

Religious Studies

Advanced GCE

Unit **G585**: Developments in Christian Theology

Mark Scheme for June 2011

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Part 1

Answer **two** questions, **one** from Part 1 and **one** from Part 2

1 Assess the view that Barth was right in his rejection of natural theology. [35]**AO1**

Candidates might begin by explaining what natural theology is and why Barth appeared to reject it. They might argue that there are many forms of natural theology but in general it suggests that if God is creator then his presence and intentions may be known through the natural order. This notion is reinforced by the Genesis idea that there is an intrinsic order to the world which if implemented in the human sphere brings men and women into right relationship with God. Some might refer to Calvin's *sensus divinitatis*.

Candidates might then go on to explain why Barth famously rejected natural theology in his debate with Brunner culminating with his *Nein!* Barth rejected his claim that knowledge of the natural world enables humans to see how far short they have fallen from God's Grace and this puts them in a position to repent. Barth argues that the Fall so removes humans from any knowledge of God that all attempts to grasp the divine are bound to reflect human wishes not God. Feuerbach's analysis of religion is pertinent here and may be discussed.

Candidates might then go on to show why Barth's theology requires this wholesale rejection of natural theology. They might illustrate that knowledge of God is entirely God-given revelation when God as Word makes himself known in the Incarnation and as Trinity. They might consider how Barth's highly unusual treatment of election illustrates how the Logos as the subject of election is also its object (in the person of Jesus Christ). Barth's particularist position sets up the conditions by which salvation is possible for all.

AO2

Some candidates might argue that Barth's vehement rejection of natural theology was result of the historical conditions of the time when Barth considered that human institutions - including the Church, had justified their positions based on worldly reasoning and not on the Word. They might argue that Calvin and Brunner's balance between natural and revealed knowledge does not undermine Barth's distinctive theology of election but could add to it. If God as Word could participate in the natural order, then this suggests that the natural order was already receptive and capable of revealing God. Some might suggest that Barth's leaning towards universalism indicates that his dogmatic denial of natural theology was not as emphatic as it may at first seem (especially as St. Paul in *Romans* appears to permits it).

On the other hand some may argue that Barth's theology gains its distinctiveness because it gives God back his unique ontological existence without which religion is indeed in danger of greater status than it should because of its tendency to objectify human desires and encourage 'I-piety'. Furthermore, his position reinstates the distinctiveness of theology which is neither religious studies nor philosophy but uniquely concerned with the nature of God as he reveals himself to humans.

- 2 **'Religion has no future in our modernist age.' Discuss.** [35]

AO1

Candidates might begin by defining what is meant by religion. They might take Feuerbach's view that properly understood religion is the expression of human nature in relationship with Nature. It is the means by which humans become aware of their conscious thoughts. Or they might consider Ninian Smart's phenomenological notion that religion is a special experience of the Other as the 'invisible world' expressed in rituals, myths, doctrines and ethical codes. Some may argue that religion refers only to Christianity as God reveals himself in the person of Christ as the means of salvation.

Candidates might then consider what is meant by 'modernist age'. Some might take this to be the post-Enlightenment world view which considers human reason to be the source and means of describing, explaining and manipulating the world or even the universe. The effects of modernism might be illustrated by the rise of technology and science

AO2

Some might argue agree that modernism will eventually bring religion to an end. They might, in part, agree with Feuerbach and Marx that if religion is the false objectification of human consciousness, science should now enable humans to distinguish false consciousness from genuine experiences. Technology is a visible sign that human reason alone is the answer to the ancient myths embodied in religions which hope for immortality, global travel and social stability. Some might argue that Western philosophy has effectively debunked most metaphysics as irrational and that as religion lacks any sound rational basis it has no part in the academic curriculum and so it will and must die out as a subject.

On the other hand some might decide that as Smart argued, there has been and appears to continue to be a distinctive human response to the world which for the sake of a better word is religious. Furthermore religions are a source of meaning, purpose and order which challenge the very reductive end of modernism to make humans less ego-centric and more aware of their place in the cosmos in relation to the Other. Some might argue along with Barth, that Feuerbach was right to indicate the irrational aspect of religion, but this doesn't mean it is all false. Religion will not die out because it is deeply embedded within the human psyche.

Part 2

- 3 **'The aim of feminist theology is simply to seek equality between women and men.'** Discuss. [35]

AO1

Candidates may wish to set out some of the different feminist theologies and compare and contrast them – these might include liberal feminist theology, reconstructionist feminist theology and radical or natural feminist theology. Liberal or equality feminist theology argues that although the Bible is often patriarchal and biased against women, there is nevertheless a strand which runs from Genesis to Galatians which consider men and women to be created equally in the image of God and therefore entitled to equal respect. Liberal feminist theologians argue that biblical passages which discriminate or demean women (and indeed some men) are to be understood in the context of their historical setting.

Candidates might argue that reconstructivist feminist theologians indicate how more radical Christian ideas have often been appropriated by conservative theologians. Using a hermeneutic of suspicion can show how Jesus' treatment of women was radical and revolutionary for its time. This is reflected in the use of the feminine principle Sophia in the Trinity and later in Julian of Norwich's reference to the second person as 'our Mother'.

Some might go on to consider how some radical feminist theologians have argued that in giving equality to women and men Christianity also re-values women's bodies and ensures that theology retains the polarities of gender.

AO2

Some candidates might argue that the different types of feminist theologies indicate that equality is not its only aim. Reconstructionist theologies consider that for equality to be a real possibility liberation needs to take place first. This means a shift in consciousness and power relations. As contextual theologians, feminists point to Marx, de Beauvoir and Freud for insights into how Jesus' notion of the Kingdom as reversal might come about. They might discuss Elaine Pagels' view how certain forms of Gnostic Christianity from the start offered spiritual liberation which the orthodox Church felt unable to develop,

On the other hand some candidates might argue that feminist theology aims for equality as this is the underlying principle of Christianity. They might argue that theologies which have to use Marx or Freud are unnecessary and detract from the spiritual equality which is distinctive to Christianity.

4 To what extent should language about the Trinity be gender free? [35]

AO1

Candidates might begin by considering that all theology has to use language to talk about God and therefore how and in what way it functions. Some understanding of religious language will be expected but the focus of the essay will probably be a consideration of how feminist and non-feminist theologians have tackled the issue of God and gender.

Some may consider Ruether's arguments in *Sexism and God-Talk* that the Bible already has a rich tradition of different metaphors for God which include a range of male terms but also female. Ruether also argues that it is appropriate to use non-Christian and Gnostic Christianity experience and female language to reimage God as Goddess. Her argument is that language is about consciousness; gendered language therefore is more than an academic definition of God, but is also an expression of female spirituality.

Some candidates might refer to Fiorenza's argument in *Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet* that early strands of Christianity understood that as the personification and incarnation of the divine Sophia, Jesus was both male and female. Some Gnostic writings for instance argue that the male/female division occurred only at the Fall, but that Christ represents the 'fullness' (an important Gnostic term) of God.

Candidates may also discuss how for some feminist theologians the economy of the Trinity expresses a community of relationships which challenges the tendency of monotheism to depict God in hierarchical terms.

AO2

Some might argue that as God is not a person then all language should be gender free. God should be referred to as the Other, the Real, the Eternal One etc. They might argue that for Christians God as Word already avoids specific gender and this is as it should be. They might also consider the feminist theologians attach too many human gendered qualities to God who is beyond all such attributes.

On the other hand candidates might argue that even traditionalists think of God in gendered terms. Conservative theologians argue that God the Father is especially important for women who find in God a complementary relationship. They might argue that gender neutral language is too abstract and gives no sense of the God who acts in the human sphere.

Others might argue that the Trinity lends itself to a fluid set of gender expressions without which it would be unable to be part of human existence and experience. The Incarnation was not a neutrally gendered event but one which fully embraced gendered existence. Some might reflect on Julian Norwich's range of gendered language in her 'shewings' of the Trinity.

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