

# PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION & ETHICS Instructions for holiday work

Independent study using journal articles and primary sources is crucial to your success and understanding at A-level. Your holiday work is to read the four articles that you have been provided with, make detailed notes about all of them and bring in your notes as evidence (first see advice below):

(1) [What do we really know about Jesus Christ?](#) Gordon Reid

*An introduction to a biblical-critical approach to studying the New Testament*

(2) [When did Jesus live and die?](#) Theo Knight

*A review of the information available to us from biblical and non-biblical sources.*

(3) [Aristotle & causes of existence](#) Jon Mayled

*An introduction to a question in philosophy, by looking at Aristotle's notions from Ancient Greece of how things come about, which have heavily influenced arguments for God*

(4) [Christianity and homosexuality](#) Jon Mayled

*An introduction to ethical thinking about homosexuality and different Christian attitudes towards it.*

## HOW SHOULD I MAKE NOTES?

You should put aside at least two hours to properly read and make notes about *each* article. Some of them are very challenging and so you need to be methodical when you come across material you don't understand. We do not expect that you will understand everything, but we do expect you to demonstrate that you have attempted to work through the ideas in the articles.

### Step 1 – START SIMPLY

- Read the introduction and concluding paragraphs first
- Take a pen/highlighter
- Quickly read the whole article
- Highlight/underline **tricky words**
- Look up and **write down definitions** on lined paper – be sure they actually make sense to you

### Step 2 - BREAK IT DOWN

- Read **one section** at a time
- Write your own **subtitle/summary for each paragraph** or short section
- Rewrite or summarise sections **in your own words** on lined paper (IMPORTANT for revision)

### Step 3 - TAKE WHAT YOU NEED

- Highlight phrases or **quotations you could use** in an exam
- Note scholar's names or key words as **research 'pointers'** – i.e. what you'd next like to know more about
- **Write down questions** you want answered, however simple (THIS IS AN IMPORTANT DISCIPLINE!)
- **Note examples** that clarify an idea for you

### Step 4 - FINALLY

- Make sure your notes are **dated and titled** – you will revise from *these* rather than going back to the original
- Create a **mind-map** or diagram summarising the article, to check and consolidate your overall learning

## BRING IN EVIDENCE OF THOROUGH NOTE-TAKING AND FURTHER RESEARCH

For each article we expect to see: the original article highlighted/underlined; a summary in your own words, key point by key point; glossary of new terms; list of 3-4 quotes for each article; questions you still have; mind-map or diagram to represent the core of what you have learned.

# WHAT DO WE REALLY KNOW ABOUT JESUS CHRIST



Christology — or the question 'Who is Jesus?' — is an essential discipline for students of the New Testament and Christian theology. **Gordon Reid** examines answers to this question

Jesus Christ was one of the most influential people in human history, but what do we really know about him? Did he really exist and, if so, was he a prophet, a religious leader, a troublemaker or the Son of God? Christology is the study of the person of Jesus Christ and his spiritual and religious significance. It is concerned with discovering who Jesus Christ actually was.

## The Jesus of history

Let's start with the historical side. What do we know of the Jesus of history? The four gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John — give detailed accounts of the life and work of Jesus but they

are not historical books as such, rather books written to encourage religious faith. Ideally, historically reliable evidence needs to come from unbiased sources other than the gospels in order for scholars to determine what can actually be known about the historical figure of Jesus — when he lived, what he did and when he died.

There is, unfortunately, very little serious and reliable historical evidence about Jesus beyond somewhat vague references from Roman and Jewish historians of the time. What we actually know about the historical Jesus can be summarised as follows:

- The Roman historian Tacitus mentioned a religious teacher called 'Christus' who had a following and was executed by Pilate.
- Pliny the Younger wrote of a religious group called 'Christians'.
- The Jewish historian Josephus in 'Antiquities of the Jews' wrote:

Jesus, a wise man, did surprising feats. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who became his disciples reported that he appeared to them three days after and that he was alive; accordingly, he was, perhaps, the Messiah.

This lack of evidence has frustrated scholars for decades and, over the years, they have tried to find out more. This search became known as the 'Quest for the Historical Jesus'. These scholars wanted to separate the historical evidence for Jesus from the religious view of Christ as a divine being, which had been developed by the Christian Church from the accounts in the gospels.

The scholars believed that if they could strip away the religious dogmas attached to Christ by the Christian Church — for example, that he was the Son of God and that he rose from the dead — then what they would be left with would be a more accurate and credible idea of who Jesus Christ actually was.

One eminent scholar, Reimarus, wrote *An Apology for the Rational Worshipper of God* (1774) in which he put forward the theory that the early Christians had altered the gospel accounts of Jesus and, in particular, had invented the notion that Jesus was the Son of God who rose from the dead. Instead, Reimarus believed, Jesus was a political leader who tried, and failed, to lead an uprising against the Romans and was executed.

Later, other scholars tried to imagine what Jesus must have been like and a number of speculative 'life of Jesus' books appeared. However, these scholars, like Reimarus, were simply guessing and had no historical evidence to back up their claims. McGrath noted in *Christian Theology — An Introduction* (2004, Blackwell): 'They certainly saw him as he had never been seen before; sadly, they believed that they saw him as he actually was.'

## Schweitzer onwards

As time went by, scholars tried new and different ways to try to gain an understanding of what the historical figure of Jesus was actually like. One of the most famous, Albert Schweitzer, argued in *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1991, OUP) that Jesus could not be known at all from the limited historical material available, and that his life could only be understood through his teaching and apocalyptic outlook. This left Schweitzer's Christ as a remote and unworldly figure.

William Wrede in *The Origin of the New Testament* (1993, Biblio-Bazaar) questioned all the historical evidence of Jesus. He argued that the gospels were a religious picture of Christ, but that the Christian Church had regarded them as historically accurate as well, even though, in his view, the evidence was both unreliable and unverifiable.

Taking this further, Martin Kahler in *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ* (1964, Augsburg Fortress Publishers) claimed that the historical facts of the life of Jesus were irrelevant to religious faith. The importance of Christ lay not in who he was, but what he did in the lives of believers — the Jesus of history was not important. The Jesus of the 'life of Jesus' movement is merely a modern example of a brainchild of the human imagination.

But this all seemed rather negative and defeatist. To counter this, Ernst Kasemann in the *New Quest for the Historical Jesus* (2010, Eerdmans) argued that it was possible that the gospels contained accurate historical information as well as theological truths about Jesus. He said it was important to see how the preaching of Jesus in the gospels supports later teachings about Jesus.

Joachim Jeremias in *The Problem of the Historical Jesus* (1974, SCM) took this a stage further by emphasising the continuity between the teaching of Jesus during his ministry and the preaching about Jesus given by the Christian Church, and in *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (1993, Penguin) E. P. Sanders listed all the facts of Jesus' life which could be regarded as true. Most interestingly, Sanders gained from these a picture of Jesus not as the Son of God, but as a Jewish holy man who preached about the love and kingdom of God. But beyond that, Sanders said, nothing

Martin Kahler... claimed that the historical facts of the life of Jesus were irrelevant to religious faith

WJEC: RS3 CHR: Studies in Christianity A2  
OCR: G575 AS  
Developments in Christian Theology  
Edexcel: AS 6RS01 Area D

could be known for certain — Jesus may or may not have had disciples, or performed miracles, and there is insufficient evidence to know if Jesus was crucified and resurrected or not.

Most recently, John Crossan in *The Historical Jesus* (1993, Harper) claimed that Jesus was just a Jewish teacher who tried to break down social conventions and, in the same way, Geza Vermes in *Jesus the Jew* (2001, SCM) saw the historical Jesus as a Jewish holy man whose message was misunderstood by his fellow Jews. Indeed, in 1985, the Jewish Seminar group of 150 biblical scholars announced, somewhat reluctantly, that the evidence pointed to the historical Jesus as being simply a Jewish teacher and religious man but not the Son of God.

So has the quest for the historical Jesus brought us any closer to knowing what Jesus was really like? Arguably, there is simply not enough reliable historical evidence to come to any firm conclusions.

So, is there another way in which we might find out what the real Jesus Christ was actually like? Some have argued that the answer lies in studying the religious figure of Jesus.

### The Christ of faith

The 'Christ of faith' is a term used by those who see the importance of the life of Jesus not in historical terms, but in terms of religious belief and faith. Those who adopt this view claim that the historical facts concerning the life of Jesus are largely irrelevant as there are so few of them. They claim that Jesus Christ can only really be known by viewing his life and teaching through the perspective of religious faith, taking the evidence of the gospels, which show Jesus Christ not as just a good man, but as divine — the Son of God, who has miraculous powers and, through his death and resurrection from the dead, can bring salvation and eternal life to all who believe in him. Thus, in John's Gospel it clearly states that Jesus Christ was God in human form (incarnate).

'...the Word was God.' (John 1:1)

'...anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.' (John 14:9)

'My Lord and my God!' (John 20:20)

Indeed, it was this claim to be God in human form that led the Jewish authorities to call for Christ's execution: 'For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God.' (John 5:18)

Certainly the early Christians accepted the accuracy of the gospel accounts and believed that Jesus Christ was God in human form and was therefore an object of worship. But what did this really mean? Did God actually become human, or was this simply a symbolic picture? This caused a controversy that has raged down the centuries — just how 'human' was Jesus Christ?

One early scholarly group, the Docetists, argued that Christ was God and that he took human form, but only in a symbolic sense. Saturninus of Antioch declared: 'the Saviour was unborn, incorporeal and without form...he was a human being in appearance only.' However, other early scholars argued that there was no symbolism and that Christ really was God in full human form. Ignatius of Antioch in his 'Letter to the Trallians' wrote that Jesus was: 'truly born, who ate and drank, who was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and truly died, in full view of heaven, earth and hell, and who was truly raised from the dead.'

In the Nicene Creed of 381 CE the Christian Church confirmed the view that Christ really was God in human form, and in 451 CE the Council of Chalcedon declared that Jesus Christ was truly human and truly divine:

We all with one voice confess our Lord Jesus Christ to be one and the same Son, perfect in divinity and humanity, truly God and truly human, consisting of a rational soul and a body, being of one substance with the Father in relation to his divinity, and being of one substance with us in relation to his humanity.

This remains the view of mainstream Christianity today. The *Book of Common Prayer* (1662) declares:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father, God of God, light of light; very God of very God; begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father... and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost and of the Virgin Mary and was made man.

### Modern Christology

In modern times, scholars have largely supported the view that if Christ really was the Son of God, then he had to take on human form as this was the only way that God could break the power of sin and give eternal life to humanity. If God alone could bring salvation, forgive sin and offer eternal life, then Jesus, if he was just an ordinary man, could not do this. Since the gospels said that Jesus did bring salvation, then Jesus must have been God incarnate. As McGrath (ibid.) noted: 'Only the creator can save the creation.'

Dietrich Bonhoeffer went further in *The Cost of Discipleship* (2001, SCM) when he said that,

by becoming human, God, in Christ, emptied himself of divine knowledge, to make himself truly incarnate:

God lets himself be pushed out of the world on the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us.

So are we any the wiser? What do we know for certain about Jesus Christ? Historically, very little beyond the fact that he existed as a religious leader and was executed. Beyond that, we can merely guess. Religiously speaking, believers claim he is God incarnate and the bringing of salvation. But there is no empirical evidence to support this, only faith. Rudolf Bultmann in *New Testament and Mythology* (1990, Augsburg Fortress) said that looking for the historical facts of the life of Jesus was a waste of time and that Christ can only be understood by faith. He may be right.

**Gordon Reid** is a principal examiner and former head of religious studies at Alleyn's School, London. He is an editor of RELIGIOUS STUDIES REVIEW.

he existed as a religious leader and was executed

in John's Gospel it clearly states that Jesus Christ was God in human form (incarnate)

**FlashRevise**  
Pocketbooks

**Instant revision... just when you need it**

- 100s of quick-fire questions and answers
- Exam tips to understand and memorise key topics
- Fits in your pocket for instant revision, wherever and whenever you need it!

~~£4.99~~ Just **£3.99** with your **20% off voucher** (see January issue)

Visit [www.philipallan.co.uk](http://www.philipallan.co.uk) today for information on all the titles in the series and simple online ordering, or contact our customer services department on **01235 827827**

# When did Jesus live and die?

AS and A2  
New Testament  
options: Edexcel,  
OCR, AQA

Nativity plays encourage us to visualise the birth of Jesus amid snow and Christmas trees, while the death of Jesus is associated with the coming of spring. In reality, the birth and death of Jesus cannot be dated with precision.

**Theo Knight** explores some ways of working them out.

The historical dates of the birth and death of Jesus are shrouded in mystery. Although our calendar sets the date of his birth at the year 0000 we know that is not the case, for this was a date of convenience set many centuries later. So can we know for certain when Jesus Christ lived and died? Recent research has indicated that finding the exact dates of his life might be possible.

## When was Jesus born?

In order to gain a clearer understanding of Jesus' date of birth, we must put aside the traditional Christmas nativity story because it does not appear in the Bible in the form we see and hear it every Christmas. In the Bible, only two Gospels, Matthew and Luke, refer to the birth of Jesus and they each suggest a different date and give a slightly different account of what actually happened.

In Matthew's version, Jesus was born 'during the time of King Herod' (2:1). The Magi (commonly known as the 'Three Wise Men'), apparently led by a strange star, came to Jerusalem and asked King Herod if he knew the whereabouts of 'the one who had been born king of the Jews' (2:2). The Old Testament prophecies gave the answer: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah... out of you will come a ruler who will be the

shepherd of my people Israel' (Micah 5:2). The Magi went to Bethlehem. Soon after, Herod, outraged and fearful, ordered all boys under the age of two in Bethlehem to be killed — the so-called 'massacre of the innocents'. Here again, Matthew shows a prophecy fulfilled: 'A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted because they are no more' (Jeremiah 31:15).

There are several interesting points here. First, when the Magi reached Bethlehem (which is only a few miles from Jerusalem), they did not find Jesus in a stable, as the Christmas tradition suggests, but found him in a house with Mary, implying that the holy family now lived in Bethlehem. Moreover, Jesus was not a baby, but a young child (2:11), which is, presumably, why Herod ordered all boys up to the age of two to be killed. (However, there is no historical record of such a massacre ever taking place.) In other words, the Three Wise Men did not come at the moment of the birth of Jesus, but some time later.

Second, Matthew tells us that Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt and stayed there until Herod died. We know from the historian Josephus that Herod died at the time of a lunar eclipse — one took place on 13 March 4 BCE and coins of the day ceased to have Herod's picture on them after

that date. If all this is true, then Jesus must have been born before 4 BCE.

## Extra-biblical evidence

Can we be any more accurate? Well, the Magi told Herod that they saw the 'star in the east' (2:2) and astronomers have considered a number of possibilities as to what the star actually was. In 1614, German astronomer Johannes Kepler suggested that the star was, in fact, the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 7 BCE. Others have suggested that the star could have been Halley's Comet, which was visible from the Middle East in 12 BCE. Most interestingly, ancient Chinese stargazers wrote of a comet or nova that appeared in 5 BCE and seemed to stay still in the sky for 70 days — matching Matthew's account of the star that 'stopped over the place where the child was' (2:11). However, knowing Matthew's tendency to refer to the Old Testament, it may be that he invented the star to fulfil the Old Testament prophecy in Numbers 24:17: 'A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel.'

If we accept Matthew's account, it would seem that Jesus was born between 12 BCE and 4 BCE. However, the evidence is inconclusive, as Raymond Brown observed in *The Birth of the Messiah* (Yale 2007): 'No astronomical record exists of what is described in Matthew.'

Luke's account is different, for there are no Wise Men. Instead, Luke tells us that Jesus was born at the time of the census ordered by Caesar Augustus 'while Quirinius was governor of Syria' (2:3). The only known census at that time occurred between 6 and 7 CE. However, earlier Luke says that John the Baptist, who was only a few months older than Jesus, was conceived during the reign of King Herod (1:5). This prompted Geza Vermes in *The Nativity* (Penguin 2006) to suggest that Luke's account is simply wrong. If so, it seems that we cannot be certain of the date of the birth of Jesus. If we accept Matthew's account it is around 4 BCE, and if we accept Luke's then it is around 6 CE. Raymond Brown concluded: 'It is unlikely that either account is completely historical.'

## When did Jesus die?

The death of Jesus is highly significant and it may be that we can date that event more accurately. First, what clues does the Bible give us? We know from the Gospels that Jesus was crucified during the Jewish time of the Passover. In the Old Testament, the Law of Moses stated that Passover began at twilight on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Nisan, followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread which began at twilight on 15 Nisan (Nisan occurs in March to April



It seems that we cannot be certain of the date of the birth of Jesus

The Three Wise Men did not come at the moment of the birth of Jesus, but some time later

in our calendar). To put these dates into our time-frame, Passover lasted from 6 p.m. Wednesday until 6 p.m. Thursday and the Feast of Unleavened Bread was from 6 p.m. Thursday until 6 p.m. on Friday.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus was crucified during the governorship of Pontius Pilate, which was between 26 CE and 36 CE. In other words, Jesus was crucified at Passover sometime during this 10-year period. But can we narrow it down still further? Passover was also known as Preparation Day because this was the time when the people prepared for the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It was also deemed to be a Sabbath day, even though it was not a Saturday — moreover, it was a special Sabbath on which people could

work. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was also a Sabbath, but one where the people were forbidden to work.

John 13:1 states that Jesus ate his last meal 'just before' the Passover Feast. This is a little unclear — we do not know exactly when John means, but if this is meant to be the Passover Meal then John has got the day wrong. However, in the Gospel he only refers to this as an 'evening meal' (13:2).

### The Passover

According to John, Jesus was arrested a few hours later, put on trial, crucified and buried before the next sunset. John indicates that the Jewish leaders had not eaten the Passover Meal at the time of his trial (not surprising since it was the middle of the night) and John 19:31 goes on to tell us that Jesus died on 'the day of Preparation'. In other words, John suggests that Jesus was crucified on a Thursday, not a Friday as the Christian tradition states. This also fits with John's theme of Jesus as the sacrificial lamb. The Law of Moses stated that the lamb had to be sacrificed by the High Priest on the day of Preparation between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. and eaten before midnight. This reflects the timing of Jesus' own sacrificial death at 3 p.m.

There is a slight difference in the other Gospels, which state clearly that the Last Supper was the Passover Meal — in which case, this meal would have been eaten after sunset, making it early on 15 Nisan. This means that Jesus was crucified on 15 Nisan, which was Friday. This confusion of dates may be explained by the fact that, at that time, post-exilic Jews believed that Passover started at dawn on Thursday (14 Nisan), while traditional Jews said it began at sunset.

So when did Jesus die? Well, Matthew 27:62 states that the day after the crucifixion 'was the one after Preparation Day', indicating that Jesus was crucified on Preparation Day (Friday). Similarly, Mark 15:42 and Luke 23:54 say that Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body of Jesus as evening was approaching on Preparation Day — again indicating that Jesus was crucified on Friday. So, depending on which Gospel

you believe, Jesus was crucified on Thursday or Friday, 14 or 15 Nisan.

In what year was Jesus crucified? We know it was while Pilate was governor (26–36 CE), but the biggest clue we have beyond that comes from the rather obscure reference to the sky darkening for several hours as Jesus was being crucified: 'At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour' (Mark 15: 33).

Isaac Newton, the famous scientist, thought that the darkness might have been caused by a lunar eclipse (not a solar eclipse, which is always over in a matter of minutes). He calculated that the crescent of the new moon came in conjunction with the sun over Jerusalem on Friday 23 April 34 CE. More recently, scientist Bradley Schaefer, using computer calculations, has suggested that Newton was just one year out and that such an eclipse may have occurred on Friday 3 April 33 CE.

Humphreys and Waddington of Oxford University reconstructed the Jewish calendar

for that time and suggested that an 80% lunar eclipse would have taken place from 3.40 p.m. to 6.50 p.m. on 3 April. This also matches the obscure saying of the Apostle Peter in Acts 2:20 when he refers to a 'moon of blood' because in a lunar eclipse the moon appears to turn red. Finally, Jesus then rose the following Sunday, which was the Jewish Festival of Fresh Fruits. Presumably this was no coincidence.

So when *did* Jesus die? We cannot know for certain, but we can make a pretty good guess — John's Gospel suggests Jesus may have been crucified on 14 Nisan (Thursday) and he makes no reference to the sky darkening. The synoptic Gospels lean towards Friday 15 Nisan and refer to the sky turning dark. Scientists seem to agree that a lunar eclipse may have taken place on Friday 15. The corresponding date in our calendar appears to suggest that Jesus was crucified on or near Friday 3 April 33 CE.

**Theo Knight** is a theological consultant, researcher and writer.

Our calendar appears to suggest that Jesus was crucified on or near Friday 3 April 33 CE



## AS/A2 Intensive Revision Weekends

- Separate AS and A2 weekend courses
- Courses held in April and May 2010 at Regent's College, London
- Course fees only £189

Visit our website at  
[www.philipallanupdates.co.uk](http://www.philipallanupdates.co.uk)

Contact us today for further information: tel: 01706 831002  
or e-mail: [sales@philipallanupdates.co.uk](mailto:sales@philipallanupdates.co.uk)

### Fast track to the best grades

- Intensive 2-day revision courses with expert tutors and senior examiners
- Guaranteed to improve your exam technique and build your confidence
- Develops essential AS and A2 key skills
- Tests your understanding of core topics
- Invaluable summary notes provided
- Ideal Central London location

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Biology</b></li> <li><b>Business Studies</b></li> <li><b>Chemistry</b></li> <li><b>Economics</b></li> <li><b>French</b></li> <li><b>German</b></li> <li><b>Mathematics</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Physics</b></li> <li><b>Politics</b></li> <li><b>Psychology</b></li> <li><b>Religious Studies</b></li> <li><b>Sociology</b></li> <li><b>Spanish</b></li> </ul>
---	--

# What causes things to exist?

Jon Mayled looks at Aristotle's preoccupation with what causes things to exist.

## The four causes

- \* **The Material Cause:** the material which something is made of, e.g. bread is made of flour.
- \* **The Formal Cause:** what gives the matter its 'form' or 'structure'. So a loaf of bread is not just a heap of

flour. It is flour which has been treated or 'arranged' a particular way.

- \* **The Efficient Cause:** refers to why an object exists. A loaf of bread exists because someone made it. That someone, a baker, caused the loaf to exist, otherwise it would have stayed as a heap of flour.

- \* **The Final Cause:** is about 'why'. Why does the loaf exist? The answer is presumably so that someone can eat it. Therefore the Final Cause is teleological, being

concerned with the function of an object or the reason something is done.



Unlike Plato, Aristotle does not say that there is a purpose or design in nature — he says that when you consider an object it has a function and that is the reason it is as it is.

Aristotle provided many examples to demonstrate his ideas. For example:

#### A stone statue

- \* Material Cause: it's made of marble.
- \* Formal Cause: it has the shape of a statue.
- \* Efficient Cause: a sculptor made it.
- \* Final Cause: its function is to be a statue that represents or honours someone or something.

### Plato and Aristotle

The famous painting of Aristotle and Plato by Raphael (you can find this on Google images) shows Aristotle pointing down to the physical world, the world of experience, and Plato pointing upwards to the world of Forms.

Aristotle always acknowledged what he had learnt from Plato but there are clear differences between their thinking. Aristotle emphasises studying the physical world and so his work is empirical. Aristotle did not accept Plato's Theory of Forms because it does not explain the relationship between the Forms and physical objects. Plato had a dualist view of the world which Aristotle rejected.

### Aristotle and movement

From observation, Aristotle believed that everything existed in a permanent state of movement. Movement is a translation of the Greek word *motuz* which means change. So the weather changes all the time and even rocks change over time.

#### Four observations

- \* The physical world is in a constant state of change.
- \* The stars and planets are permanently moving.
- \* Change and motion must be caused by something.
- \* All the objects in the physical world exist in states of actuality and potentiality.

From these observations Aristotle was led to the conclusion that something must cause this change and that this something is eternal.

He argued that if something can change then it exists in an 'actual' state and has the 'potential' to reach another state: an acorn has the power to become an oak tree.

When something comes into existence then it must be caused to exist by something else. If something can change then it is potentially something else. So what causes motion and change?

Aristotle thought that the movement of the planets was eternal (we now know that it is not). However, if they are in eternal movement then there must be a cause of their eternal movement and that must be a Prime Mover.

#### The Prime Mover

Aristotle believed that the Prime Mover existed of necessity and therefore could not fail to exist. The Prime Mover is one thing which cannot change and so is pure actuality. From this he argued that the Prime Mover is by nature good as without goodness something can become better and so change.

Aristotle considered the Prime Mover to be the Final Cause because it is the ultimate answer to why things exist. Strangely, to us

perhaps, Aristotle argued that the Prime Mover leads to change like being loved — everything is attracted towards the Prime Mover which is the final goal of all change or movement.

Aristotle then took his argument further: *We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God.*

(Metaphysics Book XII)

God is the Prime Mover, therefore he is 'divine simplicity' (without parts) and 'complete reality'. However, as God is pure actuality, God could only think about God, otherwise his thoughts would change.

### God and the universe

The relationship between God and the universe is that God is the 'leader' of the universe because everything depends on the Prime Mover. It is very important to remember that this immanent and impersonal God does not interact with the world

and is not a personal such as the God of the Peoples of the Book.

So, it is a long answer to the child's question 'why?'.

Remember when you are answering questions about Aristotle and the Causes that this is a completely different theory to Plato's idea of Forms — Raphael's picture should help you.

### Exam practice

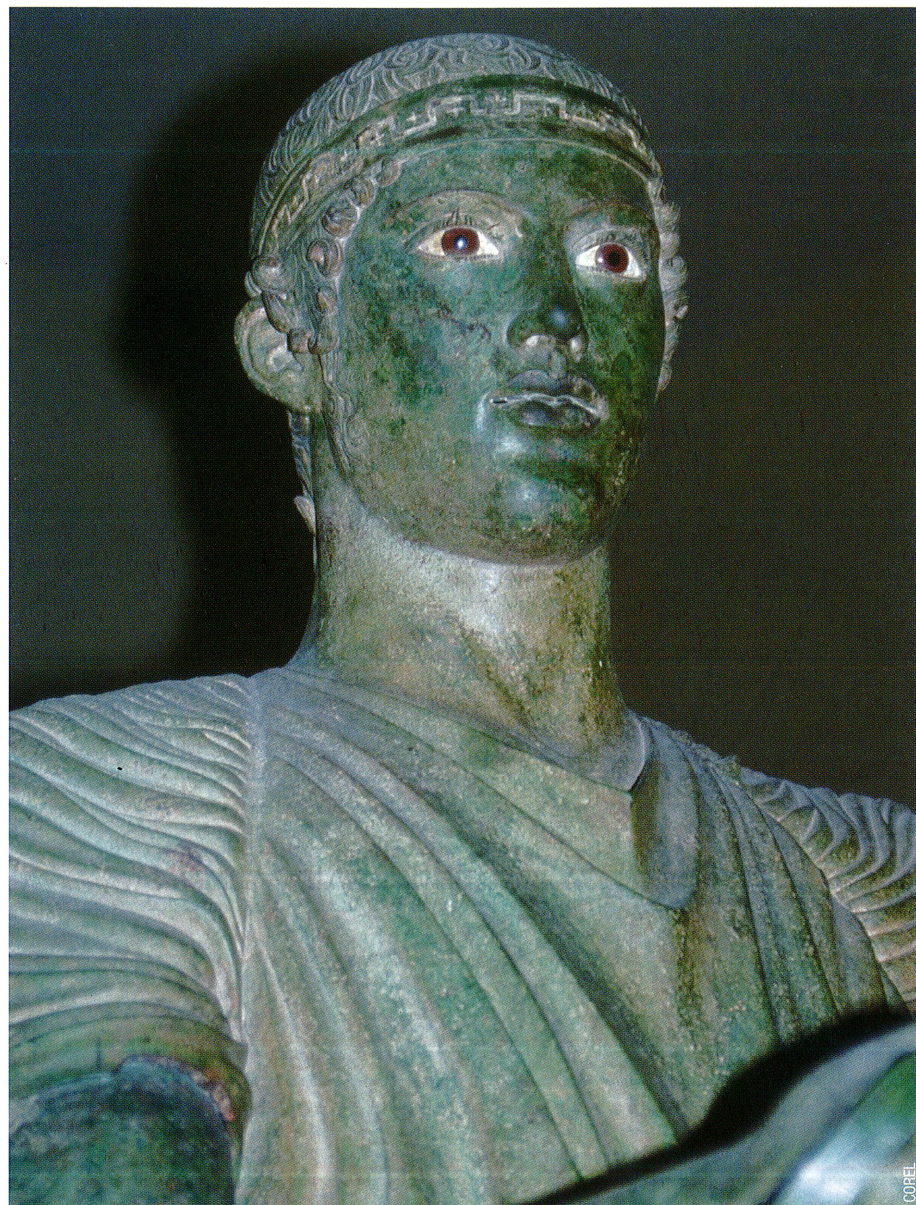
(a) Describe Aristotle's teaching about the differences between the Final Cause and other sorts of cause. [25]

In your answer you need to explain Aristotle's idea that 'form' is what causes something to be what it is. You should explain the four causes by theory and give an example. You need to say that the Final Cause is what something does and what it is for. You might also want to refer to the idea that God is the Prime Mover and the Final Cause. Make sure you show that you know there is a difference between this God and the Judaeo-Christian idea of God.

(b) Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of Aristotle's ideas about cause. [10]

Here you can point out as a strength the significance of the idea that 'cause' can work at several different levels at the same time. You might, for example, explain that it could make sense for a scientist to talk of the (Efficient) cause of the universe in terms of the Big Bang while at the same time believing that the (Final) cause of the universe is God — the two do not have to be mutually exclusive. You might also say that it is a strength that Aristotle believed things exist for a purpose, because this gives a basis for some popular ethical systems such as Natural Law and Virtue Ethics. Clearly, as a weakness you might suggest that sometimes there is very little evidence for there being a 'Final Cause' and it can be less than obvious what this might be.

**Jon Mayled** is a chief examiner and the author of many religious studies textbooks.



# Intensive Revision Weekends

AS

A2

April/May 2009

London

- |                                   |                             |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Biology</b>                    | <b>Mathematics</b>          |
| <b>Business Studies</b> (AQA)     | <b>Politics</b>             |
| <b>Chemistry</b>                  | <b>Psychology</b> (AQA (A)) |
| <b>Economics</b> (AQA or Edexcel) | <b>Religious Studies</b>    |
| <b>French</b>                     | <b>Sociology</b> (AQA)      |
| <b>German</b>                     | <b>Spanish</b>              |
| <b>Law</b> (AQA or OCR)           |                             |

## Improve your grades

- Intensive 2-day revision courses with expert tutors, including senior examiners
- Guaranteed to improve exam technique and build confidence
- Develops AS and A2 key skills
- Tests understanding of core topics
- Invaluable summary notes provided
- Ideal Central London location

Contact us today for further information: tel: 01706 831002 fax: 01706 830011  
e-mail: [sales@philipallanupdates.co.uk](mailto:sales@philipallanupdates.co.uk) Philip Allan Updates, Suite 16, Hardmans Business Centre, Rossendale, Lancashire BB4 6HH

Visit our website at  
[www.philipallanupdates.co.uk](http://www.philipallanupdates.co.uk)

# Homosexuality and Christianity

**Jon Mayled** examines some influences on religious teaching about homosexuality, an often misunderstood topic at A-level

OCR: G582  
AQA: RST3A  
Edexcel: 6RS02/1C

Attitudes towards homosexuals and homosexual practices have changed dramatically in the last 25 years. Homosexual practice between men was illegal and punishable by imprisonment in the UK from the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885) until the Sexual Offences Act (1967).

It is difficult to know what people's opinions about homosexuality are based on. In religious terms it is certainly true that most of the world's faiths treat homosexual practice as taboo, even though many individual followers may not share this opinion.

For the purpose of this article it is sufficient to focus on the teaching of Christianity and the teachings of the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches, while

noting that many of the free churches and other groups such as the Religious Society of Friends have different views.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

## **Chastity and homosexuality**

§2357 Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always

declared that 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered'. They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.

§2358 The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. They do not choose their homosexual condition; for most of them it is a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called

to fulfil God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.

## The Bible and homosexuality

In fact the Bible has very little to say about homosexual behaviour:

The principal references cited included the story of Sodom in Genesis 19:4–8:

But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them.' Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, and said, 'I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.'

This is the New Revised Standard Version translation. More dramatically, the New Jerusalem Bible has: 'Send them out to us so that we can have intercourse with them.'

It is difficult to make the Hebrew bear the translation 'intercourse' here, though some translations of the Tenakh use the phrase 'be intimate'.

However, this seems to miss the point of the passage that is essentially about the respect due to visitors. It is this respect that prompts Lot to the surely outlandish suggestion that the crowd should take his daughters instead.

The story of Gibeah in Judges 19 seems to be a parallel with the Genesis text. In Leviticus are two passages: 'You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination' (18:22), and 'If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them' (20:13).

References to Sodom elsewhere do not refer to the possible homosexual aspect of the story: Isaiah 1, Ezekiel 16, Jeremiah 23.

There are three relevant texts in the New Testament:

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers — none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.' (1 Corinthians 6:9–11)

μαλακός — translated here as 'male prostitute' — is elsewhere rendered as 'soft'. ἀρσενικοκήτης is a feminine word in Greek meaning 'someone who lies like a woman'.

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately. This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me. (1 Timothy 1:8–11)

For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. (Romans 1:26–27)

Although it is possible to argue semantics here, these passages do seem to be essentially condemning homosexual acts. However, if a literalist interpretation of the text is not taken and rather they are read taking account of their *sitz im leben* then it is possible to challenge how far these teachings should be taken as doctrinal absolutes.

Without repositing the view that Jesus may have been homosexual (see RELIGIOUS STUDIES REVIEW, Vol. 7, No. 2) there is still one relationship in the Bible that has long been a topic of discussion and speculation.

The following passage is from 2 Samuel 1:26 where David mourns the death of Jonathan:

I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

This is then allied with:

Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan. He said to him, 'You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?' (1 Samuel 20:30)

## Homosexuality and social interpretations

The traditional religious interpretation of this relationship has been one of platonic love and perhaps as an example of homosociality. However, later medieval and Renaissance literature drew on the story to underline strong personal friendships between men, some of which involved romantic love. In modern times, some scholars have emphasised aspects of homoeroticism in the story.

There are many documents that can be found suggesting that in the past the Church gave blessings to same-sex relationships (see Further reading at the end of this article).

Throughout all of this there is no mention of lesbians or lesbian practices. Perhaps, as

is said of Queen Victoria, the writers did not believe it existed.

### The myth

Lesbianism was never made illegal in Britain because when Queen Victoria was shown the proposed legislation she refused to sign it, as she wouldn't believe that lesbians existed: 'Women do not do such things.' In other versions of the story, government ministers struck out all references to women in the Act, because they couldn't think of a way of explaining matters to the dear old queen.

### The truth

The idea that Victoria refused to sign the Labouchère Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 until it had been de-lesbianised is easily dealt with: the British monarch in the late nineteenth century did not have the power to overrule parliament — any attempt to do so would have triggered a political earthquake. The myth apparently started in Wellington, New Zealand, in 1977, to explain why a demonstration for lesbian equality centred on a statue of Victoria. Labouchère's true motives for criminalising male homosexuality are still disputed; what seems certain is that banning female homosexuality never crossed his mind. Some historians suggest that the male establishment avoided legislating on lesbianism for fear of drawing women's attention to its existence. (*Fortean Times*)

## Homosexuality and the Church

However, for centuries, the Church has condemned homosexual practices even while, as with the quote above from the Catechism, accepting that some people have homosexual tendencies, usually requiring them to be celibate in accordance with Natural Law.

In recent years many have argued that it is the quality of a relationship, be it homosexual or heterosexual, that determines its moral value.

In 1991 the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England emphasised that 'homophile [i.e. homosexual] orientation and its expression in sexual activity do not constitute a parallel and alternative form of human sexual activity as complete within the terms of the created order as the heterosexual'. They did not reject homosexual activity in permanent relationships among the laity, but insisted that the clergy have a particular responsibility to maintain the scriptural ideal; they 'cannot claim the liberty to enter into sexually active homophile relationships'.

Seven years later, however, the 1998 Lambeth Conference expressed the belief that for all Christians 'abstinence is right for those not called to marriage' and rejected 'homosexual practices as incompatible with Scripture'.

It now appears that gay people may be given the right to have civil partnership ceremonies in religious buildings. This, however, has brought more disunion to the Anglican Church:

The Archbishop of Canterbury has vowed he will never allow Church of England buildings to be used for gay weddings. Dr Rowan Williams told MPs that he would not bow to pressure to enable his churches to be used for same-sex unions.

Some within the CofE have been calling on the Archbishop to move with the times and allow his churches to host gay weddings — pointing out that polls have shown that some two thirds of the British public would be in support.

Giles Fraser, canon chancellor at St Paul's cathedral, said the Church of England should be embracing gay equality in marriages.

'Gay relationships are perfectly capable of reflecting the love of God,' he said.

'Which is why the church should respond more imaginatively to the idea of same-sex blessings being celebrated in church.'

(*MailOnline*, 27 February 2011)

Let us turn now to the Religious Society of Friends. In 1963 British Quakers published a book *Towards a Quaker View of Sex*, which put forth the argument that it was not the gender and sexual orientation of a person that mattered — it was the depth of feeling they have for each other.

Where there is a genuine tenderness, an openness to responsibility, and the seed of commitment, God is surely not shut out. Can we not say that God can enter any relationship in which there is a measure of selfless love?

Subsequently, the Quakers of Westminster Meeting in the UK published a statement:

We affirm the love of God for all people, whatever their sexual orientation, and our conviction that sexuality is an important part of human beings as created by God, so that to reject people on the grounds of their sexual behaviour is a denial of God's creation.

In looking at these texts it is perhaps worth noting that 'love' appears 419 times in the Authorised Version of the Bible and 769 times in the New Revised Standard Version. Perhaps the Christian concept of love is more important than the few teachings about homosexuality.

### Further reading

Boswell, J. (1995) *The Marriage of Likeness: Same-Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe*, HarperCollins.

**Jon Mayled** is a chief examiner and the author of many religious studies textbooks.