



# Contemporary Perspectives on Theology: Navigating Faith in a Modern World

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## ABSTRACT

Theology today finds itself at the intersection of tradition and innovation. As societies evolve rapidly through technology, globalization, and shifting moral landscapes, theology must respond dynamically while remaining anchored in its historical foundations. This paper explores how contemporary theology engages modern issues such as secularism, interfaith dialogue, social justice, and scientific advancement. It examines the challenges and opportunities these contexts present for theological discourse, church practice, and personal faith. Drawing from diverse traditions — including evangelical, liberation, feminist, and global theologies — this study demonstrates how theology remains a living discipline that critiques and informs contemporary culture. Moreover, it addresses the tension between preserving orthodoxy and embracing contextual relevance. In doing so, the paper argues that rather than departing from classical traditions, contemporary theology is a faithful articulation of enduring truths in light of new realities. The goal is to offer a framework for understanding theology not as a static doctrine but as an ongoing, Spirit-led conversation that continues to shape and be shaped by the world we inhabit.

## ARTICLE'S INFO

**Article No.:** 052725095

**Type:** Review

**Full Text:** [PDF](#), [PHP](#), [EPUB](#), [MP3](#)

**DOI:** [10.15580/gjss.2025.1.052725095](https://doi.org/10.15580/gjss.2025.1.052725095)

**Accepted:** 03/06/2025

**Published:** 05/06/2025

**Keywords:** Contemporary Theology, Secularism, Contextualization, Global Christianity, Faith and Culture

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**Article's QR code**



## I. INTRODUCTION

Theology, derived from the Greek words *theos* (God) and *logos* (word, discourse), is the disciplined study and articulation of God's nature, actions, and relationship to creation. Historically, it has served as the intellectual backbone of Christian doctrine and practice, shaping the Church's engagement with the world across time. Alister McGrath defines theology as "the sustained attempt to speak meaningfully about God in the face of human limitations and historical context."<sup>1</sup> In this light, theology is not merely a systematic catalog of doctrines but a dynamic endeavor that seeks to interpret divine revelation for the ongoing life of faith.

In recent decades, the rapid evolution of culture—marked by postmodern skepticism, secularism, globalization, and the digital revolution—has called for a renewed approach to theological reflection. Theologians such as James K. A. Smith have emphasized that theology must now consider cultural liturgies and embodied practices, recognizing that faith is not merely believed but lived.<sup>2</sup> This contemporary moment demands more than a repetition of inherited doctrines; it calls for a contextualized theology that speaks to real-world crises and human experiences. As Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen notes, the pluralism and interconnectedness of the 21st century necessitate "a constructive theology that is dialogical, intercultural, and interdisciplinary."<sup>3</sup>

The significance of a contemporary theological perspective lies not in its novelty but in its faithfulness to the enduring Gospel amid changing times. Contemporary theology, therefore, is not an abandonment of orthodoxy but a vital expression of it, reshaped by fresh challenges and opportunities. The work of theologians like Kathryn Tanner and Willie James Jennings exemplifies this ongoing project. Tanner insists that theology must be critically engaged with economics and social systems,<sup>4</sup> while Jennings stresses theology's role in confronting racism and colonial legacy.<sup>5</sup> Together, these voices underscore the need for theology to remain prophetic and pastoral, rooted in Scripture and tradition, while attentive to the cries of the present age.

<sup>1</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Theology: The Basics*, 4th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 2.

<sup>2</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Doctrine of God: A Global Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

## II. HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS AND THE NEED FOR CONTEMPORARY ENGAGEMENT

Theology has always existed in dialogue with its historical context, shaped by philosophical movements, ecclesiastical traditions, and cultural challenges. While classical theology provided foundational doctrines rooted in Scripture and the early Church Fathers, the rise of modernity, emphasizing reason and individualism, compelled theologians to rearticulate faith in light of new epistemologies. Therefore, Contemporary theology is not a break from tradition but a necessary evolution. As Alister McGrath observes, theology must "engage critically and creatively with culture" to remain faithful and relevant.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, James K. A. Smith argues that theology today must address the "cultural liturgies" shaping human desire, recognizing that secularism is not merely intellectual but formational.<sup>7</sup> Liberation theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez have emphasized that theology must be done "from below," responding to the lived realities of the oppressed, thus broadening the theological task beyond abstract speculation.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, theologian Kwame Bediako, writing from an African context, insists that the incarnation affirms every culture as a potential vehicle for divine self-disclosure, urging a contextual theology that honors Scripture and indigenous realities.<sup>9</sup> These voices highlight the ongoing need for theological engagement that is historically conscious, culturally aware, and spiritually discerning.

### Brief history of classical theology

Classical theology, rooted in the early Church's engagement with Scripture and Greco-Roman thought, developed through key historical stages — from the patristic formulations of the Trinity and Christology to the scholastic synthesis of faith and reason in the medieval period and later to the doctrinal clarifications of the Reformation. Church Fathers like Augustine laid the groundwork for Western theological reflection, while

<sup>6</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 6th ed. (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 91.

<sup>7</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, 15th Anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 34.

<sup>8</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 89.

<sup>9</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 252.

thinkers like Thomas Aquinas integrated Aristotelian philosophy with Christian doctrine. The Reformation emphasized *sola scriptura* and justification by faith, reshaping ecclesiology and soteriology. Classical theology has been preserved and reinterpreted in the modern era by contemporary theologians who acknowledge its enduring influence. Alister McGrath, for example, affirms the theological richness of the patristic and Reformation traditions as foundational to evangelical identity.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Kevin Vanhoozer emphasizes the value of classical categories, such as the communication idiomatum in contemporary hermeneutics.<sup>11</sup> Working from a patristic and mystical foundation, Sarah Coakley reimagines trinitarian theology through a feminist and contemplative lens.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, John Webster underscores the necessity of retrieving classical doctrinal frameworks for theology to remain truly theological in a secular age.<sup>13</sup> These voices demonstrate that classical theology, far from being obsolete, remains a vital source for the ongoing renewal of the Church's witness.

### Challenges posed by the modern era

The modern era, beginning with the Enlightenment, introduced a rationalist and human-centered worldview that deeply challenged traditional theological convictions. The Enlightenment emphasized reason, individual autonomy, and empirical evidence, often relegating divine revelation to personal belief rather than public truth. This shift led to a crisis of authority for theology, as Scripture and church tradition were increasingly subjected to historical-critical methods and philosophical skepticism. Alister McGrath notes that theology was forced to "redefine its intellectual credibility in a culture that had become suspicious of religious truth claims."<sup>14</sup> Theologians were compelled to respond to this intellectual environment by articulating faith in ways that could engage rational critique without sacrificing core doctrinal commitments.

In the postmodern era, the challenge shifted again—this time toward rejecting overarching metanarratives and embracing pluralism and relativism. Postmodernism questioned the idea of universal truth, destabilizing the

foundations upon which much of classical theology rested. Stanley Grenz observed that postmodernity "undermines the notion of an objective theological framework" and calls for a theology that listens to the lived experiences of diverse communities.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Kevin Vanhoozer argues that theology must navigate the "crisis of meaning" brought about by the fragmentation of truth and identity.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, James K. A. Smith calls for a retrieval of premodern practices and liturgies to counter the "immanent frame" of secular modernity.<sup>17</sup> These theologians highlight that the contemporary task of theology is not simply to defend old truths but to communicate them anew in a culture marked by skepticism, diversity, and dislocation.

### Shifts in authority and epistemology

The Reformation marked a crucial shift in the locus of authority, moving from ecclesial and magisterial control to the primacy of Scripture as interpreted by individual believers. Martin Luther's insistence on *sola scriptura* challenged the long-standing epistemological framework upheld by the Catholic Church, which located theological authority in the Magisterium and tradition.<sup>18</sup> This shift inaugurated a new epistemic confidence in the perspicuity of Scripture and the capacity of the common believer to access divine truth apart from clerical mediation.<sup>19</sup> The Enlightenment further transformed epistemology by prioritizing reason and empirical observation, often at the expense of theological tradition.<sup>20</sup> As secular rationalism gained prominence, theological authority was increasingly subjected to the criteria of critical inquiry, giving rise to historical-critical methods that questioned long-held dogmatic formulations.<sup>21</sup> These developments destabilized inherited structures of belief and demanded a reevaluation of how knowledge of God and theological truth is understood and validated.

In the modern era, postmodern critiques have continued to disrupt traditional epistemological claims, emphasizing the situatedness of all knowledge and the multiplicity of

<sup>10</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Theology: The Basics* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 38.

<sup>11</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 112.

<sup>12</sup> Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 87.

<sup>13</sup> John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012), 24.

<sup>14</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *The Science of God: An Introduction to Scientific Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 56.

<sup>15</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 162.

<sup>16</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 87.

<sup>17</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 29.

<sup>18</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 113.

<sup>19</sup> Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 89–90.

<sup>20</sup> Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 45.

<sup>21</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 32–33.

interpretive frameworks.<sup>22</sup> In this context, appeals to objective or universal truth are often viewed with suspicion, prompting theologians to explore contextual, narrative, and experiential sources of authority alongside Scripture.<sup>23</sup> The fragmentation of epistemic authority challenges the Church to engage contemporary thought critically and constructively without capitulating to relativism. Acknowledging these shifts, some scholars advocate for a “critical realist” approach that affirms the reality of divine revelation while recognizing the finitude and fallibility of human interpretation.<sup>24</sup> These developments call for a renewed theological engagement that is both rooted in historical orthodoxy and responsive to present epistemological challenges.

### III. KEY CURRENTS IN CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY

Contemporary theology is marked by a dynamic interplay of diverse voices, methods, and global contexts, reflecting the complexity of the modern world and the plurality of the church. Emerging from the seismic shifts of the Enlightenment, the rise of secularism, and postcolonial consciousness, current theological trends include liberation theologies, feminist and womanist critiques, contextual and global theologies, as well as renewed interest in classical doctrines through re-orientation and retrieval movements.<sup>25</sup> These currents not only challenge traditional theological frameworks but also seek to rearticulate Christian faith in ways that are faithful to Scripture while meaningfully engaged with cultural, political, and existential realities. In navigating these trajectories, theology today stands at the crossroads of tradition and innovation, requiring both historical rootedness and contextual responsiveness.<sup>26</sup>

#### Evangelical and Neo-Evangelical responses

The Evangelical response to modern and postmodern theological developments has been characterized by a commitment to biblical authority, gospel centrality, and

historical orthodoxy. Emerging in the early 20th century as a response to both liberal theology and fundamentalism, Evangelicals sought a middle path that retained doctrinal fidelity while engaging culture and academia.<sup>27</sup> At the center of this movement was a reaffirmation of *sola scriptura* and the inerrancy of Scripture as the ultimate source of theological authority.<sup>28</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, a key architect of Neo-Evangelicalism, called for a theological method grounded in divine revelation and rational coherence, insisting that Christian truth claims were not only spiritually valid but intellectually defensible.<sup>29</sup> This epistemological posture distinguished Neo-Evangelicals from both the fideism of early fundamentalism and the subjectivism of liberal theology.

Neo-Evangelicals were particularly concerned with the anti-intellectualism that had plagued earlier Evangelical expressions. Institutions such as Fuller Theological Seminary, founded in 1947, embodied this renewed intellectual vigor by promoting rigorous scholarship within a confessional framework.<sup>30</sup> The Neo-Evangelical movement emphasized the importance of cultural engagement and social responsibility, challenging the separatist tendencies of prior generations.<sup>31</sup> Figures like Harold Ockenga and Bernard Ramm advocated for a theology that was both contextually relevant and biblically rooted, addressing issues such as science, politics, and justice from an evangelical worldview.<sup>32</sup> Yet, Neo-Evangelicalism also wrestled with internal tensions—particularly between maintaining doctrinal purity and accommodating academic pluralism—highlighting the ongoing struggle to articulate a coherent evangelical identity in a fragmented theological landscape.

In the face of postmodern critiques of metanarratives and truth claims, Evangelicals have offered diverse responses. Some, like Kevin Vanhoozer, have proposed a canonical-linguistic approach to Scripture, suggesting that meaning is embedded in the authoritative biblical text as performed within the Church.<sup>33</sup> Others, influenced by philosophers like James K. A. Smith, have stressed the formative power of liturgy

<sup>22</sup> John W. Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 78.

<sup>23</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 18.

<sup>24</sup> James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 137.

<sup>25</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Doctrine of God: A Global Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 15–18.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Jinkins, *Theological Reflection: A Handbook for Practitioners* (London: SCM Press, 2013), 22–24.

<sup>27</sup> George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 4.

<sup>28</sup> David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 98.

<sup>29</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976), 234.

<sup>30</sup> Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 112.

<sup>31</sup> Harold J. Ockenga, “The New Evangelicalism,” in *Evangelical Roots*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), 42.

<sup>32</sup> Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 11.

<sup>33</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 49.

and narrative over propositional knowledge, reflecting a more holistic understanding of truth.<sup>34</sup> These developments reflect a growing awareness within Evangelicalism that traditional apologetic strategies must be complemented by an embodied, narrative-rich theology. While Evangelicals remain committed to core doctrinal affirmations, the Neo-Evangelical impulse toward thoughtful engagement continues to shape evangelical theology's response to contemporary currents.

### Liberation, Feminist, and Postcolonial theologies

Emerging from systemic oppression and marginalization, liberation theology centers the lived experiences of the poor and politically disenfranchised as primary loci of theological reflection. Rooted in the socio-political upheavals of Latin America in the mid-20th century, figures such as Gustavo Gutiérrez redefined theology as a "critical reflection on praxis in the light of the Word of God."<sup>35</sup> Liberation theology asserts that salvation is not merely spiritual but integrally tied to historical and social liberation. Its emphasis on orthopraxy—correct action—challenges traditional theological frameworks prioritizing abstract doctrine over concrete engagement with injustice.<sup>36</sup> While criticized by some for its alignment with Marxist socio-economic analysis, its theological core affirms God's preferential option for the poor, urging the Church to stand with the oppressed in solidarity.<sup>37</sup>

Feminist theology arose with liberation theology, drawing attention to the patriarchal assumptions embedded in ecclesial structures and classical theological discourse. Theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elizabeth Johnson argued that the exclusion of women's voices has resulted in a distorted view of God and humanity.<sup>38</sup> Feminist theology critiques the male-dominated imagery of God and calls for a more inclusive language and praxis that honors the full humanity of women.<sup>39</sup> It also reevaluates biblical interpretation, church history, and doctrinal formulations through a gender-conscious lens, emphasizing

relationality, embodiment, and mutuality. By challenging androcentric authority and proposing alternative theological symbols and narratives, feminist theology critiques existing systems and reconstructs theology in liberating ways for all marginalized genders.

Postcolonial theology builds upon the insights of liberation and feminist theologies by foregrounding colonialism's historical and ongoing impact on theological knowledge and Christian mission. Theologians like R. S. Sugirtharajah and Musa Dube expose how colonial powers used Christianity as a tool of domination, distorting Scripture and theology to legitimize imperial conquest.<sup>40</sup> Postcolonial theology interrogates Western epistemologies, privileging the voices, histories, and spiritualities of those previously silenced.<sup>41</sup> It seeks to deconstruct colonial legacies embedded in biblical interpretation, liturgical practices, and theological education and reconstruct a contextually rooted and justice-oriented theology. This approach fosters a global and plural theological conversation, challenging Eurocentric norms and emphasizing hybridity, resistance, and reimagining identity in postcolonial contexts.<sup>42</sup>

### The rise of Global South theology

The shift of Christianity's demographic center to the Global South has profoundly reshaped the landscape of contemporary theology. In sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia, vibrant Christian movements have emerged, often independent of Western missionary control, giving rise to theological expressions rooted in local histories, cultures, and social realities.<sup>43</sup> This development reflects a decentering of theological production from the West and highlights the inadequacy of Eurocentric theological paradigms to address the lived experiences of Global South Christians.<sup>44</sup> Theologies in these contexts are typically characterized by emphasizing holistic salvation, integrating spiritual and material concerns, and intensely engaging with issues such as poverty, injustice, colonialism, and communal identity.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>34</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 38.

<sup>35</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 36.

<sup>36</sup> Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 9–10.

<sup>37</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological View* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 25.

<sup>38</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 17.

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 42.

<sup>40</sup> R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 15.

<sup>41</sup> Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 27.

<sup>42</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 61.

<sup>43</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2–3.

<sup>44</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 433.

<sup>45</sup> Tite Tiénou, "Christian Theology in an Era of World Christianity," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and*

African theology, for example, often draws from indigenous concepts of community, spiritual power, and reconciliation to articulate a contextual understanding of the gospel.<sup>46</sup> This theology seeks to affirm the value of African culture while engaging critically with traditional religion and Western Christianity. Latin American liberation theology, similarly, emerged as a response to systemic oppression and poverty, emphasizing God's preferential option for the poor and calling for political and social transformation.<sup>47</sup> These theological trajectories reveal how Global South theologians engage both Scripture and tradition through the lens of their socio-political realities, often resulting in a praxis-oriented theology that challenges Western categories of academic abstraction and theological detachment.

Furthermore, the rise of Global South theology demands a reconfiguration of theological dialogue on a global scale. It invites Western theologians to listen and learn from non-Western voices and to acknowledge the plural centers of theological authority in the global Church.<sup>48</sup> This growing polyphony enriches Christian theology by offering a more comprehensive, incarnational understanding of the faith that is attuned to diverse cultural expressions and human struggles.<sup>49</sup> Rather than being a peripheral phenomenon, Global South theology now plays a vital role in shaping ecumenical discourse, missionary practice, and theological education worldwide, reflecting the Church's truly catholic (universal) character in the twenty-first century.<sup>50</sup>

### The influence of science and technology on theological thought

The rise of modern science has fundamentally reshaped theological reflection by challenging traditional cosmologies and offering new metaphors and frameworks for understanding divine action. The scientific revolution, with figures such as Galileo and Newton, displaced the geocentric worldview and introduced mechanistic explanations for natural

phenomena, prompting theologians to reconsider doctrines of creation and providence.<sup>51</sup> In the 20th century, the theory of evolution and Big Bang cosmology further complicated literalist readings of Genesis, pushing theologians toward more symbolic or theistic evolutionary models.<sup>52</sup> These developments have led many to adopt a non-competitive view of divine and natural causality, wherein God's action is not in opposition to natural processes but operates through them.<sup>53</sup> As science increasingly shapes the public imagination, theology must interact with it seriously to defend its credibility and draw on scientific insights for constructive theological engagement.

As an outgrowth of scientific rationality, technology introduces additional questions about human agency, identity, and ethics. Developments in artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and virtual reality challenge classical theological anthropology by raising new questions about what it means to be human, the nature of consciousness, and the moral limits of human creativity.<sup>54</sup> Theologians like Philip Hefner have described humans as "created co-creators," suggesting a theological framework that acknowledges both the divine image and human technological agency.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, technology poses ethical dilemmas that demand theological discernment, particularly in genetic engineering, weaponry, and ecological degradation. In this light, theology must engage with abstract metaphysical claims and the lived realities shaped by technological systems, including their power dynamics and socio-political implications.

Furthermore, the digital age has transformed theological discourse, pedagogy, and even spirituality modes. Online worship, theological blogs, and artificial intelligence tools for biblical exegesis reshape how believers engage with Scripture, tradition, and community.<sup>56</sup> While some celebrate these innovations as democratizing access to theological resources, others warn against a superficial digital religiosity that lacks

*Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 44–46.

<sup>46</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1990), 223–225.

<sup>47</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), xxiii–xxv.

<sup>48</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 56–58.

<sup>49</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 15–16.

<sup>50</sup> Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 135–137.

<sup>51</sup> John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 19–20.

<sup>52</sup> Ian G. Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers, or Partners?* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000), 56–58.

<sup>53</sup> John Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence: God's Interaction with the World* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2005), 27.

<sup>54</sup> Noreen Herzfeld, *In Our Image: Artificial Intelligence and the Human Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 33–34.

<sup>55</sup> Philip Hefner, *The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 35–36.

<sup>56</sup> Heidi A. Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 78–79.

depth and accountability.<sup>57</sup> Theological reflection today must account for the medium and the message, interrogating how technological platforms shape theological content and community formation. As science and technology evolve rapidly, their influence on theology will remain a vital frontier for thoughtful, faithful, and critical engagement.

#### IV. CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND THEOLOGICAL RESPONSES

Theological discourse in the contemporary era must contend with many pressing issues that challenge the Church's witness and doctrinal integrity. Among these are questions surrounding human identity, sexuality, pluralism, secularism, and justice. For instance, the global rise of expressive individualism and moral relativism has disrupted traditional Christian anthropologies, prompting urgent conversations on what it means to be human in a world of competing truth claims.<sup>58</sup> Theological responses must reaffirm biblical convictions and rearticulate them in ways that address these debates' psychological, sociocultural, and political dimensions.<sup>59</sup> In this context, theology is increasingly interdisciplinary, drawing on sociology, psychology, and philosophy to speak credibly into a fragmented cultural landscape. The need for contextual theology has also intensified, particularly in the Global South, where Christian communities are navigating issues of poverty, postcolonial identity, and indigenous spiritualities.<sup>60</sup> Such challenges necessitate a theology rooted in Scripture and responsive to local realities.

In response, theologians have begun to recover ancient resources while also engaging modern thought constructively. For example, public theology has emerged as a critical avenue for addressing social justice concerns, environmental ethics, and political engagement from a theological standpoint.<sup>61</sup> Simultaneously, thinkers like Miroslav Volf and N. T. Wright advocate for a theology of reconciliation and new creation that confronts systemic sin and envisions holistic human flourishing.<sup>62</sup> These responses suggest

that faithful theology today must be both doctrinally sound and missionally engaged—capable of offering a hopeful, transformative vision amid the disorientation of modern life. In this light, theology is not merely preserving tradition but a dynamic practice of discernment, seeking to interpret the gospel faithfully within ever-shifting historical and cultural contexts.

#### Secularism And The "Post-Christian" Society

The emergence of a post-Christian society in much of the Western world signals a profound shift in the cultural and intellectual landscape. Whereas Christendom once provided the dominant framework for public morality, law, and education, secularism has increasingly displaced religious authority with human-centered philosophies grounded in autonomy, science, and individual rights.<sup>63</sup> Charles Taylor characterizes this development as the "nova effect"—a proliferation of spiritual options and competing narratives of meaning in a secular age, where belief in God is no longer axiomatic but one possibility among many.<sup>64</sup> This condition has led to what Taylor calls a "buffered self," a conception of the individual as independent from transcendent sources, closed off from divine encounter.<sup>65</sup> As a result, Christianity's public voice has been marginalized, and the Church must now engage in a world where religious faith is frequently viewed with skepticism or indifference.

This new context demands fresh theological engagement that accounts for the epistemological assumptions of secular modernity. Secularism is not merely the absence of religion but often functions as an alternative religion, offering its soteriology (self-fulfillment), eschatology (progress), and moral framework (autonomous ethics).<sup>66</sup> Theologians such as Lesslie Newbigin and Alister McGrath argue that the Church must resist assimilation and retreat, presenting the Christian narrative as a viable, coherent account of reality that addresses the most profound human

<sup>57</sup> Craig Detweiler, *iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2013), 141–143.

<sup>58</sup> Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 47–48.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 112–13.

<sup>60</sup> Tite Tiénou, "Christian Theology in an Era of World Christianity," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 42–43.

<sup>61</sup> Duncan B. Forrester, *Theological Fragments: Explorations in Unsystematic Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 59.

<sup>62</sup> Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011), 73–74.

<sup>63</sup> Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 105–6.

<sup>64</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 300–302.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 542.

<sup>66</sup> Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 35–36.

longings.<sup>67</sup> This requires more than rational argument; it calls for embodied communities of faith whose practices testify to the plausibility and beauty of the gospel. In a post-Christian world, the credibility of Christian truth is increasingly dependent on the integrity of Christian witness.

Furthermore, the rise of secularism presents challenges and opportunities for theological formation and public theology. On one hand, the erosion of cultural Christianity compels the Church to recover its identity as a distinct and often countercultural community. On the other hand, the post-Christian milieu opens space for rediscovery—inviting a return to the theological richness of the early Church, which thrived in a similarly pluralistic and skeptical environment.<sup>68</sup> For many theologians, this shift has catalyzed a reimagining of mission, where the goal is not reclaiming political dominance but cultivating a faithful presence.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the response to secularism is not panic but patient, joyful engagement rooted in the conviction that the gospel remains accurate, compelling, and transformative even amid a disenchanting age.

### Theological Ethics And Social Justice Movements

In recent decades, theological ethics has developed significantly in response to global movements for social justice, including those addressing racial inequality, economic disparity, gender injustice, and environmental degradation. These movements have challenged traditional theological formulations to consider sin and redemption's social and structural dimensions. Liberation theology, emerging from Latin America in the 1960s, was pivotal in articulating a theological ethic rooted in the lived experiences of the poor and oppressed, viewing salvation as encompassing spiritual liberation and socio-political transformation.<sup>70</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez's foundational work calls for a preferential option for the poor, grounded in the character of God as revealed in Scripture and embodied in Jesus' ministry.<sup>71</sup> This ethical framework has influenced global theological discourse, inspiring similar movements in African, Asian, and Black theologies emphasizing contextual justice.

North American Christian ethics, particularly within Black and womanist theology, has contributed

significantly to contemporary understandings of justice. James Cone's theology of Black liberation situates the gospel in solidarity with the oppressed, arguing that God's justice demands a confrontation with racism, white supremacy, and systemic violence.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, womanist theologians such as Katie Cannon have critiqued dominant ethical paradigms for marginalizing the voices of Black women and have proposed moral frameworks rooted in survival, resistance, and communal flourishing.<sup>73</sup> These ethical approaches challenge abstract moral reasoning by anchoring theological reflection in lived experience and historical struggle. As a result, many contemporary theologians advocate for an ethics that is theologically coherent and socially engaged—capable of addressing the realities of injustice in concrete, transformative ways.

In light of these developments, many Christian communities and scholars are reassessing the Church's public witness. Social justice movements—such as those concerned with climate change, indigenous rights, and economic inequality—prompt renewed theological engagement with structural sin and communal responsibility.<sup>74</sup> Theological ethics, in this context, must move beyond personal piety to include collective repentance and systemic action. This does not imply a departure from doctrinal orthodoxy but rather a deeper embodiment of the gospel's call to love one's neighbor and pursue peace. The ongoing challenge for the Church is to sustain a prophetic and pastoral voice that critiques injustice while offering a vision of a reconciled community shaped by the kingdom of God.

### Interreligious Dialogue And Pluralism

Interreligious dialogue has emerged as a significant theological and pastoral imperative in an increasingly globalized and religiously diverse world. The traditional Christian claim to the uniqueness of Christ and the necessity of salvation through Him is challenged by the growing recognition of other faiths as morally and spiritually significant traditions.<sup>75</sup> As a result, Christian theology has been compelled to reexamine its soteriological categories in the face of religious pluralism. Theologians have proposed various models in response, ranging from exclusivism, which maintains the necessity

<sup>67</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 53.

<sup>68</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 15–17.

<sup>69</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 243–44.

<sup>70</sup> Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 9–11.

<sup>71</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 26–28.

<sup>72</sup> James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 40th Anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 151–153.

<sup>73</sup> Katie G. Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 113–115.

<sup>74</sup> Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 54–55.

<sup>75</sup> Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 3.

of explicit faith in Christ, to inclusivism, which affirms Christ's salvific work while allowing for implicit faith in non-Christian contexts; to pluralism, which posits multiple, equally valid paths to the divine.<sup>76</sup> These perspectives reflect deep tensions between theological fidelity to Scripture and the ethical commitment to respect and understand the religious other.

The Second Vatican Council's declaration of *Nostra Aetate* marked a watershed in the Church's engagement with other religions by affirming that truth and holiness can be found in non-Christian traditions. That dialogue, rather than polemics, should characterize interfaith relations.<sup>77</sup> Protestant theologians, such as John Hick and Paul Knitter, expanded on this vision by advocating for a pluralist theology of religions that reinterprets the Christ event not as the exclusive means of salvation but as one of many manifestations of divine reality.<sup>78</sup> However, such views have provoked significant critique from theologians who argue that pluralism undermines the particularity of the incarnation and the narrative coherence of Christian doctrine.<sup>79</sup> The challenge remains: how can Christians affirm the distinctiveness of Christ without descending into triumphalism or relativism? This theological tension continues to animate much of the scholarly debate on interreligious dialogue. In response to these complexities, many theologians have proposed "dialogical exclusivism" or "comparative theology" as middle paths—approaches that engage other faiths seriously while remaining rooted in Christian identity.<sup>80</sup> These frameworks prioritize respectful, sustained conversation that acknowledges common ground and irreducible differences. Rather than viewing dialogue as a threat to doctrine, such approaches see it as an opportunity for deepening theological understanding, fostering peace, and bearing witness to Christ through hospitality and humility. In contexts like Africa and Asia, where religious pluralism is theological and lived daily, interreligious dialogue becomes an essential practice of faithful witness and neighborly love. As such, the Church's engagement with pluralism must be both theologically rigorous and pastorally sensitive, reflecting a posture of openness grounded in the confidence of the gospel.

<sup>76</sup> Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 10–12.

<sup>77</sup> Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), 660.

<sup>78</sup> John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 47–48.

<sup>79</sup> Harold A. Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 105–06.

<sup>80</sup> Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 14.

## Theology And Environmental Concerns (Eco-Theology)

The growing ecological crisis has compelled theologians to reexamine the relationship between Christian doctrine and the natural world. Climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and environmental degradation have raised profound moral and theological questions about humanity's role as stewards of creation. While traditional Christian interpretations have sometimes been critiqued for promoting anthropocentrism and ecological negligence, recent theological reflection has recovered a more holistic biblical vision that affirms the intrinsic value of the created order.<sup>81</sup> The Genesis mandate to "tend and keep" the earth (Gen. 2:15) is being reinterpreted not as a license for domination but as a call to responsible stewardship rooted in God's love for all creation.<sup>82</sup> This theological shift underscores that care for the environment is not peripheral to the Christian faith but integral to its eschatological hope and ethical responsibility.

Eco-theology draws deeply from Scripture and theological tradition, locating ecological concern within creation, incarnation, and redemption doctrines. Theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann have argued that the doctrine of creation affirms the interdependence of all life and the enduring presence of God within the cosmos.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, the incarnation of Christ reveals God's affirmation of material reality, while the resurrection signals not just the renewal of human life but the restoration of all creation. This sacramental vision of nature echoed in early church fathers and contemporary theologians' writings, challenges dualistic worldviews and calls for a theology of the earth that honors its sacredness.<sup>84</sup> Eco-theology thus invites a renewed spiritual consciousness that views creation not as a disposable backdrop for human history but as a participant in the divine story of redemption.

Furthermore, eco-theology is not merely theoretical but has practical and prophetic implications. It informs liturgy, ethics, and activism, urging churches to embody ecological justice in their worship, community life, and public witness. Theologies of justice and liberation now include environmental dimensions, recognizing that ecological degradation

<sup>81</sup> Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1206.

<sup>82</sup> Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 87.

<sup>83</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 19–20.

<sup>84</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2014), 205–208.

disproportionately affects the poor and marginalized.<sup>85</sup> This convergence of ecological and social concern reflects a growing awareness that care for creation is inseparable from the pursuit of human dignity and global justice. In this way, eco-theology offers a robust theological framework for confronting the environmental crisis—not as a political add-on but as a faithful expression of the gospel in a groaning creation.

## V. CONCLUSION

In the ever-shifting landscape of the modern world, theology faces unprecedented challenges and remarkable opportunities. This paper has traced the journey of theology from its historical roots through its contemporary expressions, showing how faithful engagement with new contexts does not signify a betrayal of tradition but rather a continuation of the theological task. Far from diluting classical doctrine, contemporary theology represents a creative and necessary articulation of enduring truths in languages and forms that resonate today. The emergence of diverse theological voices — from liberationists to feminists to global South theologians — reflects the Spirit's work across cultures and contexts, expanding the Church's understanding of God's mission. Likewise, the willingness of theologians to engage with scientific discovery, political upheaval, and ethical crises reveals theology's commitment to speaking meaningfully into every area of human life. Theological reflection today must resist both the temptation to retreat into anachronistic certainties and the lure of uncritical adaptation to cultural trends. Instead, it must chart a middle path: deeply rooted in Scripture and the great tradition while courageously open to the Spirit's leading in a complex and pluralistic age. By doing so, contemporary theology can offer critique and hope — a hope firmly grounded in the eternal yet ever-relevant truth of the Gospel. Thus, theology remains indispensable, not as a relic of the past, but as a vibrant, living dialogue between God and the world He so loves.

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<sup>85</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 23.

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**Cite this Article:** Ndzi, L (2025). Contemporary Perspectives on Theology: Navigating Faith in a Modern World. *Greener Journal of Social Sciences*, 15(1): 213-224, <https://doi.org/10.15580/gjss.2025.1.052725095>.