

Doctrine Matters: Chapter 1: Why Doctrine?

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The very word sends shivers down a lot of spines these days. Doesn't an interest in doctrine make you a doctrinaire person - the sort of petty and pedantic person whom the modern church could very well do without? It conjures up images of fussy theologians, closeted in their studies and isolated from the real world, scrabbling furiously and pointlessly over words. Doctrine seems like a relic of a bygone age. It may have been important once upon a time. But not now. It is an irrelevance to modern Christian faith and Christian life.

I used to think like that. I don't any more, and would like to explain why not. Maybe the way my own thinking changed will be of use to other people, as they think through much the same questions today. My conviction that doctrine is of vital importance to the mission, ministry and spirituality of the church arose through several years sustained wrestling with the question of the relevance of doctrine. It is a conviction I adopted, not one I inherited.

My own background is that of someone who became a Christian as a student at Oxford University, through the Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union. I came up to Oxford well versed in Marxism. I had been especially committed to the writings of Theodore Adorno, and had chosen to study at Wadham College on account of its historical associations with Marx and its continued association with left-wing causes. But I was beginning to have my doubts about Marxism. There were just too many unanswered questions. 1971 was probably the heyday of Marxist influence at Oxford, and my doubts seemed out of place.

I began to rethink things. I had never given all that much consideration to Christianity, which I had tended to regard as little more than some form of spiritual narcotic to deaden the pain of life - quite unnecessary for someone like myself, who was perfectly capable of coping with things. I found myself reopening old questions I thought I had buried, and allowing myself to listen to ideas I had never really taken seriously. By the end of my first term, I knew that Christianity had something far more satisfactory - and far more moral - than Marxism to offer the world, myself included. I became a Christian, and can honestly say I have never looked back since then.

But I was determined to be a thinking Christian. After completing my undergraduate and research degrees in the natural sciences, I began to study theology seriously, eventually taking a degree in the subject at Oxford. At that stage, the Oxford University Faculty of Theology could fairly be said to have been dominated by a gentle liberal Protestantism. Perhaps a number of its members may have even seen their educational objectives to be to encourage students to become liberal Protestants, like themselves. Evangelicalism always seemed to be treated as something intellectually despicable, whereas liberalism was commendable. All too often, the call for students to 'think for themselves' seemed to amount to a demand that they think like their (theologically liberal.) teachers. Christianity without doctrine

At any rate, I found that my youthful views on the nature of Christianity were often ridiculed as unworthy of serious consideration. I realised that I had become a liberal - someone who looked to human reason and secular culture, instead of scripture, for religious guidance and inspiration. I went on to train for the priesthood of the Church of England at Westcott House, Cambridge, then firmly established as the flagship of liberal Catholicism within the Anglican theological colleges. My shift away from evangelicalism to liberalism seemed to be justified by events in 1977, which witnessed the publication of the essay collection *The Myth of God Incarnate* and James Barr's *Fundamentalism* [1] - works which finally persuaded me that evangelicalism totally lacked serious intellectual content, and had been totally rejected by mainstream academic life.

But I kept thinking throughout my period at Cambridge, and on into my curacy at a suburban parish in Nottingham. And I found myself plagued by doubts. It seemed increasingly to me that liberal Anglicanism often amounted to little more than a conglomerate of transient theological responses to events in the academic world. It seemed as if there was no theological or spiritual core. As I struggled with the issues thrown up by preaching and pastoral work, I found myself continually wondering whether liberalism actually had anything to say to the world, other than uncritically endorsing its latest trends.

Space does not permit me to write about these anxieties here, nor about the way in which I regained confidence in my evangelicalism. That would demand a book in its own right, and it is unlikely that anyone would be especially interested in it. But my reflections on the importance of doctrine are of relevance to the readers of this book.

The sort of ideas I had entertained during the five or so years of my liberal phase could be summarised along the following lines. Christianity is about bringing into the modern world the same breadth of spirit, the same compassion and care, the same depth of spiritual awareness, that was first shown to the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Christianity is about action and attitudes, not about the cold, barren and outdated world of dogmas. We should not believe in Jesus, but with Jesus. Like many a young man, I found the romantic image of a 'Christianity without doctrine' profoundly attractive. It seemed to represent the best of all possible worlds, combining a rhetorical appeal to the great Western liberal deities of intellectual freedom and personal integrity with an unashamed, almost mystical, sentimental fascination, focused upon the distant hero-figure of Jesus himself. Here was a living person, whose gospel consisted in the simplicities of commitment and obedience. The demand to follow him was a call to imitate him in his relation to God and to others. We are called to imitate him, to copy him, to pattern ourselves upon him. Simple solutions are attractive, yet seductive. As I reflected upon my liberal understanding of Christianity, I began to appreciate how intellectually shallow it was. 'Christianity without doctrine' seemed to me increasingly untenable. Why? Let me explain. [2]

The question of truth

The basic difficulty was that liberalism seemed to fudge the question of truth. This concern came home to me as I wrestled with the pastoral relevance of the incarnation. To many of my colleagues in the ministry, the incarnation was simply a symbol of God's commitment to the whole created order. I was told that it was relevant (where much doctrine was not), in that it gave theological justification to ministry, encouraging us to affirm the creation, and get involved with it.

And I have no doubt that the incarnation is of relevance and importance in these contexts. But another question seemed relevant to me: Is it true? And if it was true, was this all that there was to it? If Jesus really was God, surely it had greater and more astonishing implications than the affirmation of pastoral ministry.

This point came home to me increasingly persistently, as I tried to console the bereaved in my parish ministry. The funeral liturgy resonates with the hope of resurrection, grounded securely in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. My liberal colleagues didn't seem to find this a problem. 'It's just a symbol of hope,' they told me. 'It helps people cope with death.' It didn't matter whether it was 'true'; what mattered was whether it was 'helpful' (like believing in tooth fairies or Santa Claus). Beneath all the rhetoric about relevance lay a profoundly disturbing possibility: that

people might base their lives upon an illusion, upon a blatant lie - whether the resurrection, or the incarnation. As any historian knows, the attractiveness of a belief is all too often inversely proportional to its truth.

An example will make my point clearer. In the sixteenth century, the radical writer and preacher Thomas Muntzer led a revolt of German peasants against their political masters. On the morning of the decisive encounter between the peasants and the armies of the German princes, Muntzer promised that those who followed him would be unscathed by the weapons of their enemies. Encouraged by this attractive and meaningful belief, the peasants stiffened their resolve. The outcome was a catastrophe. Six thousand peasants were slaughtered in the ensuing battle, and six hundred captured. Barely a handful escaped. Their belief in invulnerability was relevant. It was attractive. It was meaningful. It was also a crude and cruel lie, without any foundation in truth. The last hours of that pathetic group of trusting men rested on an utter illusion. It was only when the first salvoes cut some of their number to ribbons that they realised that they had been deceived.

To allow 'relevance' to be given greater weight than truth seemed to me to be a mark of intellectual shallowness and moral irresponsibility. The first, and most fundamental, of all questions must be: Is it true? Is this worthy of belief and trust? Once this has been established, the relevance of the belief in question may be considered. Truth is certainly no guarantee of relevance - but no one can build their personal life around a lie. And thus I came to see the importance of doctrine. It aims to tell the truth about things. What you do with that truth - morally, spiritually or pastorally - is secondary to establishing that truth in the first place.

The way things are

Christian doctrine aims to describe the ways things are. It is concerned to tell the truth, in order that we may enter into and act upon that truth. It is an expression of a responsible and caring faith - a faith which is prepared to give an account of itself, and to give careful consideration to its implications for the way in which we live. To care about doctrine is to care about the reliability of the foundations of the Christian life. It is to be passionately concerned that our actions and attitudes, our hopes and our fears, are a response to God - not something or someone making claims to divinity, which collapse upon closer inspection.

Perhaps the German church struggle of the 1930s highlights the importance of doctrine to the modern church. When Adolf Hitler came to power, he demanded that he and the Nazi government of the Third Reich should have authority over the

church and its preaching. The German church polarised into two factions: the 'German Christians', who believed the church should respond positively to National Socialism, and the 'Confessing Church' - including such writers as Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer - who believed that the church was answerable to Jesus Christ, and him alone. Representatives of this 'Confessing Church' met at Barmen in 1934, where they issued the famous Barmen Declaration, perhaps one of the finest statements of the Lordship of Jesus Christ over his church and its implications:

'I am the way, and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.' (John 14:6) 'I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber ... I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.' (John 10:1,9)

Jesus Christ, as he is revealed to us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

We reject the false doctrine, that the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation or as the revelation of God any events and powers, figures and truths, other than this one Word of God.

In other words, the church cannot and must not substitute anything (for example, the state government or German culture in the 1930s; or liberal humanism in the 1990s) or anyone (such as Adolf Hitler in the 1930s; or the ideas of some cult novelist or writers in the 1990s) for Jesus Christ. If the church ever loses her faithful obedience to her Lord, she has lost her life and her soul.

Who to obey

Doctrine thus defines who we are to obey. It draws a firm line of demarcation between a false church, which answers to the pressures of the age, and a true church, which is obedient and responsible to God, as he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. 'True knowledge of God is born out of obedience' (John Calvin). [3] Inattention to doctrine robs a church of her reason for existence, and opens the way to enslavement and oppression by the world. The German Christians, through well-intentioned but muddled attitudes towards the world, allowed that world to conquer them. The same could too easily happen to us as well.

A church which takes doctrine seriously is a church which is obedient to and responsible for what God has entrusted to it. Doctrine gives substance and weight to what the Christian church has to offer to the world. A

church which despises or neglects doctrine may simply lapse into a comfortable conformity with the world - or whatever part of the world it happens to feel most at home with. Its agenda is set by the world; its presuppositions are influenced by the world; its outlook mirrors that of the world. There are few more pathetic sights than a church wandering aimlessly from one 'meaningful' issue to another in a desperate search for relevance in the eyes of the world.

But there is more to it than this. One of my reasons for adopting liberalism had been the pervasive perception within academic circles at Oxford and Cambridge that thinking people could not be evangelicals (and vice versa). Yet more and more I found that certain ways of thinking were, in effect, ruled out in advance by liberalism. It seemed increasingly to me that liberal values determined liberal theology. (For example, the uniqueness of Christ was rejected, on account of its implications for inter-religious dialogue. This dialogue was seen to be a good thing; therefore, any doctrines which happened to get in its way were eliminated. [4])

A critical approach?

But where did those values come from? They seemed to be little more than an uncritical repetition of the views of liberal society at large. Having been attracted to liberalism by its agenda of 'adopting a critical approach', I found that this critical approach was only applied to certain matters (for example, scripture), and appeared to be used rather sparingly in other areas (such as with regard to the values of secular liberal society, or the validity of appealing to common human experience as a central theological resource). This selectivity raised doubts in my mind. It seemed that culture was allowed to criticise Christianity -but that Christianity was not allowed to criticise culture. In any case, the liberal agenda seemed to deprive it of the resources it needed to do this. No doctrines; no foundation for a criticism of society.

Who is Jesus?

This point led me on to reflect on the relevance of Jesus Christ to the Christian faith. In my liberal phase, I - like many of my colleagues - dismissed doctrines about the person of Christ as an irrelevance to life. The incarnation, to return to the example noted above, was not so much a doctrine about the person of Christ, but a symbol affirming God's involvement in the world. But gradually I found myself realising that I had to be able to give an account of who Jesus was. That question could not be postponed indefinitely. One had to spell out what it was about him that made him so central to Christianity.

So what were the options? Jesus must be more than just a religious teacher to account for his position within Christianity. C. S. Lewis expressed this point clearly and trenchantly:

We have never followed the advice of the great teachers. Why are we likely to begin now? Why are we more likely to follow Christ than any of the others? Because he's the best moral teacher? But that makes it even less likely that we shall follow him. If Christianity only means one more bit of good advice, then Christianity is of no importance. There's been no lack of good advice over the last four thousand years. A bit more makes no difference. [5]

In fact, however, Christians do not speak of Jesus in this way, as Lewis stresses. They speak of being 'saved' through him. They speak about encountering God through him.

In any case, the teaching of Jesus himself carries us beyond the idea that Jesus is only a teacher. The outrage provoked by Jesus among his Jewish audience when he declared that the paralytic's sins were forgiven (Mark 2:5) was utterly genuine. Their theology was utterly correct: 'Who can forgive sins but God alone?' (Mark 2:7). Jesus' words point back to himself. If they are to be taken seriously, they amount to a remarkable statement concerning Jesus himself. His identity and status become part of this message. His statements about God are mingled with statements concerning himself, even to the point where the reliability and trustworthiness of the former come to depend upon the latter. The statements concerning what Jesus believes himself to be called and able to do require clarification of the relationship between Jesus and God, between the Son and the Father - and thus point to the need for doctrines, such as that of the incarnation.

To allow that Jesus is a religious teacher is to raise the question of his authority. Why should we take him seriously? We have been fortunate enough to have had the advice of countless moral and religious teachers in human history - what makes Jesus different? What singles him out as commanding attention? It is untenable to suggest that Jesus' authority rests upon the excellence of his moral or religious teaching. To make this suggestion is to imply that Jesus has authority only when he happens to agree with us. We thus would have authority over Jesus.

I did originally believe that the authority of Christ rests upon the excellence of his moral and religious teaching. This position initially sounds attractive; on closer inspection, however, it turns out actually to undermine that very authority. By what standards do we judge Jesus' teaching? The argument rests on knowing in advance

what moral or religious teachings are to be regarded as outstanding. Jesus Christ is then regarded as authoritative, to the extent that he echoes these already existing standards. He is judged by a higher authority - what these writers regard as morally and religiously acceptable. For classical Christian thought, it is existing human religious and moral ideas which are to be challenged and judged by Jesus Christ; for these modern writers, it is existing notions of morality and religion which are to judge Jesus Christ. Christ is thus placed firmly under human authority, denied any role of challenging and overturning accepted human ideas and values.

It may seem very attractive to see Jesus as some sort of projection or validation of our own standards and aspirations. Yet if we allow that Jesus has authority simply because he echoes what we happen to believe to be right, we are setting ourselves above him in judgement. It is our own concepts of morality, our own standards (wherever they come from) that are judging him. And all too often those standards are little more than the prejudices of our own culture. By judging Jesus in this way, we lock ourselves into our own situation. We are prisoners of our culture, unable to see its limitations. We are unwilling to accept criticism from outside it. If Jesus echoes our own values and aspirations, we gladly accept his support; if Jesus should happen to challenge them, we dismiss him, or choose to ignore the challenge.

Jesus is thus denied any possibility of transforming us by challenging our presuppositions. We are reluctant to hear him when he does not echo our own liberal voices. (The rush to 'contextualise' or 'relativise' Jesus where he seems to conflict with modern values is an interesting illustration of this process.) If Jesus has any authority in this way, it is simply as a passive echo of our own ideas and values.

It is for this reason that doctrine is of central importance. Christianity does not assert that Christ has authority on account of the excellence or acceptability of his teaching; rather, the teaching of Christ has authority and validity on account of who he is - God incarnate. The object of Christian faith is not the teachings, but the teacher. The New Testament provides ample justification of this point; throughout his writings, Paul begins by making doctrinal affirmations, and then proceeds to draw moral conclusions. Doctrine comes first; moral and religious principles follow. For example, the doctrine of the resurrection leads to an attitude of hope in the face of adversity; the doctrine of the incarnation of Christ leads to an attitude of humility on the part of believers; the doctrine of the reconciliation of believers to God through Christ leads to a plea that believers should be reconciled with one another.

The inevitability of doctrine

In fact, the identity and significance of Jesus can only be spelled out in doctrinal terms. 'We cannot go on treating and believing in Jesus Christ in a way in which it would be wrong to treat and believe in another man, without a theory of his person that explains that he is something more than man' (Charles Gore). [6] It is doctrine which explains why and how Jesus' words and deeds have divine, rather than purely human, authority. It is doctrine which singles out Jesus Christ, and none other, as being God incarnate. Quite contrary to the Broad Church liberals of the nineteenth century (who believed it was possible to uphold the religious and ethical aspects of Christianity, while discarding its doctrines) and their spiritual heirs of today, the authority of Jesus' moral and religious teaching thus rests firmly upon a doctrinal foundation.

This point was made clearly and prophetically by William Temple. Writing against the 'Religion without Dogma' movement in 1942, he declared that:

You would hardly find any theologian now who supposes that Christian ethics can survive for half a century in detachment from Christian doctrine, and this is the very last moment when the church itself can come forward with outlines of Christian ethics in the absence of the theological foundation which alone makes them really tenable. Our people have grown up in a generally Christian atmosphere, and take it for granted that all people who are not actually perverted hold what are essentially Christian notions about human conduct. But this is not true. [7]

(Temple then goes on to illustrate this point with reference to the rise of Hitler and Stalin in the 1930s.) Although many liberal and radical writers of the 1960s suggested that Christian ethics could be divorced from doctrine, and maintain an independent existence, the wisdom of

Temple's words is once more apparent. As recent writers such as Oliver O'Donovan have insisted, distinctive ethics (whether Marxist, Christian or Buddhist) are dependent upon world-views, which are in turn shaped by doctrines, by understandings of human nature and destiny. [8]

Liberalism seemed to me to teach that doctrine was superfluous. Yet I gradually realised that liberalism had its own doctrines. The economist J. M. Keynes came across similar attitudes among industrialists and politicians. 'We're practical people who have no need for abstract theories about economics,' they declared. Yet these people, Keynes scathingly remarked, were little more than the unwitting slaves of some defunct economist. Their allegedly 'practical' outlook actually rested upon unacknowledged economic theories. They lacked the insight to see that what they

regarded as obvious was actually based upon the theories of some long-dead economist.

Liberalism, I realised, itself rests upon quite definite doctrinal foundations, despite allowing itself to be represented as an anti-doctrinal movement. The study of doctrine is thus profoundly liberating, as it exposes these hidden doctrinal assumptions. Every version of Christianity that has ever existed rests upon doctrinal foundations; not every version of Christianity has grasped this fact. The genuine question of importance is quite simple: Which of those doctrinal foundations are the most authentic and reliable?

How is the 'cross' good news?

This point became increasingly clear to me as I reflected on the question of why Christianity can be said to be good news. I found the importance of this question to my pastoral work becoming ever more evident during my time in the parish. Time and time again, my regular parish visiting suggested that people had real difficulty in understanding how the death of a man two thousand years ago could be good news for them today. The liberal vocabulary of the cross began to seem rather pathetic to me, as it so obviously failed to gain a hearing.

Now, it had been drilled into me that liberalism was relevant to the modern world, where evangelicalism was not. Yet liberal approaches to the cross seemed an irrelevance in my parish ministry. It is not good news if a man, after a life of self-giving and care for his fellows, should be harried, tortured, mocked and finally executed in a triumphant display of barbarity. It is no gospel if this man reveals the love of one human being for another, far far away and long long ago.

It becomes good news, however, if it is the Son of God himself who gives himself in order that we might come to newness of life. It becomes good news if these events are interpreted in terms of a sufficiently high profile of identity between Jesus and God, such as that set out by the doctrine of the incarnation. The cross is good news because it proclaims the reality of the love of God to the world. It points to Jesus Christ upon the cross, and declares, 'God loved the world this much' (see John 3:16). The death of Jesus Christ upon the cross is therefore only good news if it is interpreted in a certain way.

Doctrine defines how the cross of Christ is to be interpreted. To put it another way, it provides an interpretative framework for understanding the events of Calvary. Doctrine aims to explain what it is about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus

Christ which is good news. It aims to explain and justify the vital connection between the 'there and then' of Calvary and the 'here and now' of our own situation. It is an interpretative bridge between history and faith, between the past and the present. It relates the events of Calvary to our own experience, interpreting the latter in terms of the former.

Doctrine and the mind

Doctrine also represents a natural outcome of human inquisitiveness and intelligence. Human beings are rational creatures. They ask questions - questions like: 'Why?' As

Plato stressed, there is a natural human desire to 'give an account of things'. Why are we being asked to accept the teachings of Jesus Christ? Why is he singled out among other human beings? This need to make sense of things applies equally to matters of Christian faith. For example, the crucifixion and resurrection are things which need to be explained. Why did they happen? What do they mean? In his 1891 Bampton Lectures, delivered at Oxford University, Charles Gore pointed out that this natural human inquisitiveness has its religious outcome in doctrine:

Christians found themselves treating Jesus Christ, believing in Jesus Christ, as they had never treated or believed in any other man . . . Because they were rational they must have asked themselves 'Why do we treat Jesus Christ in this exceptional manner? Who is he to be so treated? What is his relation to God whose functions he exercises? Why are we not idolaters if we yield him such worship?' They must have asked these questions because they were men endowed with reason, and could not therefore go on acting without giving some account of their action. [9]

Doctrine is nothing other than the attempt of rational believers to make sense of every aspect of their experience of Jesus Christ. If conversion involves the mind as well as the soul, doctrine is its inevitable outcome, as the believer brings his or her mind to bear on the implications of faith. To be a thinking Christian is to be aware of the need for, and importance of, doctrine.

Doctrine thus attempts to make explicit the implicit assumptions of faith. For example, faith believes that we have been saved through Jesus Christ; doctrine

asserts that this belief implies that Jesus must be both God and man if this is to be possible. Doctrine is basically the outcome of taking rational trouble over the mysteries of faith. To prohibit this rational reflection in order to develop a 'Christianity without doctrine' is to deny Christians the right to think about their faith. Doctrinal reflection is the product of a passionate search for truth, combining intellectual curiosity and honesty.

To be concerned about doctrine is not to be obsessed with petty matters; it is to be aware of the enormous responsibility placed upon us, as we try to grasp exactly what God is like, and what that might entail for our hearts and minds. Doctrine matters because God matters - and because we matter to God. If God has taken so much trouble to enter into our pathetic and sinful world, the very least we can do is to be attentive to him. Doctrine is the outcome of a caring and committed attentiveness on our part to God telling us about himself.

Only a fool would imagine that doctrine pretends to state exhaustively everything about God in the form of human words. But words are the only means at our disposal to tell others about God, and about his nature and purposes. That means we must get those words right. It means taking care to use words responsibly. Doctrine aims to assist our talk about God, guiding us as we try to explain the gospel to outsiders, or gain a deeper understanding of it ourselves, or think through its implications for our society. To those who mutter darkly about doctrine getting in the way of the real business of life, it may be said that doctrine does not preclude, but informs, action. It forces us to think through what sort of action is most in line with the patterns God himself has set us, in the person of Jesus Christ and in the testimony of scripture. As church history makes painfully clear, not all the actions of the church merit the name 'Christian'. Doctrine aims to ensure that our actions do. There is far more to Christianity than doctrine. The Puritan slogan 'truth in life' has much to commend it. Doctrine affects life. It determines values, and thus actions. It is like the bones which give strength and shape to the human body. It is like the steel rods which reinforce concrete structures. Without doctrine, faith becomes shapeless, weak and vulnerable. Doctrine addresses, interprets and transforms human experience, in order that a dynamic, living and resilient faith may result. Doctrine inside the head is an irrelevance; life without doctrine is an impossibility-Doctrine and life complement each other - and are meant to complement each other. The doctrine of a loving God who became incarnate in his world gives rise to loving people, who aim to serve God in that same world. The doctrine of the forgiveness of our sins gives birth to a forgiving people, just as the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead brings into being a people of hope, who

know their final destiny lies outside this world. Doctrine enables God's story to express itself in our story, and transform it. George Herbert's little-known poem 'The Windows' brings out this point rather well:

Lord, how can man preach the eternall word? He is a brittle crazie glasse: Yet in they temple thou dost him afford This glorious and transcendent place, To be a window, though thy grace. But when thou dost anneal in glasse they storie, Making ty life to shine within, The holy Preachers; then the light and glorie More rev'rend grows, and more doth win: Which else shows watrish, bleak and thin. Doctrine and life, colours and light, in one When they combine and mingle, bring, A strong regard and aw: but speech alone Doth vanish like a flaring thing, And in the eare, not conscience ring.

Why doctrine? Because Christians think and act. That thinking and acting needs to be informed. Christianity is just too important to allow itself to be reduced to a 'watery, bleak and thin' set of ideas, or the shallowness and mindlessness of unthinking action in the world. The rest of the essays in this volume aim to spell out how doctrine affects life. The purpose of this essay is to insist that doctrine provides a firm foundation upon which the Christian life may be built. And in a world plagued by superficiality, a firm foundation remains of essential importance. Questions for discussion

1. Can anyone be a Christian without believing something.
2. What are some of the uses of doctrine?
3. Why do some people find the idea of 'doctrine' very intimidating?
4. What would be the effect of eliminating doctrine from Christianity?

For further reading

James Atkinson and Rowan Williams, 'On Doing Theology', in C. Baxter (ed.), Stepping Stones (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), 1-20

Paul Avis, Ecumenical Theology and the Elusiveness of Doctrine (London: SPCK, 1986)

Hendrikus Berkhof, Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) Charles Gore, The Incarnation of the Son of God (London: John Murray, 1922)

C. S. Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry?" In C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection, 1-21. (London: Collins, 2000)

Alister E. McGrath, *Understanding Doctrine* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991)

Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 4th edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006)

Alister McGrath, *Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth* (London: SPCK, 2009)

Dorothy L. Sayers, 'Creed or Chaos?', in *Creed or Chaos?* (London: Methuen, 1947), pp. 25-46

Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005)

J. S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1941)

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[1]John Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1977); James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 1977).

[2]Some of these points are developed at greater length in my book *Understanding Doctrine: Its Purpose and Relevance for Today* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991). For two more scholarly approaches to the same issue, see George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (London: SPCK, 1984); Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

[3]*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1. 6. 2.

[4]This approach is vigorously defended in John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (London: SCM Press, 1987), which interestingly - failed to attract anything even approaching the same interest as John Hick (ed.), *The*

Myth of God Incarnate (London: SCM Press, 1977). For a vigorous scholarly refutation of the pluralism of this approach, see Gavin D'Costa (ed.), Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990).

[5]C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (London: Collins, 1956), pp. 132-3.

[6] Charles Gore, The Incarnation of the Son of God (London: John Murray, 1922), p. 23.

[7] Letter cited in F. A. Iremonger, William Temple (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 490.

[8] Oliver O'Donovan, Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986).

[9] Gore, The Incarnation of the Son of God, p. 22.