

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Christology, Session 8, Modern Christology, Part 3, Moltmann, Catholic and Process Theology Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Peterson, Christology, Session 8, Modern Christology, Part 3, Moltmann, Catholic and Process Theology, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This text presents **Dr. Robert Peterson's lecture on modern Christology**, specifically examining the theologies of **Jürgen Moltmann**, **Catholic theologians like Hans Küng and Karl Rahner**, and **Process Theology**, culminating in a discussion of "**The Myth of God Incarnate**" debate. Peterson outlines Moltmann's **theology of the cross** and then critiques it using evangelical perspectives. He subsequently analyzes **Catholic Christologies** that tend towards a "Christology from below" and evaluates their compatibility with traditional doctrines. Finally, the lecture addresses **Process Theology's panentheistic view of Christ** and the controversy surrounding the denial of the incarnation.

2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, Christology, Session 8 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Theology → Theology, Peterson → Christology).



Peterson_Christology_Session08.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Salvation, Session 8, Modern Christology, Part 3, Moltmann, Catholic and Process Theology

Briefing Document: Modern Christology - Moltmann, Catholic Theology, and Process Theology

Overview: This briefing document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented in Dr. Robert Peterson's lecture on modern Christology, focusing on the theological contributions of Jürgen Moltmann, key figures in Catholic theology (Hans Küng and Karl Rahner), Process Theology (Norman Pittenger), and the "Myth of God Incarnate" debate. Peterson critically evaluates these approaches in light of traditional, orthodox Christology, particularly the Chalcedonian Definition.

I. Jürgen Moltmann's Theology of the Cross:

- **Context and Motivation:** Moltmann's theology is deeply rooted in his post-World War II experiences, where he felt a "theology that does not speak of God, in the sight of one who was abandoned and crucified, would have nothing to say to us." This echoes Luther's theology of the cross against the "theologies of glory."
- **Key Theme: The Crucified God:** Moltmann's central idea is that God himself is profoundly affected by and involved in the crucifixion of Jesus. "The Christ event on the cross is a God event."
- **Dialectical Principle:** The deity of God is revealed in the paradox of the cross, where Jesus died as the one rejected by the Father. Peterson notes this becomes a "dialectical principle that governs his whole theology and leads to a new Christian praxis of liberation."
- **Intra-Trinitarian Suffering:** Moltmann argues that the cross reveals tensions and relationships within the Trinity. While rejecting "patripassianism" (the suffering of the Father), he affirms "patracompassionism" (the Father suffered with the Son). "In the passion of the Son, the Father himself suffers the pains of abandonment. In the death of the Son, death comes upon God himself."
- **Inclusion of All Suffering:** Moltmann contends that God has taken all the suffering of the world into himself through the cross. "All human history... is taken up into this history of God... and integrated into the future of the history of God." He explicitly mentions Auschwitz as being included in God's suffering.

- **Critique:Scriptural Basis:** Klaas Ruina questions whether the idea of the "crucified God" is truly scriptural, noting Luther's hesitation to go beyond saying that God suffers *in Christ*. Ruina sees Moltmann's view as a "speculative construction" with more affinity to Hegel than Scripture.
- **Minimization of Resurrection:** Ruina argues that Moltmann's focus on the cross potentially minimizes the importance of the resurrection, which Paul emphasizes as God raising Jesus from the dead.
- **Death in God:** The Bible nowhere speaks of "death in God."
- **Universalism and Divinization of Man:** Moltmann's inclusion of all suffering in God's history leads to a potential universalism and a "divinization of the whole human race," which Ruina again sees as Hegelian rather than biblical.
- **Impact on Chalcedon:** It's unclear how Moltmann's theology aligns with the Chalcedonian understanding of the two natures of Christ.

II. Catholic Theology (Hans Küng and Karl Rahner):

- **Shared Starting Point:** Both Küng and Rahner, along with other modern Catholic theologians, agree on two key points: (1) the starting point must be the man Jesus (Christology from below), and (2) Jesus' true humanity must be taken absolutely seriously.
- **Hans Küng:Functional Christology:** Küng advocates for a functional Christology where Jesus' relationship to God is expressed in terms of revelation. "Jesus is God's word and will in human form." "The true man Jesus of Nazareth is, for faith, the real revelation of the one true God."
- **Reinterpretation of Pre-existence:** Küng understands pre-existence as Christ always being in God's thought, not as the eternal Son of God.
- **Reinterpretation of Chalcedon:** While affirming the intent of Chalcedon (true God and true man), Küng believes its metaphysical language ("homoousios") was context-dependent and that the core truth can be maintained today without a literal understanding of incarnation.
- **Critique:** Peterson, following Runia and Baucom, argues that Küng's Christology is "absolutely from below" and fails to adequately account for the incarnation and the ontological deity of Christ. His functional Christology requires an essential foundation. Baucom calls it a "kind of naive biblicism." Peterson notes Küng's rejection of Christological reflection in the New Testament (pre-existence,

incarnation) as "mythological." The German Bishops' Conference accused him of denying the Nicene Creed.

- **Karl Rahner: Emphasis on Chalcedon within Transcendental Philosophy:** Rahner sought to retain Chalcedonian Christology within a framework of transcendental philosophy, arguing that the ontological (what Christ is) is the foundation of the existential (what Christ means to us).
- **Economic Trinity is the Immanent Trinity:** Rahner famously stated that "the economic trinity is the immanent trinity, and the immanent trinity is the economic trinity." Peterson explains this can be valid in showing God reveals himself truthfully, but is often misused by social Trinitarians to effectively eliminate the immanent Trinity.
- **Anonymous Christianity:** Rahner introduced the concept of "anonymous Christians," arguing that those who oppose the church may already unknowingly be related to Christ. "The others who oppose the church are merely those who have not yet recognized that they nevertheless really already are or can be... already anonymous Christians." This concept influenced Vatican II's inclusivist stance.

III. Process Theology (Norman Pittenger):

- **Panentheistic Conception of God:** Process Theology operates on the assumption that "God and the world mutually exist, and God needs the world, even as the world needs God." "The world is in God."
- **Christology from Below:** Norman Pittenger's Process Christology sees Jesus Christ as the "focus of the pervasive and universal activity of God," the "focal manifestation of man of God in action."
- **Rejection of Literal Incarnation:** Pittenger rejects the literal incarnation as "incredible and impossible," opting for the idea of a climactic "mutual interpenetration of the divine and human" in Jesus.
- **Difference in Degree, Not Kind:** For Pittenger, the difference between God's activity in Jesus and in others is one of degree, not essence.
- **Critique:** Peterson labels this an "absolutely from below" Christology that denies the incarnation and the deity of Christ, consequently undermining the traditional understanding of atonement.

IV. The "Myth of God Incarnate" Debate:

- **Provocative Thesis:** A 1977 book by seven British theologians, "The Myth of God Incarnate," argued that the doctrine of the incarnation, taken as factual truth, is no longer intelligible.
- **Jesus as a Man Appointed by God:** The authors contend that Jesus was a man appointed by God for a special role, and the concept of him as God incarnate is "mythological or poetic."
- **Rejection of Nicaea and Chalcedon:** Contributors like Holden and Cupid view the development of Christology leading to Nicaea and Chalcedon as a "deviation" from the New Testament.
- **Motivations:** John Hick argued that a literal incarnation is "pernicious" because it excludes other religions from salvation.
- **Critique:Skepticism towards the New Testament:** The authors show "a deep and unwarranted skepticism as to the historical reliability of the New Testament writings."
- **Neglect of Resurrection and Soteriology:** The resurrection plays hardly any role, and the soteriological significance of Jesus is entirely silent.
- **Philosophical Objections:** Some authors acknowledge the New Testament teaches incarnation but reject it on philosophical grounds.
- **Troubling Impact:** Peterson notes the book's popularization of liberal ideas troubled evangelical theologians who responded with "The Truth of God Incarnate."

V. Conclusion and Future Directions:

- Peterson concludes the survey of modern Christology, highlighting the prevalence of "Christology from below" approaches and their challenges to traditional understandings of Christ's deity and incarnation.
- He outlines the focus of future lectures, which will combine systematic theology with biblical texts (John 1, Colossians 1, Philippians 2) to explore the deity and humanity of Christ, pre-existence, the unity of his person, and the communication of attributes.

This briefing document provides a summary of the key figures and movements discussed in Dr. Peterson's lecture on modern Christology, emphasizing the critical analysis offered from a perspective rooted in traditional Christian orthodoxy.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Salvation, Session 8, Modern Christology, Part 3, Moltmann, Catholic and Process Theology

Christology: Modern Perspectives

Study Guide

I. Jürgen Moltmann's Theology of the Cross

- Understand the historical context that shaped Moltmann's theology, particularly his experiences following World War II.
- Explain Moltmann's concept of the "theology of the cross" and how it contrasts with a "theology of glory."
- Detail Moltmann's dialectical principle and its significance for his understanding of God.
- Articulate Moltmann's interpretation of the crucifixion as an event within the Trinity, including his concepts of patracompassionism and the "death of God."
- Explain how Moltmann understands the inclusion of human suffering, guilt, and death within God's history, referencing Auschwitz as an example.
- Summarize the criticisms of Moltmann's theology raised by Klaas Runia, focusing on the scriptural basis, the emphasis on the cross versus the resurrection, the concept of death in God, universalism, and the implications for Chalcedonian Christology.

II. Catholic Christology (Hans Küng and Karl Rahner)

- Identify the two common starting points for the "new theologians" in both Protestant and Catholic circles.
- Explain Hans Küng's motivation for a new paradigm in Christology, driven by secularization and modern science.
- Describe Küng's "Christology from below" and his understanding of Jesus as God's word and will in human form.
- Contrast Küng's functional Christology with an essential Christology, particularly regarding the pre-existence of Christ.
- Summarize the criticisms of Küng's Christology, focusing on its alignment with the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds and its potential reduction of the incarnation.

- Explain Karl Rahner's approach to Christology within the framework of transcendental philosophy and his emphasis on the ontological foundation of the existential.
- Articulate Rahner's famous axiom regarding the economic and immanent Trinity and its implications, both valid and potentially problematic (as discussed in relation to social Trinitarianism and panentheism).
- Describe Rahner's concept of "anonymous Christians" and its significance for the Catholic Church's inclusivist position.

III. Process Theology and Christology

- Explain the foundational assumptions of Process Theology regarding the relationship between God and the world (panentheism and mutual dependence).
- Describe Norman Pittenger's Process Christology, including his rejection of literal incarnation and his view of Jesus as the focus of God's pervasive activity.
- Understand the difference in degree versus kind in Process Theology's understanding of God's activity in Jesus compared to others.

IV. The Myth of God Incarnate Debate

- Understand the central argument of the book *The Myth of God Incarnate* regarding the doctrine of the incarnation.
- Identify the alternative view of Jesus presented by the authors (a man appointed by God).
- Explain the authors' view of Christological titles and the development leading to Nicaea and Chalcedon.
- Summarize the criticisms of *The Myth of God Incarnate*, focusing on the reliability of the New Testament, the role of the resurrection, soteriology, and the philosophical grounds for rejection.

Quiz: Modern Christology

1. What was the key historical context that significantly influenced Jürgen Moltmann's development of his theology of the cross? Explain how this context shaped his theological concerns.

2. Contrast Moltmann's "theology of the cross" with what he understood as the medieval Roman Catholic "theologies of glory." What is the central epistemological principle of the theology of the cross for Moltmann?
3. According to Moltmann, how does the crucifixion reveal the triune God? Explain his concepts of patercompassionism and his understanding of the "death of God" in relation to Christ's death.
4. What are some of the main criticisms raised by Klaas Runia regarding Jürgen Moltmann's theology of the cross? Focus on the scriptural basis and the potential downplaying of another key aspect of Christ's work.
5. Describe Hans Küng's motivation for advocating a "Christology from below." How does he understand Jesus' relationship to God within this framework, particularly in terms of revelation?
6. Explain the difference between a functional Christology and an essential Christology, as discussed in the context of Hans Küng's views. What are the implications of Küng's functional approach for the doctrine of pre-existence?
7. What is Karl Rahner's famous axiom concerning the economic and immanent Trinity? Explain both a positive and a potentially problematic application of this axiom as discussed in the text.
8. Define Karl Rahner's concept of "anonymous Christians." What are the implications of this idea for the Catholic Church's view of other religions?
9. Briefly explain the core tenets of Process Theology regarding the relationship between God and the world. How does Norman Pittenger's Christology align with these tenets, particularly concerning the incarnation?
10. What was the central argument presented in the book *The Myth of God Incarnate* regarding the traditional understanding of Jesus Christ? What alternative view of Jesus did the authors propose?

Answer Key

1. Moltmann's theology was significantly shaped by his experiences as a prisoner of war after World War II. Witnessing immense suffering and abandonment led him to believe that a theology that did not speak of God in the context of Christ's abandonment on the cross would be meaningless to those experiencing similar despair.

2. Moltmann contrasted the "theologies of glory," which he believed claimed direct access and knowledge of God, with a "theology of the cross," which focuses on God's self-revelation in the suffering and humiliation of Christ. The epistemological principle of the theology of the cross for Moltmann is a dialectical principle where God's deity is revealed in the paradox of the cross.
3. Moltmann argues that the crucifixion reveals the triune God because the Father rejected the Son on the cross, yet this was also God's act of raising Jesus. Patracompassionism is the idea that the Father suffered with the Son. Moltmann speaks of the "death of God" (without implying the Father's death) to emphasize that the Christ event on the cross was a God event, with God taking up the suffering of the world.
4. Runia criticizes Moltmann's reliance on scripture, suggesting he goes beyond its restrained language and develops a speculative theology with Hegelian affinities. He also questions whether Moltmann's intense focus on the cross minimizes the significance of the resurrection, as Paul consistently emphasizes God as the one who raised Jesus from the dead.
5. Küng's motivation stemmed from a desire to make the Christian faith relevant in an increasingly secular and scientifically-minded world. He advocated for a "Christology from below," starting with Jesus as a man on earth, where Jesus' relationship to God is understood in terms of revelation – Jesus is God's word and will in human form, revealing who God is.
6. A functional Christology focuses on what Jesus *does* (his roles and actions as the revealer of God), while an essential Christology concerns *who* Jesus is in his being or nature (fully God and fully human). Küng's functional approach interprets pre-existence not as the eternal existence of the Son of God, but as Christ always being in God's thought, thus differing significantly from the traditional understanding.
7. Rahner's axiom states that the economic Trinity (God as revealed in salvation history) is the immanent Trinity (God as he is eternally), and vice versa. Positively, it can indicate that God truly reveals himself in history according to his eternal being. Problematically, it has been used by social Trinitarians to effectively collapse the immanent Trinity into the economic, potentially leading to a view of the Trinity as merely functional or historical.
8. Rahner's concept of "anonymous Christians" refers to individuals who, despite not explicitly knowing or following Christ or belonging to the Christian church, are

still recipients of God's grace and potentially saved through Christ's death and resurrection. This concept underpins the Catholic Church's more inclusivist stance towards other religions, viewing their adherents as unknowingly connected to Christ.

9. Process Theology posits that God and the world mutually exist and are interdependent; God is in the world (panentheism) and the world is in God. Pittenger's Process Christology views Jesus not as a literal incarnation of God, but as the human being in whom the energizing and indwelling of God reached its most complete expression, a difference in degree rather than in kind from God's activity in others.
10. *The Myth of God Incarnate* argued that the doctrine of the incarnation, understood as a literal factual truth, is no longer intelligible in the modern world. The authors proposed that Jesus was a man appointed by God for a special role, and the later understanding of him as God incarnate is a mythological or poetic way of expressing his significance.

Essay Format Questions

1. Compare and contrast Jürgen Moltmann's "theology of the cross" with traditional understandings of the atonement. In what ways does Moltmann's focus on God's suffering on the cross reshape or challenge conventional doctrines of salvation?
2. Analyze the concept of "Christology from below" as exemplified by Hans Küng. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach in articulating the person and work of Jesus Christ, particularly in relation to the historical confessions of Nicaea and Chalcedon?
3. Discuss the implications of Karl Rahner's axiom ("the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity") for understanding the doctrine of the Trinity. How has this axiom been both helpful and potentially problematic in contemporary theological discourse?
4. Evaluate the key arguments presented in *The Myth of God Incarnate* against the doctrine of the incarnation. What are the main criticisms leveled against this perspective from those who affirm the traditional understanding of Jesus Christ as God incarnate?
5. Explore the fundamental differences between traditional Christian Christology and the Christology proposed by Process Theology. How do their differing understandings of God's relationship to the world impact their views on the person and significance of Jesus Christ?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Theology of the Cross:** A theological approach, notably emphasized by Martin Luther and Jürgen Moltmann, that focuses on God's self-revelation in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross, contrasting with a "theology of glory."
- **Theology of Glory:** A theological approach, criticized by Luther, that seeks to know God directly through human reason and achievement, rather than through the humility and suffering of the cross.
- **Dialectical Principle:** A method of reasoning that involves the interplay of contradictory ideas to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding; in Moltmann's theology, the deity of God is revealed in the paradox of the cross.
- **Patracompassionism:** The theological concept that the Father suffered with the Son during the crucifixion, a view affirmed by Moltmann while rejecting patripassianism.
- **Patripassianism:** The heretical belief that the Father himself suffered on the cross.
- **Death of God (in Moltmann):** Moltmann's concept that in Christ's death, death comes upon God himself in the sense that God fully enters into the experience of abandonment and suffering, without implying the literal cessation of God's being.
- **Christology from Below:** A Christological approach that begins with the humanity of Jesus and moves towards an understanding of his divinity, often focusing on his earthly life, actions, and teachings.
- **Christology from Above:** A Christological approach that begins with the pre-existent divinity of Christ and moves towards an understanding of his incarnation and humanity.
- **Functional Christology:** A Christological perspective that emphasizes the roles and functions of Jesus Christ (e.g., revealer, redeemer) rather than his inherent essence or being.
- **Essential/Ontological Christology:** A Christological perspective that focuses on the inherent being or nature of Jesus Christ, particularly the union of his divine and human natures.

- **Economic Trinity:** The doctrine of the Trinity as revealed through God's actions (economy) in creation, redemption, and the sending of the Spirit.
- **Immanent Trinity:** The doctrine of the Trinity as it exists eternally within itself, apart from creation and salvation history.
- **Social Trinitarianism:** A contemporary theological perspective that emphasizes the relationality and distinctness of the three persons of the Trinity, sometimes using analogies of human community.
- **Panentheism:** The belief that God is in everything and everywhere, but is not identical to the universe; the world is in God.
- **Anonymous Christians:** Karl Rahner's concept that individuals who live good lives and respond to grace may be implicitly oriented towards Christ and thus be considered "anonymous Christians" even if they do not explicitly profess Christian faith.
- **Process Theology:** A theological system based on the philosophies of Whitehead and Hartshorne, emphasizing God's dynamic and interactive relationship with the world, mutual dependence, and a panentheistic view of God.
- **Myth (in *The Myth of God Incarnate*):** Used by the authors to describe the doctrine of the incarnation as a non-factual, symbolic, or poetic way of expressing Jesus' significance, rather than a literal historical reality.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Salvation, Salvation, Session 8, Modern Christology, Part 3, Moltmann, Catholic and Process Theology, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Modern Christology: Moltmann, Catholic Theology, and Process Theology

1. What is the central theme of Jürgen Moltmann's theology of the cross, and what historical context influenced its development? Moltmann's theology of the cross centers on the idea that God himself is deeply affected by and present in the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross. This theology emerged from Moltmann's experiences as a prisoner of war after World War II, where he and his generation sought a theology that could speak to the immense suffering and abandonment they had witnessed. He argues that a God untouched by the crucifixion would have nothing meaningful to say to a suffering humanity.

2. How does Moltmann's understanding of the cross differ from traditional interpretations, particularly regarding the Trinity? Moltmann goes beyond the idea that the cross was merely an event in the life of Jesus, asserting that it was a "God-event" that reveals the inner tensions and relationships within the Trinity. He argues that the Father suffered the pain of abandonment in the Son's crucifixion (patracompassionism), and that in the death of the Son, death comes upon God himself in a profound way. This perspective suggests a deeper Trinitarian involvement in the suffering of Christ than some traditional views emphasize.

3. What are some of the main criticisms leveled against Moltmann's theology of the cross by evangelical theologians like Klaas Runia? Runia and others question the scriptural basis for the idea of a "crucified God" in Moltmann's sense, suggesting that while the Bible affirms God's presence in Christ's suffering, it does not explicitly speak of death within God. Critics also worry that Moltmann's intense focus on the cross might downplay the significance of the resurrection and that his concept of God taking all human suffering into himself leans towards a Hegelian rather than a biblical worldview, potentially leading to universalism and a diminished view of the resurrection.

4. What are the defining characteristics of a "Christology from below," as discussed in the context of modern Catholic theologians like Hans Küng? A Christology from below begins its understanding of Jesus by focusing on his humanity, his earthly life, actions, and teachings, rather than starting with his divine nature or pre-existence. Many modern theologians adopt this approach to make Christianity more relevant to a secularized world, emphasizing the historical Jesus as a model of human existence and a revelation of God's will.

5. How does Hans Küng's "functional Christology" differ from a traditional "essence Christology," and what are the implications of this shift? Küng's functional Christology emphasizes Jesus' role as the revealer of God. He sees Jesus as God's word and will in human form, and the titles attributed to Christ (Son of God, pre-existent, etc.) are understood as ways of highlighting the uniqueness and unsurpassability of God's revelation in him. This contrasts with an essence Christology, which focuses on the inherent being and nature of Christ as both fully God and fully human (ontological reality). Critics argue that Küng's approach diminishes the ontological deity of Christ and treats traditional doctrines like the incarnation and pre-existence as mythological or merely functional expressions.

6. What is Karl Rahner's concept of "anonymous Christians," and how does it reflect a shift in Roman Catholic theology regarding salvation? Rahner introduced the concept of "anonymous Christians" to suggest that individuals who live according to their conscience and seek what is good may be unknowingly participating in God's grace and the salvation offered through Christ, even if they are not explicitly Christian or aware of Jesus. This idea reflects a move towards a more inclusivist position in Roman Catholic theology, suggesting that salvation is possible for those outside the formal boundaries of the Christian church.

7. How does Process Theology view the relationship between God and the world, and how does this influence its Christology, as seen in the work of Norman Pittenger? Process Theology posits that God and the world mutually exist and influence each other. God is seen as operative within creation at every level, but is not identical to it (panentheism). In this framework, Jesus Christ is not understood as a literal incarnation of God, but rather as the focal point of God's pervasive activity in the world, where the interpenetration of the divine and human reached a climactic degree. The difference between God's presence in Jesus and in others is seen as one of degree, not kind, thus rejecting the traditional understanding of Christ's unique deity and incarnation.

8. What was the central argument of the book "The Myth of God Incarnate," and what were some of the main criticisms raised against it by evangelical theologians? "The Myth of God Incarnate" argued that the doctrine of the incarnation, understood as a literal factual truth, is no longer intelligible and should be seen as a mythological or poetic way of expressing Jesus' significance. The authors contended that Jesus was a man appointed by God for a special role, not God himself in human form. Evangelical critics responded by asserting the historical reliability of the New Testament's witness to the incarnation, highlighting the absence of the resurrection's significance and the lack of focus on sin and atonement in the book's arguments. They viewed the rejection of the incarnation as undermining the core of Christian belief and the possibility of salvation through Christ.