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## UNIT 4 PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIANITY

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### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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What this present unit proposes is a Philosophy of Christianity. A course on the 'Philosophy of Christianity' would mean understanding how the Christian religion looks at world, man, and God. Who is man in Christianity? Why was human life created, sustained? Where is human life destined? What is the understanding of God in Christianity? What is World? What is the relationship between world, man and God?

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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Of the two terms that constitute the title 'Philosophy of Christianity', we are familiar with the word 'Philosophy', and we have a basic understanding of its scope and importance. The second term 'Christianity' may require a brief introduction. Christianity, a monotheistic major world religion, is an offshoot of Judaism. It began as a Jewish reform movement after the Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension of Jesus Christ and the Pentecost event, in *circa* 30 CE. Christianity took a systematized form as 'historical Christianity' through a triple combination: Jewish faith, Greek thought, and the conversion of a great part of the Roman Empire. Greek philosophy played a primal role in the formulation and interpretation of the Christian doctrines. But these doctrines of Greek inspiration were founded upon the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

The life and teachings of Jesus as well as the experiences of his apostles (a select few numbering 12, chosen by Jesus), are found in a group of texts commonly known as the *New Testament*. This corpus along with the Jewish Scriptures (referred to as *Old Testament*) became the sacred Scripture, the

*Bible* of Christianity. Considered as divinely inspired, these sacred texts have been a constant source of critical interpretation and contemplation. The *New Testament* does not contradict the Jewish Scriptures. Rather it continues, fulfills and perfects it. From *Genesis* (the first book of the *Old Testament*) to *Revelation* (the last book of the *New Testament*) it is the same manifestation of God which is continuously at work.

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## 4.2 CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIANITY

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The distinction between ‘Christian Philosophy’ and ‘Philosophy of Christianity’ is subtle. Christian philosophy refers to a system of thought inspired by Christian beliefs, concepts, and doctrines. A philosophy does not become Christian just because it speaks of Christianity, or attempts to justify it. Rather, when philosophical thinking stems from the fundamental belief in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, when it is developed through Christian tradition, when its identity is distinctively Christian, then it is termed as Christian philosophy. In other words, in Christian philosophy there is an intrinsic relationship between Christian revelation and the philosophical knowledge which results. Philosophy of Christianity on the other hand, is philosophy of the Christian religion. Just as other religions, Christianity too has a particular world view distinct from other religions. Its perceptions of God, world, and man, of what is good, what is sacred, what is real, are specific, unique, and exceptional of its kind, and totally unlike the metaphysical content of other religious traditions. A Philosophy of Christianity explains, expounds, and analyses the concepts and belief systems of Christianity, the phenomena of religious experience, and the activities of worship on which these belief systems rest. There is thus a vital relationship between these two. The Philosophy of Christianity is founded, and is dependent on Christian philosophy. Though the Christian religion is based on Scripture, on tradition as well as on doctrines, Christian philosophy is not static but dynamic. The interpretation of the Bible is never finished; each age seeks new ways to understand the sacred books. The evolution in thought is clearly evident in the history of Christian philosophy.

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## 4.3 DIFFICULTIES IN FORMULATING A PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIANITY

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**Existence of different denominations in Christianity:** Like in many of the major world religions, Christianity too has different denominations, the chief of them being Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Protestant, and Anglican. Their common element is: Jesus Christ, his life and teachings as it is promulgated in the *New Testament*. But there are major differences in their theological beliefs. They differ in their outlook on: Religious authority (Creed and confessions, the books in the Bible, the sources of doctrine); God and Spirits (the Trinity, the Nature of Jesus Christ, Mary the mother of Jesus, Angels, Satan); Sin and Salvation (Human Nature, Body and Soul, Evil, Free Will, Atonement, Predestination, Sin and its corruptive effects, Means of Salvation, Grace, Sacraments, Eschatology, Judgment, Heaven, Hell); Liturgical practices; Ethical teachings and views (marriage, divorce and remarriage, abortion, euthanasia). The difficulty of formulating a Philosophy of Christianity lies in their different outlooks.

**Prevalence of various trends in the Philosophy of Christianity:** This is due to the direct influence of philosophies of the country where Christianity is practised. Thus depending on the prevailing trends, Christian philosophy will have overtones of existentialism, scientism, phenomenology, feminism, option for the poor and the marginalized, etc.

**Evolution in Christian Philosophy:** Christian Philosophy, as stated earlier, is not static, but dynamic. The different readings and the different interpretations of the Bible have in turn given birth to different doctrines. The change in thought could also be the result of scientific discoveries or of interaction with non-Christian cultures. Thus we have Early Christian and Patristic philosophy (Apostolic Fathers, Pre-Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers), Scholastic philosophy, Renaissance and Reformation Christian philosophy, Modern and Contemporary Christian philosophy, and Post-modern Christian philosophy. In spite of these difficulties it is possible to identify the essentials in Christianity. The ontology of Christianity is unique and is founded on the distinction between the uncreated Being and the created being, an original concept of Revelation and a Trinitarian God, a doctrine of the relations between God and His creation. The cosmology of Christianity negates the deification of the universe. The created universe is real and dependent on its Creator God for its existence, nature, and history. The anthropology of Christianity is original, distinct from the ancient concepts of Orphism, Gnosticism, or Platonism. Deeply embedded in the metaphysical tradition of biblical anthropology, it affirms human freedom, the resurrection of the body, and eternal life.

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## 4.4 THE CONCEPT OF GOD

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In Christianity, there is but One Supreme, Omnipotent (all powerful), Omniscient (all knowing), Omnipresent (always present) God, and this God is Being. The understanding of God as One Supreme has its roots in Judaism, in the words of the *Old Testament*: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” (*Deuteronomy* 6:4-5). This understanding of God has continued in the other two Semitic and monotheistic religions: Christianity and Islam. The God of Christianity is with attributes or characteristics. He is fundamentally Being, Truth, and Love.

**God is self-existent:** This assertion recognises: 1) God’s absolute ontological independence. God does not depend on anything or on any being for existence or for characteristics. God is not created, nor can He be constituted. God cannot be destroyed. God is an unconditioned, all-conditioning reality. God *IS*. 2) God is eternal, that is, God exists without beginning or end. He is Infinite. The medieval philosopher Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033-1109), famous for his ontological argument for the existence of God, states: “Indeed You exist neither yesterday nor today nor tomorrow but are absolutely outside all time. For yesterday and today and tomorrow are completely in time; however, You, though nothing can be without You, are nevertheless not in place or time but all things are in You. For nothing contains You, but You contain all things.” (*Proslogion*, 19).

**The Infinite creates the finite:** God is ‘Creator’. God creates everything that exists out of nothing – *Creatio ex nihilo*. The infinite created the finite through His Word (*Logos*), that is, God uttered the world into being. God spoke and the world, with everything in it, including humankind, came to be. This

creation out of nothing implies: 1) Distinction: God and the World are not one. The two are distinct from each other. 2) Inequality: The Creator (God) and the Creation (World) are not equal in relation. This means that human beings will always remain subservient to God. Human beings can never become God; they will never become God. 3) Dependence: Human beings depend upon God every moment of their lives. This dependence is manifested through the prayers, rites and practices that the human being directs towards God. The human being exists by the grace of God, the Giver of Life. The Early Church Father, Irenaeus of Lyon writes: “There is one God alone, who has created all by His *Logos*, who has set all in order, and has made it out of nothing. ... It is He who has made the world, it is He who has formed man, it is He, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, above whom there is no other God, nor Principle, nor Power, nor Fullness; it is He, the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ” (*Adversus Haereses* 1, 22,1)

**God is a Personal God:** God is a transcendent, divine ‘Thou’. In analogical discourse about the divine, Christianity resorts to the masculine, the paternal ‘Father’, and not to the impersonal ‘It’, or to abstract, general terms such as ‘Force’. The personal mode of encounter is evident both from the Biblical, as well as devotional and theological literature. It is seen in the manner Jesus addressed God. God is ‘*Abba*’ – Father. This figure of fatherhood with its paternal characteristics of love, mercy, care, and concern for his children, became the earthly image with which to think of God.

**God is a ‘Person’, and Relation:** Within the Christian perception and experience, God is Trinity. God is ‘Father’, ‘Son’, and ‘Holy Spirit’. This does not mean that there are three gods. It means, God is One but not solitary or in isolation. Rather, there are three distinct divine persons in One God. The three divine persons are consubstantial, that is they are one in substance or essence or nature. Their distinction from one another resides solely in the relationships which relate them to one another: “In the relational names of the Persons the Father is related to the Son, the Son to the Father, and the Holy Spirit to both” (Eleventh Council of Toledo, held in the year 675). There is no opposition of relationship: “Because of that unity the Father is wholly in the Son and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Son is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Son.” (Council of Florence, 1442). The affirmation of God as Trinity implies that God is in active and dynamic relationship with His people.

**God is Love, Truth:** God’s unconditional and universal love for human kind is attested many times in the New Testament, along with the attributes of goodness and mercy. He wills the ultimate good of His creatures, and acts to bring it about. God loves all persons. And therefore humans can love God, and should love one another. This possibility of triangular loving – God loving humans, humans loving God, and humans loving one another – has been expressed by Jesus Christ, a man in whom dwelt the fullness of divinity and humanity. A man crucified and who died, but who came out of his tomb alive. Through Jesus Christ, a personal relationship has been established between Christians and God. This kind of interpersonal relationship is new in the history of human kind. Henceforth, for all eternity, God has become reality. God is with humans, God is in humans, for God has revealed Himself concretely in Jesus who lived among us.

**God is holy (*Kadosh* in Hebrew):** The idea of holy implies differentiation, a setting apart from the profane, the common, and the habitual. God is holy in the dual sense that He is unique, and that He is morally perfect. Because God is unique He alone is worthy of being worshipped. The appropriateness of worship is built into the nature of the Creator/creature distinction, which cannot be dissolved. The moral perfection of God expresses God's absolute separation from evil.

**God is providential:** God preserves, maintains, and governs the course of history, moving it toward an end (the Kingdom of God). This implies that time and the historical process are one-directional (not cyclical), real, and not illusory.

**God comes to meet man:** God has acted in history at real times and in real places to reveal Himself to real persons, and to act on their behalf. Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, is the direct revelation of God. He is the Word of God who became flesh and dwelt among humans.

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## 4.5 INCARNATION

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Incarnation (Latin *incarnatio*: *in* : in, into + *caro* [genitive *carnis*] : flesh), meaning 'to make flesh' or 'to become flesh', is one of the central tenets of Christianity. It teaches that God out of sheer generosity became man in the person of Jesus Christ and lived among humans: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (*Gospel of John* 1:14a). This embodiment of the divine principle as a human being, as one of us, is a unique once and for all event that will not be repeated. It took place in a particular space (in Palestine) and in a particular time (the beginning of this common era). By taking human form and coming down to earth (divine becoming man) God invites and receives humans into His own company.

From the metaphysical standpoint of Judaism, the Christian doctrine of Incarnation can be objected to. The very possibility is meaningless and a contradiction. How can the Intelligible, the Spiritual, and the Divine come and defile itself in the sensible, the material, and the human? How can the Eternal enter into the temporal, the Universal into the particular? But a relook at the metaphysics of immanence according to the biblical thought would reveal that the idea of Incarnation is possible. The Creator can come into this world, created in and through his *Logos* (Word). The Old Testament speaks of the God of Israel dwelling among His chosen people; that God "tabernacles" with His chosen. The Biblical Hebrew word is *Shekinah* and denotes the dwelling or the settling presence of God among His people. The God of Israel, the Creator God, is both transcendent and immanent. In God mankind is, moves, and lives. God continues to act through human conduct, thoughts, and acts of free will, just as He is at work in the continuous coming into being of the world.

The *Logos* is the individual Incarnation of the divine principle, the emanation of a personal God. Though the act of God taking human form is found in other religions like Hinduism or in ancient Greek and Roman thoughts, and though the *Logos* in the Gospel of John has Greek and Semitic roots, Incarnation and the *Logos* in Christianity is original and different from other religions. Incarnation is not *ensomatosis*, that is, descent into bodies. John made *Logos* a real person, an irreplaceable individual, and not merely a personification, or allegorism. The *Logos* is fully human and fully divine without any confusion of natures. This



*Logos* is the Creator and the Light which enlightens every human born in this world. This *Logos* is the Messiah, the Saviour who lays down his life for humans, and who introduces the Kingdom of God. He is fully human whom his disciples approached, with whom they related on familiar terms, and of whom they now give witness.

### Check Your Progress I

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

- 1) In Christianity, God is One in essence but Three in persons. Explain.

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- 2) How is Incarnation original and different from other religions?

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## 4.6 THE CONCEPT OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Christian anthropology is developed within the sacred Scripture of the Old Testament, and is therefore Biblically rooted. The Bible narrates the beginning of existence, both for particular beings as well as for the whole, through the dynamic and voluntary act of God the Creator. The human being is created by God.

**The human person is corporeal:** It is not an evil god or a perverse principle that created the corporality. Man's corporality is not due to a fall from God's grace. Neither is it a blemish, nor a place of exile, nor an accident, nor a catastrophe. Corporality was not gifted to man because of sin or in anticipation of sin. He is corporeal by God's creation. God the unique Creator created humankind, both male and female, with a bodily nature, in His "own image and likeness"; and human, so created, is blessed by God, and is found, like all creation, "good". Corporality is part of the creative plan of the Creator, and is excellent in its order.

**The human body is not evil:** Since God created humankind with a body, found His creature good, and blessed him, the body is not evil, nor the source of evil, nor is it responsible for evil. God created humans corporeal, and therefore the corporeal nature of man is good. Christian tradition rejects vehemently the Gnostic and Manichean systems, the Neoplatonic philosophy and mediaeval dualism which have tended to degrade, despise, or diminish human corporality. According to these philosophies, the human soul is divine by nature, and is part of the godhead fallen into an evil body. But, if man was a soul fallen into an evil body, it would be difficult to understand the biblical concept of creation, or Incarnation. Creation is the work of God's free will and is a gift; how could the *Logos* of God "pitch tent", *i.e.*, incarnate, into an evil matter, a body impure by nature?

Human is not a divine soul fallen into an evil body: Man is a created, living being with a soul. Humans have a single soul, which is both intellectual and spiritual. The soul is created in a corporeal condition. It is not pre-existent as part of the divine substance. The living body exists as a living body only because it is animated (Latin *anima* : soul, breath). The body is the ‘matter’ while the soul is the ‘form’. On the other hand, the body is not a prison for the soul. God created human, soul and body together. The concept of the pre-existence of the soul, the themes of transmigration, reincarnation, and everlasting return are therefore alien to Christianity.

**Human soul is not a particle or fragment, or a part of God:** They are not created from God’s substance, His spittle, His seed, or His blood, and therefore there is no natural consubstantiality of the human with God. The Biblical creation story is radically different from the Egyptian and Assyro-Babylonian myths which taught the consubstantiality of the soul with the divinity. Christianity rejects this doctrine of a natural consubstantiality. The individual souls are created by God as new souls. As created souls they are radically and ontologically distinct from God their Creator. All beings are beginning to be born and to exist. They are in a world which is in a state of coming into being, of continued creation, in which all beings begin to exist every day. The human soul is the gift of God, of the Spirit of God, who gives immortality to the soul. Immortality is not its own nature. The soul continues in existence after death; souls do not transmigrate, but they remember the actions performed here on earth. The parable of the wicked rich man and the poor man Lazarus in the *Gospel of Luke* (16:19-31) reveals clearly that souls continue to exist, that they do not pass from one body to another, that they possess those human characteristics by which they can be recognized, and that they remember those who are on earth (Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses* 2, 34, 1).

**Life is God’s gift:** Human life is given in accordance with God’s grace, and it is not of oneself or of one’s own nature that one possesses life. It is God who gives life. This thought of life as God’s gift is foundational in Christian ethics.

**Human being is summoned to perfection:** The Biblical anthropology of the human being created in the image and likeness of God implies that the human being is different from other created living things. The very purpose of the creation of human in the image and likeness of God is the divinization or perfection of human nature. The doctrine of divinization, which the Greek fathers called *theiosis*, carries certain metaphysical implications and presuppositions. Man should be free to consent to be called to this godlike destiny. The human person, unlike inanimate objects or other living things, is summoned to perfection, to share in God’s life, to divine completion. In Christian thought, man is not a marionette. God cannot invite a lifeless puppet to a divinization. The divinization is not something that took place in the past but is to happen in the future. It is the final end. This would mean that there is no place for hopeless nostalgia, for a vain desire to return to the past state of perfection. On the other hand, the divinization, for which mankind is pre-adapted by creation, demands active cooperation from the humans as well as the saving grace of God.

**Human being has the capacity for God:** According to Biblical anthropology, in all of God’s creation, only human beings possess a spirit. The term ‘spirit’ translates the Hebrew word *Ruah* which in its primary sense means, breath, air, wind. *Genesis*, the first book of the Bible gives two narratives of the creation

of man by God. According to the second narrative, God creates Adam, the first man, out of the “ground, and breathes into his nostril the breath of life (*Ruah*)”. The Spirit of God is breathed onto the inanimate Adam, and the vivifying power of this breath transforms the human into a living being: “The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (*Ruah*); and man became a living being” (*Genesis* 2:7). No longer is human an animal being. The human being is now a partner with whom God converses, and to whom God entrusts the stewardship of the world. The human who has received in himself the *Ruah* of God, has now the capacity to welcome the supernatural, the capacity to hear God’s word, and to converse with God, in short the capacity for God (*capax Dei*). According to Christian ontology and anthropology, what distinguishes human from animals is this capacity for God; the ‘capability’ to attain God.

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## 4.7 HUMAN FREE WILL AND PROBLEM OF EVIL

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The Biblical teaching on freedom and evil is bound with the teaching on creation, matter, and body. It is not the body or matter or the senses which are responsible for evil, but it is man himself who is responsible for the evil he does. It was his own act, done out of his own free will and choice, that led man into exile and away from the paradise God has prepared for him; man was himself the cause of his downfall. It is not the gods (as in the cosmogonies of Greek philosophy), or fate or the stars that are responsible for man’s tragedy.

Freedom of will is a fundamental characteristic of a human being. According to Tertullian, one of the Early Church Fathers, there is nothing in man which is more to the image and likeness of God than free will. It is essential to the being who was created in the image and likeness of God. Man was created good and free, and he is called to be good through free, personal consent. Without freedom man could not be good; with it he might be either good or bad. The narrative in *Genesis* of the Fall of man tells us that man was faced with the alternatives of obedience or disobedience, either of which he was free to choose indifferently. It was in the exercise of his free will that he deliberately chose the way of disobedience and transgression.

Evil is not merely an enigma but a reality. Though evil has been understood in different ways (absence of good, human fallibility, unmerited suffering that cannot be justified), its existence has never been denied in Christianity. There is evil in the world. Now, the paradox is this: how to reconcile the concept of creation of the world by an omnipotent, benevolent God with the existence of Evil? The Trilemma argument attributed to the Ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-270 B.C.E.) presents the enigma of the existence of an omnipotent God and Evil:

“Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able?

Then He is not omnipotent.

Is He able, but not willing?

Then He is malevolent.

Is He both able and willing?



Then, from where, comes evil?

Is He neither able nor willing?

Then why call Him God?"

In other words, an all-powerful, all benevolent God would not allow evil to exist. But that evil does exist cannot be denied. And its very existence puts into doubt the existence of God. Over the centuries there have been numerous attempts at Theodicy. (Theodicy, from Greek *Theos* : God, and *dike* : justice, coined by the German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz, is the defence of God's omnipotence and goodness in view of the existence of evil). How can God of Love allow evil?

In Christian thought, God created human beings with free will, that is, with the capacity to choose to do good or to do evil. Human beings decide, make the choice and act. True, an omnipotent and omniscient God could have made sure that human beings decide, choose and act justly, and always rightly. But in order to do so, God would have to create human without a free will. A human who is programmed to act correctly is not a free person. Creating human beings with free will implied that human is free to decide, to make a choice, and that he/she is morally responsible for the decision, choice, and action. It would be contradictory to say that God created a free human being who had to always do what is right. Creating a free human being means creating a person who is free to do both right and wrong, good and evil. Man can stop himself from doing evil; he has the free will to make decisions and choices, and to act accordingly.

The key of a meaningful life for a Christian is an ongoing relationship with God and with others. This is evident in the love commandment of Jesus: "Love your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and Love your neighbour as yourself" (*Gospel of Mark* 12:28-34). The life of Jesus characterized by love and sacrifice, as told in the *New Testament* narratives, is the paradigm for a meaningful life for the Christian. Imitating the *Logos*, that is Jesus Christ, implies the willingness to lay down one's life, and be subject to rejection just as Jesus was.

### Check Your Progress II

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

- 1) According to Christian thought mankind is created in God's image and likeness. What are the implications of this philosophy?

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- 2) Freedom of Will and Evil are inseparably linked in Christianity. Explain.

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## 4.8 CONCEPT OF THE WORLD AND THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GOD AND THE WORLD

**Creation is a free act of God:** Creation is the act of God who is One and Unique. The created world is not the absolute, nor is anything which the world contains. Only God is Absolute, and the Absolute is distinct from the world. The relation between the Absolute and the world is a relation of creation, and is expressed through the Hebrew verb “*bara*” (to create), a word that the Bible reserves only for God’s action. Creation is not imposed upon God, either by an external or an internal necessity. It was not for self-realization, or for self-generation, or for self-awareness that God created the world. Neither did God create the world to acquire perfection. Creation is grace; the first grace. In the words of the scholastic theologian Hugh of St Victor it is *gratia creatrix* (creating grace). Creation is the manifestation of God’s *agape* (love), and of His goodness. At the beginning there is the *agape* of God, His bountiful love, and creation is His free gift.

**Creation is not fabrication:** In Christian thinking the world is God’s creation and not His fabrication. The difference in these two acts is that creation needs no pre-existing matter, not even God’s own substance. Creation is *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing). On the other hand, fabrication or fashioning would require matter. Creation did not presuppose an uncreated and external matter on which the creator would have worked, like the raw clay that the potter moulds into a pot, or the block of marble that the sculptor chisels into a figure of art. The originality of creation is that God created the matter too; there was no pre-existing matter. The pre-existence of matter would suppose the existence of two absolutes, two uncreated eternal principles: God and matter. This would be inconsistent with Christian monotheism.

**Material creation is not consubstantial with the Divine:** Creation is not an emanation of, or a procession from the divine substance. Neither is creation generation. The created is not born of the divine substance (spittle, blood or seed as in other cosmogonies), and hence is not consubstantial with God. Only the *Logos* is consubstantial with God. *Logos* is not created, but begotten. Creation is a positive act, willed by God, blessed and found good by Him. Material creation is willed and brought into being by God for its own sake. Thus neither creation nor the Fall is evil. God is not responsible for the Fall, for man’s sin. According to the Biblical narrative of man’s Fall, creation and Fall happen at different intervals. Human sins at the end of creation, and therefore sin is not pre-cosmic, pre-historical, or pre-empirical.

**Creation is not eternal:** Creation has had a beginning. The world did not exist from all eternity. God created all things in time. The Bible opens with these words: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (*Genesis* 1:1). Just as creation has had a unique and definitive beginning, the created world is irreversibly directed towards an end. Creation is neither eternal, nor will there be an eternal re-commencement of the cosmic cycle. Creation is not appearance or illusion. The whole world has had a beginning and will have an end, for it is not divine, and is not the same as self-existence.

**Creation is “continuous creation”:** Creation is not a static, ready-made world constructed by the divine Creator, but it is a dynamic, unfolding creative process.

If creation is *creatio ex nihilo*, it is also *creatio continua* (continuous creation). *Creatio ex nihilo* conveyed the ontological dependence of creation on the sustaining will of the Creator. *Creatio continua* communicates that God's action in relation to the world is not a single act in the past, but is a continuing presence here and now, a continuing creation. God is as much the Creator today as God was when the Creator spoke the world into being. The created world has no autonomous existence that would enable it to continue independently of a God. The world would cease to be without the divine sustaining will.

The created world that God holds in existence is not an immense marionette theatre manipulated from above by the unseen Puppeteer-God. Neither is God an impotent, disinterested, indifferent, deistic spectator of its history. When the Bible speaks of God "holding in his hands the depths of the earth and the highest mountains" (*Psalms* 95:4) it is to express God's creation care. The created human beings are endowed with free will, and summoned to act with responsibility. They are God's stewards and co-creators participating actively in the *creatio continua* of God. This is in fact the divine purpose of creation – to let the creatures continue the creation improvisation. Over the billions of years since the world was created, the human beings as created co-creators have lived up to this summoned responsibility, exploring new possibilities, continuing, and improvising God's creation.

**Creation is God's self-emptying:** Creation is *kenosis*, the self-emptying act of the Creator. It is an emptying of the self in the sense of self-restriction of the exercise of divine power, the letting-be of creative process. The most momentous moment of the *kenosis* act of the Creator is related to free human actions. Respect for the free will of his created co-creators requires God to permit evil or sin. Christian thought makes a distinction between God's permissive will and God's positive will. Although all happenings depend upon the divine permissive will, however everything that happens does not take place in accordance to God's positive will. Thus the voluntary evil acts of the creatures, like murder, or the natural catastrophes are not willed positively by God. However, the Creator allows the autonomous course of such events; they are permitted to happen within the creation that has been gifted with a degree of creaturely independence.

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## 4.9 ESCHATOLOGY

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Every human life ends in death; but in Christian thinking, death is not the end. It is only the end of the temporal existence of man's earthly pilgrimage. In Christianity, there is a perfectly coherent belief and hope in an Eternal existence to come, that is, in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. The human being is made up of the human body and the human soul. Death is the separation of the unity of body and soul. At death the human soul continues, while there is a physical breakdown of the material body, that is, its decay. The very nature of man's material body makes it subject to physical decay, as it is the case for all material beings. By death the human soul is separated from the body, but in the resurrection God will give incorruptible life to the body, transformed by reunion with the soul. God's creative, saving, and sanctifying action will preserve the human body in divine memory, and ultimately reconstitute the soul's embodiment in an eschatological act of resurrection. This eschatological new creation is not *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing), but *creatio ex vetere* (creation out of old creation). Resurrection is therefore not merely a spiritual

survival after death. The resurrection of Jesus remains as the promise of one's own resurrection, for "if there be no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen again" (*First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians*, 15:12). Christian thinking affirms in the Last Judgement, the existence of hell and its eternity. The souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into Hell. Hell is eternal separation from God. For those who die in God's grace, but who are imperfectly purified, there will be a period of atonement, of purification, before being reunited with God. Life everlasting means to be in blessed communion with God, to see God face to face.

### Check Your Progress III

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

- 1) Explain the meaning and the implications of the terms: *creatio ex nihilo*, *creatio ex vetere*, *creatio continua*.

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- 2) What is the Christian interpretation of human destiny?

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## 4.10 LET US SUM UP

A 'summary' of the Philosophy of Christianity would mean recapitulating the particular world view of the Christian religion, its specific and original approach to the triple concepts of God, World and the Human person. Nothing beats a story in helping us remember important information. In the present case, we shall resort to two parables (short allegories) that are found in the *New Testament*. These two parables – 'The Prodigal Son' and 'The Good Samaritan' – are narrated by Jesus himself to his disciples at two different occasions. The parable of 'The Prodigal Son' tells the story of loss and reconciliation, and reflects the relationship between the Absolute and His created. The parable of 'The Good Samaritan' speaks of eternal life, the primacy of interpersonal relationships between human and God and human and the other. Together these two parables capture the spirit of Christianity.

**The Prodigal Son** (*Luke* 15: 11-32): And he (Jesus) said, "There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants

have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.” And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to make merry. Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.’ But the elder son was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!’ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’

**The Good Samaritan** (*Luke 10:25-37*): Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher”, he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” The lawyer said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

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## 4.11 KEY WORDS

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***Creatio ex nihilo***: Creation out of nothing. God the Creator created the world and all things in it out of nothing. He created matter too.

***Creatio continua***: Continuous creation. God’s action in relation to the world is not a single act in the past, but is a continuing presence here and now, a continuing creation.



**Creatio ex vetere:** Creation out of old creation. Resurrection is not mere spiritual survival after death, but is resurrection of the body. God's creative, saving and sanctifying action will preserve the human body in divine memory, and ultimately reconstitute the soul's embodiment in an eschatological act of resurrection.

**Incarnation:** The embodiment of the divine. God the Son became man and dwelt among humans.

**Logos:** The Word of God. The second Person of the Trinity. God created the world through his Word, *i.e.*, God spoke the world into being.

**Trinity:** There are three distinct divine persons in One God. The three divine persons 'Father', 'Son' and 'Holy Spirit' are consubstantial, that is they are One in substance or essence or nature. Their distinction from one another resides solely in the relationships which relate them to one another.

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## 4.12 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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