (Mt 28:11-15) were circulated. It is most unlikely, of course, that the apostles would have chosen martyrdom for something they knew to be untrue.

Jesus as mediator of salvation:

The early Christian community were shocked by the death and resurrection of Jesus. The apostles had spent a great deal of time with him – listening to his preaching, observing his miracles, knowing his radiant presence. They had failed to grasp that ‘he was the only name under heaven by which they could be saved’ (Norris & Leahy, p116) and Acts 4:12 since they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. Lk’s gospel ends with Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles. The descent of the Holy Spirit is described by Luke in Acts 2. Jn 16:13 tells us that the Holy Spirit led them into the truth. Soon the early Christian community realised that Jesus was more than just a messenger from God to Israel and to human kind. The fullness of revelation had been realised in Jesus Christ. The Incarnation, the enfleshment of God in Jesus, who dwelt among us, ensured this. Pope Leo the Great (460 CE) once described it as follows: ‘the incarnation increased what was human, without lessening what was divine’, being ‘a bending down of compassion, not a lack of power’ (The Tome of Leo the Great, in Michael O’ Carroll, *Verbum Caro: An Encyclopedia on Jesus, the Christ*, Collegeville, 1982, p. 184). The Incarnation had meant that the ultimate bond between God and humanity had been realised. The language of ‘mediator’ emerged, as in the First Letter from Paul to Timothy: ‘There is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and mankind, himself a man, Christ Jesus, who sacrificed himself as a ransom for them all’ (1 Tim:2:5). God takes the initiative and moves towards us, for we cannot reach him left to our own devices. 1 Cor 11:24 speaks of a ‘new covenant’ between God and his people – a covenant sealed with Christ’s blood who had ascended to heaven. ‘This means that in Jesus the eternal Son of God descends to us, reaching into the depths of our distance from God, in order to lift us up out of our ‘lostness’ to union with his Father’ (Norris & Leahy, p117). Jesus is the one mediator between God and humankind. Jesus reveals God to humankind, and presents humankind to God.

Images and titles used to describe the risen Lord:

The death and resurrection of Jesus to be ‘Lord and Christ’ (Acts 2:36), together with the sending of the Holy Spirit, constitute the ‘Big Bang’ of God’s dealing with his Creation (ibid, p117). The Gospels and Letters contain approximately 80 titles for Jesus. These include ‘Lord’, ‘Saviour’, ‘Son of Man’, ‘Mediator’, ‘Son of God’, and ‘New Adam’. Each title in part tries to answer the question at the centre of Mk’s gospel: Who is Jesus?

A new awareness of community:

The immediate impact of the Resurrection and of Pentecost was the emergence of the early Christian community. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Protestant martyr, once noted that ‘Jesus did not rise alone: rather he rose as community, because he brought humankind with him’. Act 4:32 tells us that the first Christian community in Jerusalem were one in mind and heart, remaining faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers (Acts 2:42). This presents us with 4 sources of God. The God of Jesus is communion, therefore our relationship with Jesus is communitarian. The first Christian community lived in communion of spiritual and material possessions. Acts 4:34 tells us that ‘none of the members was ever in want’. In order to share in his Eucharistic communion they shared the humbler communion of their material goods. They were convinced of course that the risen Lord was living among them, through the Holy Spirit. Mt 18:20 sees Jesus promise that ‘where two or three are gathered in my name, I shall be there in their midst’. John’s gospel sees Jesus’ command to love one another (Jn 13: 34-35; 15:12) – love would be the hallmark of the Christian community. Jesus was no longer constrained by time or place. He could now be present everywhere and always. Just as for the early Christian communities, so too Jesus can be present today among his followers. Where there is mutual love, this reflects the Trinitarian love of the three divine Persons who love one another.

Part 4 The Formation of Christian Community

Topic 4.1 The First Christian Communities as seen through one of the writings of Paul

Outcomes:

- Give an account of an early Christian community from either Corinth, Thessalonica or Phillipi that includes:
*its geographical location * the main features of Christian belief and how that belief impacted on the lifestyle of believers * tensions within the community and any tensions with others outside the Christian community

Acts 4:32 describes how the focus of the early Christian communities was 'koinōnia' – a communion or fellowship of life in God and with each other. The love and unity which characterised these communities was not just a human achievement, but resulted from the work of the Holy Spirit. In examining the early Christian communities we want to know

- How did they grow in their understanding of Jesus
- What new meaning did they take from Jesus' death and resurrection
- How the social and cultural issues that faced the communities shaped their belief and practice in a way that still guides Christians today.

Corinth, Thessalonica and Phillipi were all communities founded by Paul. His three missionary journeys are described in the Acts of the Apostles. Paul's letters also offers insight into this theme. We note throughout his letters that 'often it was circumstances, difficulties and controversies that provided opportunities for clarifying key elements of the Christian belief' (Norris & Leahy, p122).

The first Christian community at Corinth:

Corinth was the capital city of the Roman province of Achaia. A thriving city containing temples and schools, it had been destroyed by the Romans in 146 BCE. In 44 BCE Julius Caesar had it rebuilt as a Roman colony. Many of the colonists were former slaves or freedmen. Its geographical location was good. It was a significant crossroads between East and West since it had access to the Adriatic and the Aegean seas through its ports at Lechaem and Cenchreae. This meant that it was an important trading and commercial area, so many travellers passed through Corinth. This gave it a rich economic life. Sport was a significant feature of Corinth, in particular the Isthmian games (held every second year) which were next in importance to the Olympics.

Paul had brought the Gospel to this thriving city, one that was also noteworthy for its moral decadence. Norris & Leahy suggest that 'It seems that an early enthusiasm for the Gospel among the converts in Corinth deteriorated rapidly into problems of exceptional variety and of insoluble texture' (p123). Paul wrote two letters to the community at Corinth. The first was, in general, rejected. His second letter held a different tone since he tried again to win the affections of the early followers of Christ there. Norris & Leahy suggest that the Corinthians were St. Paul's 'heartbreak community' (p123). Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half.

There were numerous and varied complex problems to be dealt with in the community at Corinth – problems that were theological, moral, liturgical, doctrinal, organisational and existential. What is clear from Paul's letters is that the Corinthians were a fledgling community who were struggling. They found it difficult to accept the apostolic structure of the early Church and were ill at ease with the prophetic, priestly and governing functions of Paul. Barbara Bowe compares the Corinthians with modern day Christians: 'We know the demons that plague such efforts to build community in our day: racial hatreds, economic differences, the clash of values and the difference in worldviews...It was no different in the time of St. Paul' ('Paul and the First Corinthians', *The Bible Today*, 35 (1997), p.268).

Disunity and deep divisions were rampant in Corinth. 1 Cor 1:11-12 tells us: ‘there are quarrels among you...each of you is saying, ‘I am for Paul’, or ‘I am for Apollos’; ‘I am for Cephas’, or ‘I am for Christ’’. Paul heard of these divisions from Chloe’s people who returned from Corinth to Ephesus, where Paul wrote his letter. ‘Paul identifies this disunity as the most open wound in this community he had evangelised’ (Norris & Leahy, p124). He even stated ‘Thank God I never baptised any of you, except Crispus and Gaius’ (see 1 Cor 1:12-14; 3:1-9). No doubt Paul’s harsh admonition made it difficult for the Corinthians to warm to him. He preached the unity of believers in agape love as a prerequisite for the health and wellbeing of the Body of Christ. He asks ‘Am I to come to you with a rod in my hand, or with love and a gentle spirit?’ (4:21). He felt the tension between him and them. Yet he remained faithful to preaching the truth of the crucified, risen and glorified Christ. 1 Cor 1:30 may be the most important line in his letter: ‘God has made him our wisdom, and in him we have our righteousness, our holiness, our liberation’. This is the truth proclaimed by Paul in such a divisive environment.

Paul calls for a radical change of mindset among the Corinthians. He reminds them that ‘Christ nailed to a cross...is the power of God and the wisdom of God’ (1 Cor 1:23-24). This was the zeal that propelled Paul on his missionary journey among them. However, Paul encountered the difficulty of dealing with two rigid mindsets, one Greek and one Jewish. ‘For the Greeks, wisdom was the reward of a long search for the meaning of life: it involved the climb up from this world towards the realms of truth and beauty in the beyond. But the crucified now exalted Christ had ‘climbed down’ to the lowest of all places, death on a cross’ (Norris & Leahy, p126). In the Jewish mindset the crucified God may have been an unusual idea. Their history reminded them of God’s great deeds – signs of divine interventions that facilitated change here on earth. It must have been a source of great sadness for Paul that the converts in Corinth failed to truly know the expansive depth of Christ’s goodness.

Paul’s letters offer clarity and direction to the Corinth community on how to deal with the issues and divisions that have arisen – in the context of the light of Christ. He also challenges them to have the Gospel truly engage with their daily lives:

Sexual immorality: (1 Cor 5) Paul says that ‘they forget that their bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit who dwells in them’ (6:19). He advocated chastity in acknowledgment of the truth of the incarnation. The whole person of Christ had been exalted, in body, soul and spirit. Fornication was a denial of this truth.

Lawsuits in pagan courts: Some Christians had taken lawsuits against each other, which were fought out in the pagan courts, causing great scandal. Paul denounces such activities.

Marriage & virginity: In chp 7 we see virginity equated to ‘marriage to the Lord’. While firmly supporting marriage and family life he also stresses the radical difference made by Christ’s resurrection on our perception of time and history and how this affects the Christian vision of marriage and virginity.

Integration of new life in Christ with the surrounding cultural practices: In particular he addressed the issue of whether it was lawful for the community in Corinth to eat the food offered to idols in pagan temples. Paul reverts to the wisdom of love on this issue and tells them that they are free to eat but instructs them not to do so if it causes scandal to others.

Freedom was an important issue for Paul. He understood freedom as ‘freedom for’, something to be exercised in favour of others, for whom Christ also died. This understanding of freedom was to inform how the Corinth community was to deal with many issues including gender issues and not causing scandal. The freedom of Christ would have allowed them to eat the foods offered in the pagan temples. But the freedom of love implied that they should avoid doing so in order to avoid scandal. ‘The less perfect in unity is better than the more perfect in disunity!’ (Norris & Leahy, p128).

Agape love was of prime importance to Paul, rather than altruistic almsgiving or the sentiment of love. Agape love was lived by Christ himself and communicated to his followers.

Social division and the Eucharist: A mini-treatise on the Eucharist is found in 1 Cor. The Eucharist creates unity, and is the Body of Christ shared in time and space. The followers of Christ, though many, become one in the Eucharist (10:17). The Eucharist implies then that Christians must live in mutual love. In 11:17-22 the practice of rich Christians looking down on the poor (in a patronising way) at celebrations of the Eucharist was scandalous. This inequality showed that they failed to see the dignity of all other members of the Body of Christ. Several wealthy Christians are mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor, and presumably these were highly influential people in the Church e.g. Gaius, Crispus, Stephanus, Erastus, Phoebe, Priscilla and Aquila. However, 1 Cor 1:26-29 indicates that most of the community at Corinth were not from the well-off (wise..powerful..noble birth). Some Christians were slaves (7:21 and 16:15). Paul also mentions some Christians as ‘those who have nothing’ (11:22). The Eucharist, Paul tells them, means that they must live in mutual love, irrespective of social class.

Gifts of the Spirit: Even these were a source of tension for the converts in Corinth. This issue spurs Paul to write his hymn to love in 1 Cor 13 (‘Love is patient and kind’ etc). Christ is that love, and the Christian community are called to prolong that love in their living. Paul instructs them ‘make love your aim’ in 14:1. They are implored not only to love, but to actually become love as part of their Christian calling.

Death and Resurrection: 1 Cor 15 offers Paul’s treatment of this theme, since some Corinthians were denying the resurrection of the dead. Paul clarifies that such a denial assumes a denial of Christ’s resurrection. He unambiguously announces ‘If Christ was not raised from the dead, your faith is in vain and you are still in your sins’ (1 Cor 15:17). Paul concludes his first letter by reminding the converts that because of the Cross and Resurrection, our humanity has been taken to the right hand of the Father. God has therefore rejected death in all its forms. As individuals and as a Christian community, followers of Christ are called ‘to share body and soul in the new life of Christ’ (Norris & Leahy, p130).

The Christian community at Corinth offered a most negative reaction to Paul’s first letter. This was a source of great anxiety and distress to Paul, who offered a second letter. Paul states: ‘How many tears I shed as I wrote it’ (2 Cor 2:4). 2 Cor may have been written at two different stages. Chps 1-9 is the first stage, whereby Paul urges forgiveness and reconciliation in the community. He stresses the splendour of the Crucified and glorified Christ as a mirror for the Corinth community. He talks about a positive portrait of the Christian life enjoyed by the Corinthians despite all kinds of suffering. However, the proud Christians in Corinth were in revolt against Paul. Thus the second stage of the letter, chps 10-13 is a long justification for Paul’s apostolic ministry. Paul must demonstrate his credentials as an authentic apostle of Christ. He does this so as to ensure he remains in vital contact with the Corinthians so that the good news, graces and sacramental gifts from Christ will reach them through him. ‘If they will no longer accept the apostolic mandate of Paul, then they will fail to receive the Lord’s own gifts’ (Norris & Leahy, p132).

Part 5: The Christian Message Today

Topic 5.1 Interpreting the message today

Outcomes:

▪ **Select one of the following to show how the teaching and work of one Christian denomination carries on the mission of Jesus**

***give an example of a contemporary Christian response to violence or intolerance or sectarianism**

***give an example of a contemporary Christian effort to create a just and inclusive society**

***give an example of a contemporary Christian vision regarding the use and sharing of the earth’s resources**

***give an example of a Christian response to death and dying**

***give an example of the structures and authority of a Christian community**

Sectarianism – Northern Ireland: Many individuals and groups have been involved in the work of reconciliation and dialogue in the face of sectarianism over the last forty years. Many cross-community projects are Christian inspired (www.community-relations.org.uk). These include Church forums, education for peace projects, and fellowship meals. One initiative is the Clonard/Fitzroy Fellowship. It promotes contact, mutual understanding, respect and witness between people from different Christian traditions in N. Irl. including the Presbyterian congregation at Fitzroy and the Roman Catholic congregation at Clonard. It was awarded the Pax Christi International Peace Prize in 1999. This group began in 1981 as an inter Church bible study and prayer group, under the inspiration of Fr. Christopher Mc Carthy (Clonard Monastery) and Rev. Newell (Minister at Fitzroy Presbyterian Church). They meet each month in each of the alternate locations. The group has evolved into a forum for dialogue for an exchange of life, news, traditions and spiritual experience – where members can learn about one another’s traditions. Its activities include a Reconciliation Service. The group represents unity in a divided Church. It aims to provide ongoing dialogue with members of groups involved in the cultural and political life of N. Irl e.g. Nationalist and Unionist politicians, Loyal orders members, GAA etc.

Violence and sectarianism have led to prejudice, hurt and painful memories in N. Irl. These can be obstacles to engagement in dialogue and outreach to different faith traditions. The real challenge facing the Churches is to ensure that the dialogue and inter-Church relations operative in official circles of the Church becomes meaningful for all Church members. There is also the difficulty of sharing in sacramental liturgy, especially the Eucharist. There are doctrinal differences between the various traditions on the Eucharist. For the Catholic Church, ‘accession to the Eucharist is appropriate to those who share in oneness of faith, worship and ecclesial life’ (Norris Leahy, p175). However, as the sacraments build unity, access to the Eucharist may be permitted for members of other Churches and ecclesial communities. Christians of other Churches are permitted to receive communion in the Catholic Church only in special circumstances, to meet a grave spiritual need.

Sectarianism may be defined as a system of ‘attitudes, actions, beliefs and structures at personal, communal, and institutional levels which always involves religion, and typically involves a negative mixing of religion and politics...which arises as a distorted expression of positive, human needs especially for belonging, identity and the free expression of difference...and is expressed in destructive patterns of relating (J. Liechty and C. Clegg, eds; ‘Moving Beyond Sectarianism’, Dublin:Columba, 2001, pp.102-103). All ecumenical initiatives attempt to move beyond sectarianism. Such initiatives attempt to promote Christian unity. Other initiatives that move beyond sectarianism include:

- ‘The Churches’ Peace Education Programme’ by The Irish Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church’s Irish Commission for Justice and Peace. This programme produces educational material and resources to promote education for mutual understanding.
- A six year research project conducted by Joseph Liechty and Cecelia Clegg of the Irish School of Ecumenics. All mainline Churches contributed to this project. Results were published in a book called ‘Moving Beyond Sectarianism’. The project examined the role of Christian religion in sectarianism in N. Irl. It enabled various groups from Catholic and Protestant parishes to address the problem of sectarianism. It interviewed many people on their experiences of sectarianism and reconciliation. Results of the project were disseminated. Training events were held to pass on skills and knowledge to address sectarianism. Churches were helped to move forward in how they dealt with sectarianism through consultation. Materials were developed by the Irish School of Ecumenics for use in a range of sectors.

- The ‘Partners in Transformation’ project was set up in 2001 by the Irish School of Ecumenics and Mediation Northern Ireland, arising out of the Liechty-Clegg project. It aims to promote peace building as a mainstream issue and not just the prerogative of an enthusiastic few. It tries to build up an accurate picture of what has been happening to date in the various peace initiatives.
- The Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI) reflects critically on the identity of Evangelical Protestantism in N. Irl.
- The ‘Churches Together of Britain and Ireland’ has an initiative called ‘Building Bridges Together’.

Creating a just and inclusive society: The Kingdom of God which was central to Jesus’ preaching involved new standards and measures. It involves continuing the mission of Jesus to create a just and inclusive society. This ranges from political to economic inclusion. The Church teaches about the dignity of the human person (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1928-48), and that human beings deserve respect. It emphasises that ‘Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that ‘everyone should look upon his neighbour (without any exception) as ‘another self’. Humans are also believed to be equal, and therefore have rights. Sinful inequalities contradict the Gospel.

Central to the Church’s social teaching is the principle of solidarity – a demand of human and Christian fraternity. The Catechism refers to solidarity of the poor among themselves, between rich and poor, among nations and peoples. ‘International solidarity is a requirement of the moral order; world peace depends in part upon this’ (1941). The growth and expansion of St. Vincent de Paul in Ireland over time indicates serious commitment to the creation of a just and inclusive society. In addition to this, CORI (Conference of Religious of Ireland) offers analysis and social critique on matters pertaining to justice / economy etc. Trócaire is an overseas agency in Ireland, set up to combat poverty and create social justice in deprived areas of the world. Established in 1973, it is the overseas development agency of the Catholic Church. Trócaire means ‘compassion / mercy’ in Irish. It draws inspiration from Scripture and the Church’s Social teaching. It is not merely an almsgiving agency, since it works collaboratively with the poor and oppressed, and is influenced by their experiences. The three main areas of Trócaire’s work are:

1. Long term development projects overseas
2. Providing relief during emergencies
3. Informing the Irish public about the underlying causes of poverty and mobilising the public to enact global change.

In 1945 Christian Aid was established. It is the overseas agency of the protestant Churches and the Anglican Communion.

In 1964 Ray Davey and others set up the Corrymeela Community – a community consisting of members from various different Christian denominations, who are committed to the healing of social, political and religious divisions that exist in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the world. Its ethic of inclusion is a highly respected initiative in Northern Ireland and beyond and is supported by members from all denominations. Some of the projects of the community include:

1. Residential twinned (Catholic / Protestant) school, youth and church projects with follow up support
2. Open residential gatherings of members from all traditions on social, cultural, political and religious themes
3. Organising learning and training projects in the fields of conflict, mediation, Christian education etc.

The meetings and open dialogue of the community projects help promote mutual respect, trust and co operation between Catholics and Protestants, thereby dispelling fear, ignorance and prejudice. Many members of the community reside throughout Ireland and elsewhere, while a core community reside in its centre in Ballycastle, Co. Antrim. Victims of injustice and violence can find sanctuary there, thus healing personal as well as social wounds.

One of the city mission agencies of the Methodist Church is the Belfast Central Mission. It seeks to express Christian faith in action through a basic respect for the dignity of the human person. It is a good example of witness teaching – striving to commend the Christian faith to others by how it responds to the needs of others. Founded by Rev. Crawford Johnson in response to the hardships of inner-city life in Belfast, it tries to meet the needs of the whole person – spiritual, physical, social and emotional. It has three congregations at Grosvenor Hall, Sandy Row and Springfield Road and is involved in various social work projects.

There are many projects run by religious orders which try to create a just and inclusive society. SPIRASI is a voluntary and intercultural humanitarian organisation under the auspices of the Holy Spirit congregation. It offers welcome to refuge seekers and supports them in the integration process, in collaboration with the host community. They offer services such as training courses, a medical programme for torture survivors, a community awareness programme and social outreach and hospitality events. Other projects run by religious orders include the Jesuit Refugee Service, the Mercy Refugee Service and the Vincentian Refugee Centre.

A Christian vision regarding the use and sharing of the earth's resources: While the sharing of the earth's resources is important, so too are their use. Ecology is the focus of much of the work done by the Columban Missionaries. A faith-inspired ecological ethic is also promoted by other orders and even the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. He has designated 1st September as a day of prayer (in the Orthodox Church) for the protection of the environment. This vision reminds people that the world is not ours to use as a matter of convenience, but is a gift from God to us. We have a duty to act responsibly by protecting creation. In 1991 the Patriarch organised an Inter-Orthodox Conference in Crete on this theme. He also convenes annual Ecological Seminars at the Monastery of the Holy Trinity on Halki Island. He sponsored a symposium in 1995 on 'Revelation and the Environment, AD 95-1995' (held on the island of Patmos) in addition to a transnational conference on the Black Sea ecological crisis. This was attended by representatives from all of the countries bordering the Black Sea. The underlying vision of such initiatives is to provide ethical direction for a new generation of awareness of the planet – an ethos that is central to the liturgical and ascetic vision of Orthodox Spirituality. On 29th June 1995 the Patriarch and Pope John Paul II signed a common declaration that appealed to everyone to make a determined effort to solve the current environmental crisis. On 8th November 1997 Patriarch Bartholomew described how the Eucharist is central to the Church's ecological concern (see www.goarch.org/patriarchate/us-visit/speeches/Address_at_Environmenta.htm). He pointed out that our life and the world is a sacrament of thanksgiving and a gift of constant communion with God on a global scale. He stated that 'At the heart of the relationship between man and environment is the relationship between human beings. As individuals we live not only in vertical relationships to God, and horizontal relationships to one another, but also as a complex web of relationships that extend throughout our lives, our cultures and the material world. Human beings and the environment form a seamless garment of existence; a complex fabric that we believe is fashioned by God.' In the Orthodox vision, humans and the world exist and participate in the life of God. Thus we must respect the world, one another and ourselves.

Genesis 1:26 reminds us that we are made 'in the image and likeness of God'. We must recognise the interdependence between ourselves and the environment. In the celebration of the Eucharist we offer the creation back to the creator in relationship to the Creator and to one another. We receive back that fullness of creation as a blessing – the living presence of God. Humans need to practice asceticism and self control, since our consumption habits lead to avarice, greed and disconnection from our deepest selves. Patriarch Bartholomew stated that 'Many human beings have come to behave as materialistic tyrants. Those that tyrannize the earth are themselves, sadly, tyrannized'. The Book of Genesis says that God gave us dominion over the earth – not domination. Norris & Leahy (p192) use the term 'new sins' to describe the many forms of environmental abuse we inflict upon the earth e.g.

causing species too become extinct, destroying the biodiversity of God's creation, stripping the earth of its natural forests, contaminating the earth's waters etc. In effect, how we treat the earth reflects how we relate to God and is also a barometer of how we view one another.

A Christian response to death and dying:

All of Christian revelation is a response to the question of dying and death. Norris & Leahy (p192) point out that 'physical death was never part of God's creative intention. It is the result of humanity's inclination to sin'. In the Book of Genesis death is introduced as a result of turning away from God. Once humanity had separated from God we entered a state of disequilibrium and became fragile to the point of death. However, in Christianity, Jesus Christ offers eternal life. Beginning in baptism, eternal life involves the journey through our whole lives to the fullness of eternal life in heaven. Death is the road that leads us on that journey to eternal life. For those who journey in Christ's salvation that eternal life in God means heaven. If we journey in a state of sin, eternal death is our destiny. In Christianity, death is seen as the separation of body and soul. The soul is the vital aspect of the human being, the 'me' and it remains after death. It is not merely a part of the human body. Death is viewed somewhat as an accomplishment in Christianity. Because of free will humans can choose whether to live in a way that will mean entering eternal life. In Catholic teaching, God offers Purgatory to people 'who die desiring heaven but are not yet ready to enter into its perfection of love' (Norris & Leahy, p193). Purgatory is not a punishment but a gift of healing and transformation so that people may achieve their full conversion to love before entering heaven. 'If at death, we are not yet fully clothed for heaven, but genuinely desire it, God gives us an opportunity to prepare' (Norris & Leahy, p194). At baptism we enter into the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. Death is the ratification of our baptism in that it is the fullness of our death to sin and entry into Christ's resurrection.

Natural death is therefore a gift of self to God, in Christian terms. Dying and death, lived as a gift of self to God and as a sharing in Christ's suffering and death, can be a last act of love before we meet God directly. The Church accompanies those who are dying with care and compassion. Three sacraments assist them:

1. the sacrament of reconciliation actualises the grace of baptism,
2. the anointing of the sick is a new confirmation – a gift of the strength of the Holy Spirit in times of illness, and
3. the Eucharist – the viaticum, 'food of immortality', is our food for the journey from this life to the next.

Many Christians devote their lives to care for the dying. These Christians may be members of religious orders, association and lay people. Saint Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity is one such religious order, caring for the destitute and dying people of all castes in Calcutta. Mother Teresa herself began by reaching out to the poorest of the poor, especially those dying on the streets. She was soon joined by others, who brought the dying people home to and cared for them. They saw Jesus especially in the poor and in those dying and abandoned. They allowed these people to die with dignity, in an atmosphere of peace and the love of Jesus all around. Mother Teresa referred to such dying people as 'Jesus in disguise'. She also said: 'It is not how much we do, but how much love we put in the doing. It is not how much we give, but how much love we put in the giving'. This love responds to the deepest needs of the dying person.

Structures and authority of the Catholic Church: Although most Catholics belong to the Latin rite of the Catholic Church, there are in total 23 Catholic rites e.g. Greek-Catholic rite, Ambrosian rite etc. Each rite has its own liturgy, sacramental discipline, canon law and spirituality. All are in full communion with the Holy See of Rome. The Catholic Church defines itself as a communion or fellowship (koinōnia) lived out by the entire People of God. The Catholic Church has two main dimensions: the institutional-hierarchical profile and the charismatic profile. The former shares a wide variety of ministries while the latter shares various ordinary and extraordinary gifts/charisms of the Holy Spirit. Both aspects of the Church are co-constitutive of the Church's nature. Both are required for the Church to be Church. It is not simply a case of a hierarchical structure: Pope, bishops, priests, deacons. There are

many other nuances to consider. (Refer to www.catholicireland.net and www.catholiccommunications.url). God is the ultimate source of authority in the Catholic Church. That is why there exists a hierarchical structure in the Church (Hierarchical means 'holy origin').

Baptism calls all Church members to continue Christ's mission as Priest, Prophet and Shepherd. Mt 28:19-20 calls on the whole Body of Christ to 'go...make disciples of all nations'. Many different charisms and ministries allow this work to be done. Many religious orders exist within the Church, each with its own governance and structure. Democratic forms are found at all levels throughout the Church, particularly so since Vatican II (1962-65). However, the Church itself is not a democracy. The Vatican document 'Lumen Gentium, 10 states that lay and ordained ministry differ from each other 'in essence, not only in degree'. Ordained ministry is not higher than lay ministry, but belongs to another realm of the gifts of the Spirit. It serves the People of God and is the means through which the Risen Christ continues to be present to the Church. The functions of the hierarchical Church are to teach, sanctify and build community. Christ acts through the instrument of the ordained ministry to enable this work. This means that despite the sinfulness of any priest, the mass he celebrates is still valid.

The Church consists of many dioceses which are linked with one another in communion with the Pope, Bishop of Rome. Each celebration of the Eucharist mentions the name of the Pope as well as the local bishop, so as to express the unity and authority of the Church. The Christ mass is celebrated each Holy Thursday morning, again expressing the unity of the diocese. The bishop, priests and deacons gather with representatives from each of the parishes in the diocese – a sign of fellowship and communion.

The hierarchical structure is more than a bureaucratic, administrative arrangement. 'It is the Catholic Church's belief that the evolution of the Church's essential structure is a divinely inspired evolution of the apostolic ministry described in the later books of the New Testament and witnessed to in the post-apostolic writings' (Norris & Leahy, p183). The notion of Apostolic succession is important in the Church. Collegiality is one of the hallmarks of the episcopate, with individual bishops all being part of a larger community of bishops. This is also true of priests. The Pope is the head of the college of bishops and the visible head of the Church on earth. The Pope is the successor of St. Peter, who was the head and spokesman of the twelve disciples. The Pope is the centre and guardian of unity in the Church. In the past, disputes were often resolved by appealing to the Bishop of Rome. Papal infallibility applies to the areas of faith and moral teaching, as divinely revealed truths. The college of bishops, with the Pope as head, exercises authority over the whole Church. The doctrine of Papal primacy is essential but how this could be exercised has many possibilities. In recent years there has been a greater emphasis on collaborative structures in the Church. Each diocese has an Episcopal council, a council of priests, a finance committee, a college of consultors and a pastoral council, a council of Episcopal vicars for religious, deaneries and parishes. Collaboration also exists within each parish structure, where each parish is encouraged to have a finance committee and a pastoral council. In terms of the role of women, they are seen to guide the Church alongside men, in a charismatic sense. Women have been appointed to key positions in the Vatican.

The Church is more than its external structures. 'The Church is essentially the realm of mutual love' (Norris & Leahy, p185). In the afterlife, there will be no need for hierarchy, charism or sacraments.

Topic 5.2 (Higher Level) Trends in Christianity

Outcomes:

- **Outline some of the key achievements and key difficulties in the search for Christian unity OR explain the ways in which two rites of Christian worship remember Jesus**
- **Explain two contemporary understandings of Jesus and name the writer with which each is associated**

Achievements and Difficulties in the Search for Christian Unity: There are four main moments of division in Christian history. The first arose in the Christological controversies in the fourth and fifth centuries. It involved mainly the Eastern Orthodox Churches e.g. Syrian Orthodox, Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches. 1054 C.E. saw a split in Christianity between East and West. Cardinal Humbert excommunicated the Patriarch Cerularius in Constantinople in 1054. The Reformation of the 1500s began with Martin Luther. This saw another division, leading to the establishment of the Evangelical Lutheran churches of Germany and Scandinavia. Reformed churches sprung from the work of Calvin and Zwingli and Knox. The Anglican Communion is linked with Henry VIII's Reformation. The Anglican Communion considers itself both Reformed and Catholic. The Church of Ireland is a member of the Anglican Communion. In the seventeenth century the Baptist and the Society of Friends emerged. The Methodist Church under John Wesley was founded in the eighteenth century. The nineteenth century saw an emphasis on the second coming of Christ, so various movements developed that developed into Churches, such as the Seventy-day Adventists. The Pentecostal revival movement grew in influence in the twentieth century. All Churches in some way try to follow Jesus' desire: 'May they all be one' (Jn 17:21). Pope John Paul II's encyclical on ecumenism stresses that to believe in Christ is to desire unity.

The Ecumenical Movement was born effectively in 1910 at the Missionary Conference in Edinburgh. Great progress has been made since then. Vatican II committed the Church to work for Christian unity. This implies the confession of one faith, a common celebration of divine worship and the fraternal harmony of the family of God. The Catholic Church sees the aim of the ecumenical movement as the full visible communion of all Christians. This unity is not the same as uniformity. Many different expressions are to be encouraged in a unity of the essential faith, worship and communion of life of the Church.

Achievements: Ecumenism operates at many different levels: globally, nationally, through local communities, movements and associations. There is a council in Rome set up by the Catholic Church, and its work is that of ecumenical dialogue. The Catholic Church engages in fourteen bi-lateral dialogues at world level. Within each diocese there is an ecumenical officer and often an ecumenical commission / committee. Episcopal conferences engage in dialogues with the Churches in their region.

The Anglican Communion also engages in many dialogues. Each national Church is committed to bi-lateral and multi-lateral dialogues. In 1966 the Anglican Churches of Scotland, Wales, England and Ireland signed the 'Porvoo Declaration' - an agreement of full communion with the Lutheran Churches of Scandinavia and the Baltics.

At an official level, ecumenical dialogue has made great progress. Many published documents talk of mutual understanding, new directions for the future and breakthroughs on theologically difficult points. The 'Lima document' was published in 1982 by the Faith and Order commission of the World Council of Churches. This was a discussion document on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry and it was a springboard for further theological reflection. Other areas of progress include:

- Dialogue carried out by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC)
- 1999 joint Lutheran Roman Catholic 'Joint Declaration on Justification'

- Recent agreed statements on doctrine between the Catholic church and some of the Ancient Eastern Churches
- Dialogues between the Catholic Church and other churches with The World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Methodist Council
- Regular meetings of Church leaders from various denominations to share news, review developments, prayer and to work on common issues. In 2001 the Conference of European Churches signed an ecumenical charter called 'Charta Oecumenica', offering guidelines for the increased co-operation among European Churches
- Ministers of different Churches are often invited to attend liturgies. Chaplains from different denominations work together in hospitals and colleges
- The controversial issue of mixed marriage has been made smoother. In the past, the Catholic partner had to sign a promise that the children would be brought up as Catholics. This has now been removed. Instead, the Catholic partner now signs a commitment to do what s/he can, within the unity of the marriage partnership, to have the children baptised and raised in the Catholic faith.
- Many religious orders, organisation and communities promote ecumenical dialogue through prayer and other projects. Ecumenical formation is conducted in the Religious Education programmes in schools and colleges.

Difficulties: Doctrinal differences continue to be a source of division between the denominations. These differences include the relationship of Scripture and Tradition, the Eucharist, Ordination as a Sacrament, the Magisterium of the Church – in particular the role of the Pope – and Mary.

There is more to unite Christians than to divide them. Despite areas of disagreement, there are still many areas of agreement. One of the key areas of difficulty is the doctrinal difference on the Eucharist, which has implications for sharing in sacramental liturgical worship.

Tensions can arise due to the slow progress of agreement. However, if ecumenism is to progress all must follow the necessary steps towards that goal. At community level ecumenical developments need time to be fully owned and received by lay people and others.

One difficulty is the risk of relativism entering into Christianity under the guise of ecumenism. Relativism would tend to disregard the differences that divide denominations, and claim that they really are of no significance and can be ignored. It is important to move forward together towards a unity of truth. 'Ecumenism is a prophetic action and never a compromise' (Norris & Leahy, p169).

Another difficulty in ecumenical dialogue is often the socio-political context. Issues of history and culture can complicate healing and forgiveness. Fears and prejudices from the past can be long-lasting and difficult to surmount.

In 1973 ecumenical dialogue progressed in Ireland through The Irish Inter Church Meeting (www.irishchurches.org) at Ballymascanlon. Since 1984, several meetings are held each year between leaders and representatives from members of the Irish Council of Churches and the Episcopal Conference of the Roman Catholic Church. Inter-Church initiatives in Ireland include the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the Annual Women's Day of Prayer, Bible study groups, education projects, ecumenical Carol services at Christmas, conferences and social initiatives. Since 1964 the annual Glenstal Ecumenical Conference has been held as well as the Greenhills Conference since 1966. The Irish School of Ecumenics was inaugurated in 1970. A degree programme in theology is now jointly taught by Edgehill Methodist College, Belfast and Mater Dei Institute, Dublin. Other notable involvement in ecumenism has come from the charismatic movement as well as the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Legion of Mary. In 2002 the Methodist Church in Ireland and the Church of Ireland signed a covenant which acknowledged what each Church held in common and undertook 'to share a common life and mission' and 'to grow

together so that unity may be visibly realised'. Pioneers and authors on ecumenism in Ireland include Michael Hurley and Eric Gallagher.

Jürgen Moltmann: Moltmann is a most influential Protestant theologian. He was a prisoner of war during World War II – an experience which inspired him to ask how we can speak of God and do theology after Auschwitz? His recognition of the horrors of war, oppression, poverty and injustice made him interested in the social and political implications of Christianity.

His theology is influenced by theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth as well as Scripture Scholars Ernst Käsemann and Gerhard von Rad, and the Jewish Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch. Moltmann has had a deep influence on liberation theology.

Eschatology is a central theme in Moltmann's theology. Like the early Christian community, he believes we need to focus again on futuristic expectations. In his book 'The Theology of Hope', he states that Christianity is eschatology and hope in the radically new future of the eschatological kingdom that allows us see the world with new vision. Because of Jesus' resurrection, sin and suffering are being transformed as we move closer to the second coming. As history moves closer to the second coming, Jesus is already coming towards us from the future. Our hope in the resurrection offers us possibilities for change in this world, and an inclination to work towards the creation of a better world. 'The eschatological dimension of our faith serves as a critique of this world's unjust structures' (Norris & Leahy, p196).

Moltmann also urges Christians to have a Christianised understanding of God. In his book, 'The Trinity and the Kingdom of God' he outlines his fear that the concept of God held by many Christians is not truly Christian, since it is a vague notion of a monarchical God figure. But God is Trinity. The divine mutual love of the Trinitarian God should inform our understanding of God. It has been revealed to us in Christ. Thus the Christian concept of God should be rooted in Christ. In light of the crucified Christ we see God's revelation. God has participated in human suffering. The centre of Christian thinking should be Jesus' cry of abandonment on the Cross (Mk 15:34). For Moltmann, God suffers and is involved in our suffering, because God is love. Other thinkers claim that God cannot suffer, and that Christ suffered in his humanity, not his divinity. He wishes to reclaim the biblical vision of God as involved in our history and also in our suffering.

The cross reminds us of the closeness of God the Father and Jesus. Moltmann seems to indicate that Jesus really was abandoned by God on the cross – it is not a case that he simply felt abandoned. There was a total empathy from Jesus with the suffering of humanity. Jesus' resurrection opens up an eschatological future for us that is beyond what we can imagine. Moltmann writes of this in 'The Way of Jesus Christ'. The resurrection opens up a new history, a new realm, a new creation that awaits the coming of Jesus at the parousia before it can fully blossom. For Moltmann, our understanding of Christ must be dynamic, not static. All of Jesus' words and actions during his life on earth were directed to God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Christology is closely linked to 'Christopraxis'. Who we profess Jesus to be and how we live and behave go hand in hand. Through living in a community of discipleship and living by love, we come to understand Christ. Moltmann sees inextricable links between a holistic Christology, soteriology (doctrine of our salvation) and ethics. The Kingdom of God weaves all three together, a kingdom that calls for liberation at all levels. Moltmann has more recently written about the concept of a 'cosmic Christ' – a notion influenced by Karl Rahner and Teilhard de Chardin. The cosmic Christ is the Logos, the Word through whom the worlds were created. This concept has obvious environmental implications.

Chiara Lubich: Lubich was the founder of the Focolare Movement as well as being a famous Christian spiritual writer. She too suffered the horrors of World War II. She and her friends discovered the Gospel in a life-changing way. Influenced by Franciscan spirituality, she and her friends discovered that the Gospel was not simply a book of consolation but also words that needed to be put into practice in a concrete way. It was relevant to every place and life situation. Through the Gospel, Lubich and others discovered the closeness of God. They came to know the presence of Jesus in the poor, the orphans, in each other as well as in the Eucharist and in the bishop. This presence and awareness created peace and joy in their hearts. They remained united in his name: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them' (Mt 18:20). They desired to live together and to live Jesus' New Commandment of love (Jn 13:34). They wanted to meet God not just as individuals but as a community, a communion based on Word, Eucharist and mutual love. Many others joined them to live this new vision of the Gospel. Soon, potential issues of division crumbled. These included nationalism and racial differences. All remained united in Christ's name. Just as the Trinity reflect the union and mutual love of Father, Son and Spirit, so too the members of the community felt that they were in some way sharing in that experience that awaits the faithful in heaven. They reflected on Jn 17:21 – 'May they all be one...so that the world may believe'. They asked Jesus to teach them how to be unity builders.

One day a priest told them that he believed that Jesus' moment of greatest suffering came when he cried out in abandonment on the cross. They began to see this as the moment then when Jesus loved the most also, since his cry included all of our 'whys'. This cry embraced and transformed our darkness and divisions and led us into the unity that Jesus shares with the Father and Spirit. 'They realised they could recognise and love Jesus crucified and forsaken in any darkness, poverty and division within themselves and in the life of their neighbours. By loving him that way they could become builders of unity' (Norris & Leahy, p201).

The spirituality of Chiara Lubich has meant new perspectives in theology and Christology. Hers is an example of lived theology. What is strongly evident in the writings of Lubich is the theme of unity: 'May they all be one' (Jn 17:21) as well as Jesus' cry on the cross 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mk 15:34). Her writings include 'The Cry', 'Secret of Unity' and 'Jesus in the Midst'. She stresses the eschatological aspect of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus. Although it is already present among us, it will be even more an experience of love and unity in heaven. It is not so much 'what' we do in this life, but 'how' we do it that really matters.

Like Moltmann, Lubich sees Christopraxis and Christology as inseparable. We only come to know Christ when we live his commandment to love, as exemplified in the Gospel. Lubich stresses the importance of the communitarian aspect of Christian living. Christianity is distinct, in her view, in that we go to God together and not just as individuals. Christianity is not simply a spiritual exercise. It must have an effect on social behaviour. Lubich was responsible for the establishment of an interdisciplinary study centre as well as many other projects in politics, economics, art and psychology, media and sport in addition to theology and philosophy.