



Examination of Enlightenment Critique of Christian Theology

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to review and discuss six specific Enlightenment critiques of Christian theology. Christian theology faced critiques as biblical criticism offered a secular perspective challenging Scripture. This study employs historical and theological methods, drawing on the Bible. The study discovered that the Enlightenment period rejected the authorship of Moses' Pentateuch, the authority of the Old and New Testaments, the concept of the Trinity, vicarious atonement, and justification. They rejected Jesus' divinity, resurrection, and salvation. The findings reveal that the criticisms of the Enlightenment period primarily relied on secular philosophy rather than biblical foundations. Christian faith in Jesus Christ proves that God has revealed Himself to humans. The Christian doctrine of God is interpreted through Scripture and nature. The Gospels are historically accurate and reliable accounts of Jesus. The Bible depicts humanity's struggle with sin and God's promise and solution to that conflict. God sent Christ to redeem humanity from sin (2 Cor. 5:21). The fundamental story of Creation comes before the narrative in Genesis 1 and 2. This is because Jesus Christ is Lord over His creation. The study suggests examining the Enlightenment's critique of Christian theology to understand its impact on theological reflections. Future research should focus on the influence of the Enlightenment principles on contemporary theology regarding scriptural authority, the nature of God, and salvation doctrines.

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INTRODUCTION

Christian theology became a subject of critique during the Enlightenment, a period in history when concepts about God, reason, nature, and humanity sparked dramatic changes in art, philosophy, and politics.¹ The thinkers' new ideology significantly influenced Christian beliefs. The application and appreciation of reason were central to Enlightenment ideology.² The Enlightenment was about constructing a way of thinking that would serve as its demonstration of truth. This feat was most brilliantly accomplished in the scientific field, where the logic and reasoning of induction and deduction permitted the creation of a vast new cosmos.³ The concept of reason was used to attack Christianity.⁴

¹ Michael A Peters, "The Enlightenment and Its Critics1," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* (Taylor & Francis, 2019), 886.

² Jürgen Habermas and Thomas Y Levin, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-Reading Dialectic of Enlightenment," *New German Critique*, no. 26 (1982): 13–30. 18

³ James Schmidt, *What Is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (Downtown Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1996).

⁴ Ferdinand Nwaigbo, *Faith in an Age of Reason and Science* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003).

Philosophical reasoning can potentially be dangerous, as it encourages people to reevaluate their fundamental ideas about Christianity.⁵ Many Christian ideas were influenced by the rise of biblical criticism during the Enlightenment. Biblical criticism provided a secular strand of thought, which led to an attack on the revelation, inspiration, and authority of Scripture and the concepts of God, Christology, Soteriology, human nature and sin, and Creation.⁶ Christians considered the Bible to be God's inerrant Word. However, the Enlightenment thinkers objected to revelation, inspiration, and the authority of Scripture.⁷

The debate over Christian theology concerns a problem with Enlightenment criticism of God's word. The growth of biblical criticism throughout the Enlightenment period impacted Christian doctrine regarding God, Christology, Soteriology, Haman's nature and sin, and Creation.⁸ The question for discussion is how Christian theology was criticized in the Enlightenment period. This study seeks to enumerate and discuss six specific Enlightenment critiques of Christian theology, which include the revelation, inspiration, and authority of Scripture, the concept of God, Christology, Soteriology, human nature and sin, and Creation.

The purpose of this paper is to review and discuss six specific Enlightenment critiques of Christian theology. Moreover, the subject of Enlightenment critiques of Christian theology is a critical issue that warrants understanding. Furthermore, the research may contribute to revising the modern knowledge of Enlightenment critiques of Christian theology. Moreover, it will elucidate the perceptual challenges inherent in Christian theology. More significantly, it will contribute to what has already been discovered about the revelation, inspiration, and authority of Scripture, the concept of God, Christology, Soteriology, human nature and sin, and Creation.

The study is restricted to the period of the Enlightenment. Also, because many philosophical, ethical, and religious issues were criticized, the study is limited to Enlightenment critiques of Christian theology. This study focuses on the six specific Enlightenment critiques of Christian theology, which include the revelation, inspiration, and authority of Scripture; the concept of God; Christology; Soteriology; the nature of humanity and sin; and Creation.

This study systematically employs historical and theological methods to enumerate and discuss six specific Enlightenment critiques of Christian theology. The research is divided into five sections. The first section presents the introduction to the study. The second section examines the historical context of the Enlightenment era. The third section deals with the specific Enlightenment critiques of Christian theology. The fourth section addresses the evaluation of Enlightenment Critiques of Christian theology. The final chapter serves as a summary and conclusion.

The Background of the Age of Enlightenment

In ancient Rome, the Romans inherited and kept much of Greek culture. In ancient Rome, the concepts of the rational order of nature and the law of nature are particularly noteworthy.⁹ However, amid the empire's insecurity, a new threat to individual salvation emerged, paving the way for the Christian faith to triumph.¹⁰ Aristotle established a means for attaining truth that was ascertainable alone through reason because Christian revelation held a greater truth.¹¹ The Enlightenment was a pivotal period in 17th- and 18th-century European philosophy, marked by the scientific revolution. Its forerunner was the Reformation, with its antagonism toward established religious beliefs. Europe's fascination with the physical world evolved into scientific study.¹² More global exploration exposed Europe to other

⁵ Joel Harter, *Coleridge's Philosophy of Faith: Symbol, Allegory, and Hermeneutics* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 115.

⁶ Benjamin Schewel, "Transformational Post-Secularism: An Overlooked Strand of Thought," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 87, no. 4 (2019): 1085–1112. 1085.

⁷ Schewel, "Transformational Post-Secularism: An Overlooked Strand of Thought."

⁸ Stanley E. Porter, *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2007).

⁹ Seabury Colum Gilfillan, "Lead Poisoning and the Fall of Rome," *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 7, no. 2 (1965): 53–60.

¹⁰ Robert P. Vande Kappelle, *Securing Life: The Enduring Message of the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 168

¹¹ Gary Anthony Catona, *Thinking as Sport and Dance: Learn the Power of Creative Thinking* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2008).

¹² John P. Herron, *Science and the Social Good: Nature, Culture, and Community, 1865-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

cultures and ideas. Humanism, the Renaissance, and the Protestant Reformation all made attacks on Christianity. The Protestant Reformation challenged the Roman Catholic Church's hegemonic rule.¹³

Humanism gave birth to the experimental science of Francis Bacon, Nicolaus Copernicus, and Galileo. The research that led to the Enlightenment mainly began in the domains of earth science and astronomy. Thinkers established a new scientific theory.¹⁴ In England, the first significant Enlightenment philosopher was Thomas Hobbes, whose divisive work *Leviathan* (1651) was a landmark. Hobbes felt that humans were inherently selfish and focused on collecting a finite amount of resources. John Locke fought for the polar opposite of representative governance. The English government passed a new Bill of Rights that increased personal liberties.¹⁵ In France, Denis Diderot had no radical ideas; he was simply interested in accumulating as much knowledge as possible for his vast *Encyclopedia*. The *Encyclopedia* extended to thirty-five volumes and continued to spread Enlightenment knowledge.¹⁶

In 1762, Jean-Jacques Rousseau published "The Social Contract," calling for a form of administration based on small and genuine democracy. Rousseau's distinctly personal viewpoint contributed significantly to the maturation of the Romantic period.¹⁷ Later in his career, near the time of its completion, he would write *Confessions*, a profoundly intimate look back on his life. Also, the Enlightenment was founded on the principle that human civilization could only be achieved through the application of reason.¹⁸ Skepticism was another undercurrent that undermined the Enlightenment's dominant beliefs. Their theories were based on the notion that the visible universe is subjective to the beholder and that nothing can be absolute.¹⁹ In the 17th century, Immanuel Kant claimed that humans cannot know seen objects or metaphysical conceptions; instead, the perception of such things is dependent on the observer's psychology.²⁰

Ultimately, the Enlightenment was shaped by conflicting ideas from a diverse range of sources, some of which date back to the 17th century. The doctrines of Romanticism and skepticism clashed with the prevailing Enlightenment thinking of the 17th and 18th centuries, establishing a following of their own.²¹ Romanticism appealed to the less educated common man and moved away from the factual, scientific notions of previous Enlightenment intellectuals. The ideas and perspectives of Enlightenment thinkers profoundly influenced Western culture for centuries. The French Revolution marked the end of the Enlightenment. Many individuals pointed to the Enlightenment-induced collapse of norms as the primary reason for the turmoil that preceded the revolution.²²

The Age of Enlightenment's Critique of Christian Theology

The Age of Enlightenment was marked by intense philosophical, scientific, and political debates. The Enlightenment encouraged challenging the interpretations of religious authorities, favoring the ability of reason and science to verify things over traditional authorities. Christians were among the most renowned Enlightenment thinkers.²³ However, specific Enlightenment ideas affected church teachings. The time saw the development of a critique of Christian theology, which encompassed the following topics: revelation, inspiration, and the authority of Scripture; the concept of God; Christology; soteriology; human nature and sin; and Creation.

¹³ Richard Barnes and Ronán Long, *Frontiers in International Environmental Law: Oceans and Climate Challenges: Essays in Honour of David Freestone* (Leiden: BRILL, 2021).

¹⁴ James Davies, *Ways of Thinking* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1991).

¹⁵ Jacqueline Stevens, "The Reasonableness of John Locke's Majority: Property Rights, Consent, and Resistance in the Second Treatise," *Political Theory* 24, no. 3 (1996): 423–63.

¹⁶ Andrew S. Curran, *Diderot and the Art of Thinking Freely* (New York City: Other Press, 2020).

¹⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract; And, The Discourses* (New York City: A.A. Knopf, 1993).

¹⁸ Vincenzo Ferrone, *The Enlightenment: History of an Idea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

¹⁹ Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Conception of Freedom: A Developmental and Critical Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

²⁰ Allison, *Kant's Conception of Freedom: A Developmental and Critical Analysis*.

²¹ Allison, *Kant's Conception of Freedom: A Developmental and Critical Analysis*.

²² François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

²³ Michael J. Anthony and Warren S. Benson, *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education*: (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011).

The Critique of Revelation, Inspiration, and the Authority of the Bible

During the Enlightenment period, the issue of revelation, inspiration, and the authority of the Bible attracted criticism. The Enlightenment contended that knowledge should be based on what humanity knows rather than being innate.²⁴ Before the Enlightenment, the Greek philosopher Aristotle held that reason was superior to supernatural revelation and that humans alone had the final say in all matters.²⁵ The rise of biblical criticism during the Enlightenment period provided a secular strain of thought that influenced many contemporary religious ideas. They admired the works of ancient pagan authors, such as Cicero, Francis Bacon, and John Locke. They advocated for the unfettered use of reason as the guiding authority for determining truth.²⁶

Benedict de Spinoza argued that the Bible is not meant to be read as a philosophical work but rather as a guide to moral behavior. He argues that it must be understood in a way that no longer interferes with intellectual and scientific truth. Spinoza refutes Moses' authorship of the Pentateuch.²⁷ Francis de La Peyrère was a French scientist and philosopher. He is best known for his Pre-Adamite hypothesis, which challenged traditional Abrahamic understandings of human race ancestry.²⁸ Isaac de La Peyrère denied the authorship of the Pentateuch by Moses. According to La Peyrère, there must have been two creations: the creation of the Gentiles first, followed by the creation of Adam, the father of the Jews.²⁹

Moreover, Richard Simon (1638-1712) questioned the authority of the Bible. The *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (1678) is concerned with the text of the Hebrew Bible and its changes, as well as the authorship of the Mosaic passages. He said Moses could not have authored the texts attributed to him.³⁰ It critiqued the principal Old Testament translations, as well as biblical interpreters, both ancient and modern. Richard Simon argued against sola scriptura and in favor of the Catholic Church's interpretive tradition.³¹ Richard Simon questions the integrity of the Hebrew text and the infallibility of the Bible, as well as the Catholic Church's interpretive tradition. He rejected the authority of the Bible and argued for the redaction and compilation of the Pentateuch.³²

The French philosopher Henri Simon-Le Clerc contended that the Bible, which he claimed was riddled with inaccuracies, should not be regarded in discussions of politics, philosophy, science, humanism, ethics, and other concepts because it is an antiquity work that cannot be applied to contemporary society.³³ He observed that the nature of Scripture is an altogether "fresh voice." He said the biblical inspiration was highly divisive. He doubted the authorship of the Pentateuch or the inspiration of Scripture.³⁴

Anthony Collins (1676–1729) claimed, in his critique of revelation, that the Old Testament predictions did not come true. The Deists, who professed to be religious themselves, for the most part, did much to reconcile their public with the free exchange of ideas in religion. Jesus had not been the bearer of the unique revelation.³⁵ Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) was distrustful of revelation. His arguments against orthodox Christianity are based on the assumption that biblical inerrancy is required for faith.³⁶

²⁴ Anthony and Benson, *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education*: .

²⁵ Robert B. Lawson, Jean E. Graham, and Kristin M. Baker, *A History of Psychology: Globalization, Ideas, and Applications* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2015).

²⁶ Lawson, Graham, and Baker, *A History of Psychology: Globalization, Ideas, and Applications*.

²⁷ Daniel Garber and Donald Rutherford, *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy*, vol. 6 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁸ Richard Henry Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère (1596-1676): His Life, Work, and Influence* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 1987).

²⁹ Philip C. Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

³⁰ Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought* .

³¹ Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Downtown Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

³² Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*.

³³ Dirk van Miert et al., *Scriptural Authority and Biblical Criticism in the Dutch Golden Age: God's Word Questioned* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³⁴ van Miert et al., *Scriptural Authority and Biblical Criticism in the Dutch Golden Age: God's Word Questioned*.

³⁵ Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³⁶ Eric Carsten, "Lundius, John ." *In General German Biography*, vol. 19 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1884).

Johann Salomo Semler (1725-1791) challenged the divine authority of the Old and New Testaments. He asserted that the Bible was divinely inspired.³⁷ Semler questioned the authorship of Peter, as well as the origin of the Gospels, Epistles, Acts of the Apostles, Hebrews, and Revelation. Semler wanted the Apocalypse to be completely erased from the canon. Semler's canon for categorizing the canon of Scripture is composed of Enlightenment rationality, that is, pure religion of reason.³⁸

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) was the son of an educated Lutheran clergyman. He was sent to study theology at the University of Leipzig, where he learned the Enlightenment's widespread rationality. He went on to become a dramatist and critic and began the critical study of the sources of the Synoptic Gospels.³⁹ The concept of revelation as the transmission of timeless, predicate truths and the disorder and irrationality of history confused Lessing.⁴⁰ Events and truths are categorically distinct, and there is no logical connection between them. History's accidental facts can never become a confirmation of reason's essential truths. Lessing's solution to the issue was to see religious belief as a relative position in humanity's progress toward maturity, a notion he defended.⁴¹ Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) works primarily addressed the workings of the mind, exploring topics such as reason, aesthetics, and the nature of reality. He contended that our perception of reality is the result of a synthesis of rationalism and empiricism.⁴² Kant elaborates on this revelation narrative. While particular views will have power as a result of the unique revelation, this authority will not extend beyond individuals who embrace those specific beliefs. Immanuel Kant argued that Christianity could and should be incorporated into a rational religion.⁴³ Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752-1827), the father of modern Old Testament criticism, concluded that most of the Hebrew manuscripts have undergone numerous revisions.⁴⁴

The Critique of the Concept of God

Another issue of Christian theology that attracted criticism was the doctrine of God. Before the Enlightenment, Benedict de Spinoza, a 17th-century philosopher, proposed the doctrine of pantheism, which posits that God and the universe are one and the same. Enlightenment rationalists opposed the belief in God as a Trinity. They mocked the ideology, calling it intellectually illogical. The rationalists said that combining three people into one God is absurd mathematics.⁴⁵ Isaac Newton (1642-1727) contended against the concept of the Trinity. He called into doubt the truth of various scriptures used to defend the Trinity and rejected Trinitarianism.⁴⁶ The understanding of the universe as a machine driven by basic, discoverable principles had a profound influence on fundamental Christian beliefs about God.⁴⁷

The tremendous advancements in scientific and philosophical thought of the preceding centuries provided the initial impetus for the formation of deism in the eighteenth century. Deism was an unconventional theological perspective that emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries. Deism emerged as a theological movement.⁴⁸ The aim for unrestricted logical inquiry into all things, particularly religion, united the classical deists. They pushed for religious tolerance and the abolition of religious persecution. Deists argued that the Bible's narratives of God's miracles were neither adequate nor

³⁷ Hans Küng, *The Incarnation of God* (London: A&C Black, 1987).

³⁸ Küng, *The Incarnation of God*.

³⁹ Stanley E. Porter and Sean A. Adams, *Pillars in the History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 1 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016).

⁴⁰ Gotthold Lessing, *New Hypothesis Concerning the Evangelists* (London: A. & C. Black, 1956).

⁴¹ Gotthold Lessing, *The Education of the Human Race* (Berlin: Smith, Elder, and Company, 1858).

⁴² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (North Chelmsford, MA: Courier Corporation Publishing, 2012).

⁴³ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*.

⁴⁴ Udo Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings* (SCM Press, 1998).

⁴⁵ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian History: An Introduction* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

⁴⁶ Stephen D. Snobelen, "Isaac Newton, Heretic: The Strategies of a Nicodemite," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 32 (1999), 381.

⁴⁷ S. J. Savonius-Wroth, Jonathan Walmsley, and Paul Schuurman, *The Continuum Companion to Locke* (London: A&C Black, 2010), 137.

⁴⁸ Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology Twenty Centuries of Tradition Reform* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999).

essential to prove God's existence. Deists argued that the Bible's narratives of God's miracles were neither adequate nor essential to prove God's existence.⁴⁹ The rationalists propagated heretical notions such as the claim that God does not interfere in the universe and that miracles are impossible. Due to the intellectual pressures of the Enlightenment, many Christian theologians developed approaches to God's doctrine that were comparable to Deism.⁵⁰

Besides the Deists, there was another group that rejected the existence of God, the atheists. They are more radical products of applying reason to religion than atheism. Voltaire argued that fear of God was a vital policeman in a chaotic world. Voltaire wrote this in response to the *Treatise of the Three Impostors*, which denied the validity of all three Abrahamic religions.⁵¹ He was widely criticized as one of the reasons for the French Revolution. The *Essays of Jean Meslier* (1664 - 1729) were written by a French Catholic priest who rejected the concept of God.⁵²

In 1754, David Hume published a six-volume history of England that paid little regard to God. Hume mocked miracles but trodden carefully to avoid dismissing Christianity entirely. With Hume's presence, Edinburgh earned a reputation as a haven for atheists.⁵³ In 1770, Baron D'Holbach may have made the first outright rejection of God's existence and avowal of atheism since classical times. In the 1790s, atheism gained prominence in revolutionary France. The altar, or sacred space, of Notre-Dame Cathedral, was transformed into a monument to Reason.⁵⁴ Monasteries, convents, and church estates were confiscated, along with the monks and nuns. The Cult of Reason was an atheist credo developed during the French Revolution. Maximilien Robespierre, a Deist, put an end to it by establishing the Cult of the Supreme Being. Both cults arose as a result of the Revolution's de-Christianization of French society.⁵⁵ Michel Vovelle, *The French Revolution* was a series of events that began in 1789 and concluded on November 9, 1799, with the Festival of Liberty at Notre Dame de Paris. The Cult of Reason was commemorated in a festive atmosphere, marked by parades, church ransacking, and iconoclasm.⁵⁶

The Critique of Christology

Another issue of Christian theology that attracted criticism was the concept of Christology. Orthodox Christology, as expressed in the Nicaean and Chalcedonian creeds, was predicated on the holiness of the New Testament. The Protestant reformers' Christological ideas, particularly those of Luther and John Calvin, assumed the traditional interpretation of Scripture as a given.⁵⁷ Early in the 17th century, a growing chorus of voices demanded that other texts from the past be barred from making supernatural claims. That logical and analytical approach to the Scriptures became the foundation of Deism. English Deists portrayed Christianity as a rational and natural religion.⁵⁸ Isaac Newton (1642-1727) believed that idolizing Christ as God constituted sin. Newton was, at the very least, a Socinian sympathizer, possibly an Arian, and an anti-Trinitarian.⁵⁹

In the Enlightenment, a key assumption of Christology was that theologians and clergy had systematically distorted the true nature of Christianity throughout the ages. Enlightenment theologians were tasked with removing such lies and distortions and reviving what would later be known as the historical Jesus.⁶⁰ Historians of the New Testament concentrated on two fundamental assertions

⁴⁹ Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology Twenty Centuries of Tradition Reform*.

⁵⁰ Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012). 186

⁵¹ Geoffrey Blainey, *A Short History of Christianity* (Viking, 2011).

⁵² Michel Onfray, *Atheist Manifesto: The Case Against Christianity, Judaism, and Islam* (Arcade Publishing, 2007).

⁵³ Blainey, *A Short History of Christianity*.

⁵⁴ Michele Bigness, *Planting Seeds on Concrete* (Bloomington, IN: Balboa Press, 2013).

⁵⁵ Michel Vovelle, *The Revolution Against the Church: From Reason to the Supreme Being* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1991). 6, 171

⁵⁶ Vovelle, *The Revolution Against the Church: From Reason to the Supreme Being*.

⁵⁷ Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Encyclopedia of World Religions* (Edinburgh, Scotland: 2008: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 2008).

⁵⁸ Wayne Hudson, *Enlightenment and Modernity: The English Deists and Reform* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2015).

⁵⁹ Isaac Newton, *The Works of Isaac Newton* (London: Joannes Nichols, 1782).

⁶⁰ Jonathan C. P. Birch, *Jesus in an Age of Enlightenment: Radical Gospels from Thomas Hobbes to Thomas Jefferson* (New York City: Springer, 2019).

concerning Jesus. They said He was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and that he performed miracles to prove his divine purpose. The theorists contended that the Gospels described events that they had not observed.⁶¹

Thomas Woolston (1670-1733) was elected a member of the University of Cambridge in 1691. In particular, in *A Discourse on Our Saviour's Miraculous Power of Healing* (1730), he disputed the miracles of the Gospel.⁶² Thomas Chubb (1679–1747) vehemently contended that the Gospel authors recorded things they had not experienced and relied on tales of dreams, such as Joseph's dream about being instructed to escape Bethlehem for Egypt, which were fundamentally unverifiable. He asserted that Jesus is lesser and subservient to the Father, and indeed, the Father is the only God who is supreme.⁶³

Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) rejected any supernatural components of the Jesus accounts. He presented a fresh interpretation of Jesus' life. He argued that Jesus was an ordinary person suffering from messianic illusions; after his death, his corpse was taken and buried by his disciples to preserve his resurrection.⁶⁴ Except for creation, Reimarus continually rejected miracles and asserted that the ethical doctrines required for human society's survival were available to reason without the help of revealed principles. He fought against the conventional Christian belief in revelation.⁶⁵

The Critique of the Doctrine of Salvation

Another issue of Christian theology that attracted criticism was God's salvation of humanity. The Enlightenment marked the beginning of a new era for Christians seeking access to God's kingdom. After the Reformation, the good news of salvation became the center of a flood of printed words.⁶⁶ Salvation became the central notion in a new strain of literature that emerged in response to the civil wars. Before the Enlightenment, the philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) made significant contributions to the development of innovative approaches to the subject of salvation.⁶⁷ Hobbes opines that salvation is more than merely a desire or right, or 'eternal deliverance,' or 'inheritance' that humans have. According to Hobbes, it is a 'Christian State' that appears to be geared to satisfy people's need to be saved while neutralizing the politically dangerous drive of this desire.⁶⁸

John Locke (1632-1704) looks at what Adam lost before looking at what Christ restored. Locke argues with those who think that all individuals are doomed to eternal torment as a result of Adam's sin. This result is incompatible with God's kindness and justice.⁶⁹ When the New Testament does not comply with the canons of human reason, it is demoted to the function of a supporting act. It is in contrast with belief of those who think that no Salvation is required because the Scriptures were revealed to guide people on the road to salvation. The source of this unusual interpretation might be found in certain incorrect places in the New Testament.⁷⁰

According to Locke, Adam's death was not the result of guilt or the need to sin. God does not pass on Adam's guilt to his descendants. Without regard for Adam's or any ancestor's transgression, each person is fully accountable for his or her sin. Where there is no law, there is sin, according to John Locke.⁷¹ Even under the Gospel, the moral law is still in effect. The law of faith is how God justifies a sinful man who believes. Failure, no matter how minor, is not tolerated. God expects us to accept that Jesus is the Messiah. John Locke argues that Jesus performed miracles to persuade people

⁶¹ Birch, *Jesus in an Age of Enlightenment: Radical Gospels from Thomas Hobbes to Thomas Jefferson* .

⁶² Jan A. B. Jongeneel, *Jesus Christ in World History: His Presence and Representation in Cyclical and Linear Settings* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009).

⁶³ Jongeneel, *Jesus Christ in World History: His Presence and Representation in Cyclical and Linear Settings* .

⁶⁴ Alfred Braunthal, *Salvation and the Perfect Society: The Eternal Quest* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979).

⁶⁵ Braunthal, *Salvation and the Perfect Society: The Eternal Quest* .

⁶⁶ Andrew Pettegree, *The Reformation: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2004).

⁶⁷ Richard E. Flathman, *Thomas Hobbes: Skepticism, Individuality, and Chastened Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002).

⁶⁸ Flathman, *Thomas Hobbes: Skepticism, Individuality, and Chastened Politics*.

⁶⁹ John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁷⁰ Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility*.

⁷¹ William J. Danaher, *The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

that He was the Messiah.⁷² According to Locke, a miracle is a direct supernatural intervention by God that overrides the usual operation of the universe's natural laws. Prophecies are predictions that come true, according to Locke. John Locke argues that Jesus is the Messiah and that he fulfilled prophecies concerning the Messiah in the Old Testament.⁷³ John Locke argued that a man sent by God to teach people moral truth through miracles would be considerably more successful than the man that debates with people from broad principles. Uneducated people needed to be taught the truth, and Jesus was a shortcut to it.⁷⁴ John Locke argued that the Bible offers a shortcut to moral truth that no philosophical school can match. Locke did not welcome dissenting churches urging people to read the Bible for themselves. The propositional truth revealed by Jesus is a comprehensive corpus of moral truth, he argued.⁷⁵

Johann Gottlieb Töllner, a German philosopher, contends that it is the regeneration of the individual that leads to the bestowal of grace rather than Christ's satisfaction. Christ's obedience is an intrinsically moral trait that inspires a matching moral quality in humanity, based on which they are forgiven and justified.⁷⁶ Töllner contends that "the notion of vicarious compensation for sin" should be rejected. Humans' justification is based not on the "objective" worth of Christ's death but on the "subjective moral influence" that humans have on themselves. In terms of religious confessions, his viewpoint was agnostic.⁷⁷

Kant considers our salvation to be contingent on our belief in the historical truth of the Incarnation. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Kant discusses whether the doctrine of Sanctifying Grace can be understood concerning pure rational religion. Kant opposes the idea of vicarious atonement.⁷⁸ Humankind understands the historical event of atonement, the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, through such a historical revelation.⁷⁹ Kant stated in the *Categories of Being and Reason* that there must be another type of revelation, a larger "inner" revelation through reason, that can rationally utilize historical events such as the crucifixion. This would give all of humanity true hope in redemption.⁸⁰

Kant depicts the sacrificial atonement provided by the Son of God as a punishment that occurs neither before nor after the conversion of the heart. Before it, the elderly guy is merely guilty; he is unable to atone.⁸¹ Following that, the new guy merits no punishment and so has nothing for which he must atone. For Kant, justifying grace is the way religion represents, in terms of our relationship to God, our hope for overcoming the proclivity to evil through a change of heart.⁸² Divine forgiveness does not negate or transcend morality; instead, it occurs in harmony with morality. As a vicarious atonement, the Son of God represents our moral receptivity to God's kindness. In revealed religion, Christianity signifies the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.⁸³ According to Kant, rational religion is confidence in God's justifying grace. It does not contain but does not exclude prevenient or sanctifying grace. They are religiously acceptable components of revealed Christianity, but their actuality and our need for them extend beyond what pure reason can comprehend.⁸⁴

Kant's ethical philosophy holds that people have a responsibility to pursue the ultimate good over all things. Kant acknowledges that people are free beings with the propensity to abuse their freedom. The best that can reasonably be expected is progress toward, rather than realization of, moral perfection.⁸⁵ The philosopher, Immanuel Kant, argues that God regards individuals who intend to work

⁷² John Locke, *Delphi Complete Works of John Locke* (East Sussex: Delphi Classics, 2017).

⁷³ Locke, *Delphi Complete Works of John Locke* .

⁷⁴ Victor Nuovo and John Locke, *The Philosopher as Christian Virtuoso* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁷⁵ Nuovo and Locke, *The Philosopher as Christian Virtuoso* .

⁷⁶ Johann Gottlieb Töllner, *The Active Obedience of Christ Examined* (Breslau, 1768).

⁷⁷ Töllner, *The Active Obedience of Christ Examined* .

⁷⁸ Vincent A McCarthy, *Quest for a Philosophical Jesus: Christianity and Philosophy in Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Schelling* (Mercer University Press, 1986).

⁷⁹ McCarthy, *Quest for a Philosophical Jesus: Christianity and Philosophy in Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Schelling*.

⁸⁰ McCarthy, *Quest for a Philosophical Jesus: Christianity and Philosophy in Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Schelling*.

⁸¹ Garry J Williams, "Penal Substitutionary Atonement in the Church Fathers.," *Evangelical Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (2011).

⁸² Jacqueline Mariña, *Kant On Grace: A Reply To His Critics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁸³ Gary Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015).

⁸⁴ Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology*.

⁸⁵ G. E. Michalson, *Fallen Freedom: Kant on Radical Evil and Moral Regeneration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

toward moral perfection as though they already have such a disposition. Individuals who want to serve God “insofar as it is within their capabilities” may rely on divine favor to “supplement” their weaknesses.⁸⁶

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), a Prussian Protestant theologian, presented his perspective of sin and redemption in Christ in his magnum work, *The Christian Faith*. He refers to his understanding of Christian salvation as a ‘mystical’ view, which falls somewhere between the ‘magical’ and the ‘empirical’ views.⁸⁷ The Enlightenment appealed to human reason, which was capable of understanding the profound feeling of mystery that arose from the knowledge that “the human intellect cannot fathom even the finite universe, let alone the infinite beyond this.” The Enlightenment was first viewed as a liberator, but it has now come to be viewed as spiritually enslaving.⁸⁸

Schleiermacher argued that the core of “piety” is not an intellectual or moral principle but “feeling” or “instant self-consciousness”. The doctrine builds on the truth of redemption in Christ and the dichotomy of sin and grace. Christ’s redemptive action consists in his ascension of individuals into the power of God.⁸⁹ The Enlightenment saw Christ primarily as a teacher of a God-idea or a model of a religious or moral concept. Schleiermacher, like the Enlightenment, believes that justification is dependent on a past change inside humanity. However, he departs from the Enlightenment in his interpretation of the nature of that change.⁹⁰

The Critique of Human Nature and Sin

Another issue in Christian theology that attracted Enlightenment critique was the concept of human nature and sin. During the Enlightenment, many Christian doctrines, such as our sinful nature as a result of Adam’s fall, were fiercely attacked. The fall had little effect on human beings, at least not significantly. The concept of “sinful nature” is gradually fading as a philosophical concept. The explanation for any restrictions on man is no longer necessary.⁹¹ Before the Enlightenment, John Locke (1632–1704) opined that Adam’s death was not the result of guilt or the need to sin. God does not pass on Adam’s guilt to his descendants. Without regard for Adam’s or any ancestor’s transgression, each person is fully accountable for their sin.⁹²

According to Locke, God’s divine rule remains the standard of good and evil. John Locke opined that, apart from Scripture, he believes this law can be discovered through the accurate use of reason. Where there is no law, there is sin.⁹³ Even under the Gospel, the moral law is still in effect. The law of faith is how God justifies a sinful man who believes. He argues that humans were not inherently superior at nurturing at the time, except possibly in external ways.⁹⁴

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) believed that man was naturally good in his natural form and that it was the only society that perverted him. Contrary to the teachings of Scripture, many Enlightenment rationalists maintained this highly optimistic view of human nature.⁹⁵ Rousseau: Human freedom and perfectibility are the characteristics of human freedom in its natural condition. But how can a person possess a power of perfectibility without possessing the moral category? Rousseau: The moral notion is one of the results of the social world, and thus, solitary human beings would have no sense of ethical responsibility.⁹⁶

⁸⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 22 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1902).

⁸⁷ Justin S. Holcomb, *Christian Theologies of Salvation: A Comparative Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

⁸⁸ M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1973).

⁸⁹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith Presented in Context According to the Principles of the Evangelical Church*, vol. 1 (Lausanne G. Reimer, 1821).

⁹⁰ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith Presented in Context According to the Principles of the Evangelical Church*.

⁹¹ Daniel J. Pedersen, *Schleiermacher’s Theology of Sin and Nature: Agency, Value* (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis Limited, 2021).

⁹² Pedersen, *Schleiermacher’s Theology of Sin and Nature: Agency, Value*.

⁹³ John Marshall and John Locke, *Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁹⁴ Marshall and Locke, *Resistance, Religion and Responsibility*.

⁹⁵ Robert Wokler, *Rousseau: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁹⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Basic Political Writings*, ed. David Cress (Cambridge: Hackett, 2011).

The Enlightenment Critique of the Christian Concept of Creation

Another issue of Christian theology that attracted criticism was the biblical concept of Creation. In the pre-Enlightenment period, Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677) was among the first to criticize the Creation account.⁹⁷ Spinoza's God is the cause of everything since everything follows causally and inevitably from the divine essence, we are told. God creates the universe by free choice, and he might just as well not make anything outside his control.⁹⁸ Isaac Newton (1642-1727) explained that the most spectacular arrangement of the sun, stars, planets, and meteors was created by a Divine Force.⁹⁹ He noticed traces of design in the world's system; such an impact of selection must be traced to the fantastic planetary system. However, Newton reasoned that when disturbances accumulate, divine providence will be required to repair the world.¹⁰⁰

According to the Deists, there was a Creator, but He was disinterested in the creation. This led to the Deist theory of the cosmos, also known as the watchmaker's theory.¹⁰¹ Deists opposed God's revelation as a basis of special knowledge, believing that scientific logic and experience of the natural universe are sufficient.¹⁰² According to philosophy, the human race does not require a watchmaker God to build the cosmos. The first was via a literary critique of the biblical story, and the second was evidence that science has demonstrated the inaccuracy of the biblical Genesis story.¹⁰³ These two approaches to evaluating the Bible are still in use today. These two approaches to evaluating the biblical record are still in use today; the evolution of both is discussed here, along with some of the difficulties they have posed to the biblical narrative.¹⁰⁴

Evaluation of Enlightenment Critiques on Christian Theology

The Enlightenment period gave various criticisms of Christian theology. However, many of their criticisms are based on secular philosophy. The rejection of the Old and New Testament's revelation, inspiration, and authority, as well as the concepts of God, the doctrine of Christ, human nature and sin, salvation, and creation, is unfounded. Concerning the attack on the Bible, it must be noted that Christian faith in Jesus Christ is evidence that God has revealed himself to humans in many ways throughout history. If God's nature and will were not shown to us, humanity would be distant from him due to sin and guilt. The Bible presents how God has made himself known through human life. The Bible suggests that the insight and understanding gained from these sources alone are inadequate. God has responded to this situation by revealing Himself to humans on a personal basis. Revelation and inspiration are heavenly secrets for a mature and informed Christian faith.

Moreover, the critique of the concept of God is baseless. If deists acknowledge the existence of God, then that is enough knowledge for humanity. According to the Bible, the hidden issues are connected to God. At the same time, the revealed truths pertain to humankind and our descendants (Deut 29:29). The Christian understanding of God has been shaped by philosophical ideas rather than biblical statements. Human knowledge has influenced secular philosophers' interpretations of Christian theology regarding the concept of God. The Christian doctrine of God is interpreted through His revelation as recorded in the Scriptures, alongside insights from nature. The Bible identifies these distinct revelations.

Furthermore, the Age of Enlightenment's critique of Christ's nature, miracles, incarnation, and works is problematic. Christ is at the heart of the Christian religion. Beyond adopting essential principles, our religion is a set of crucial, pragmatic, priceless principles. Christianity does not begin with a small group of believers; it originates in Jesus of Nazareth. The Gospels are historically accurate and reliable accounts of Jesus.

⁹⁷ Travis L. Frampton, *Spinoza and the Rise of Historical Criticism of the Bible* (London: A&C Black, 2006).93

⁹⁸ Frampton, *Spinoza and the Rise of Historical Criticism of the Bible* .

⁹⁹ Rob Iliffe and George E. Smith, *The Cambridge Companion to Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹⁰⁰ Iliffe and Smith, *The Cambridge Companion to Newton* .

¹⁰¹ Leland Royce Harper, *Attributes of a Deistic God". Multiverse Deism: Shifting Perspectives of God and the World* (Lanham Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).

¹⁰² Francis Clark, *Godfaring: On Reason, Faith, and Sacred Being* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁰³ Clark, *Godfaring: On Reason, Faith, and Sacred Being*.

¹⁰⁴ Clark, *Godfaring: On Reason, Faith, and Sacred Being*.

Likewise, the critique of human nature and sin lacks merit. The Bible gives the consequences of sin. Human beings' nature is therefore exposed in their creation and future condition. The Bible depicts humanity's struggle with sin, as well as God's promise and solution to that conflict. God sent Christ to redeem humanity from sin (2 Cor. 5:21). The ideal created in God's image has been marred. Also, the critique of the salvation in Jesus is unfounded. Salvation is not a divine afterthought or improvisation rendered for sin, but rather, the plan for man's salvation was devised before the creation of this world. The suffering and death of Jesus are central to the plan.

Besides, the critique of the creation of God is groundless. The fundamental story of Creation comes before the narrative in Genesis 1 and 2. The theory of Creation is also taught in the New Testament. The new creation is linked to the old New Testament pronouncements on the issue. It is similar to it but more refined and sophisticated than the Old Testament's view. This is because Jesus Christ is Lord over His creation.

Discussion Summary

Christian theology became the subject of critique during the Enlightenment period. Biblical criticism provided a secular strand of thought, which led to an attack on the Scripture. The purpose of this paper is to review and discuss six specific Enlightenment critiques of Christian theology. This study systematically employs historical and theological methods to enumerate and discuss six specific Enlightenment critiques of Christian theology in light of the Bible, which include the revelation, inspiration, and authority of Scripture; the concept of God; Christology; soteriology; human nature and sin; and the concept of Creation.

The Enlightenment was a pivotal period in 17th- and 18th-century European philosophy, marked by the scientific revolution. In England, the first significant Enlightenment philosophers were Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and their peers. Voltaire, Denis Diderot, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau were the first major Enlightenment philosophers in France. In Germany, Immanuel Kant and other skeptics, such as David Hume, were significant enough to transform the nature of European thinking and effectively put an end to the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment thinkers critique the revelation, inspiration, and authority of the scripture. They denied Moses as the author of the Pentateuch. They claimed that the Bible was not wholly inspired. They rejected the authority of the Old and New Testaments. Also, Enlightenment thinkers opposed the belief in God as a Trinity. They opposed the Bible's narratives of God's miracles, which were neither adequate nor essential to prove God's existence. They rejected any supernatural components of the Jesus accounts, and atheists rejected the existence of God.

Furthermore, Enlightenment thinkers argued that Jesus was an ordinary person suffering from messianic illusions; after his death, his corpse was taken and buried by his disciples to preserve his resurrection. Besides, Enlightenment thinkers posited that Adam's death was not the consequence of guilt or the need to sin. Moreover, concerning the concept of creation, Enlightenment thinkers believed that God created the universe but then abandoned it to function independently according to the rules that had been established with it. God is the cause of everything since everything follows causally and inevitably from the divine essence. In addition, Enlightenment thinkers asserted that the Bible offers a shortcut to moral truth that no philosophical school can match. They opined that no Salvation is required because the Scriptures were revealed to guide people on the road to salvation. They opposed the idea of "vicarious atonement."

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that scholars and students must engage deeply with the Enlightenment critique of Christian theology to enrich their comprehension of how Enlightenment principles have shaped theological reflections and posed challenges to established doctrines. It is recommended that future research delve deeper into the intersection of historical philosophy and contemporary Christian thought. Such studies should investigate how Enlightenment principles continue to influence contemporary theological frameworks, particularly regarding scriptural authority, the nature of God, and doctrines of salvation. Researchers might also consider comparative analyses between

Enlightenment thought and post-Enlightenment philosophies to reveal potential reconciliations or further divergences in understanding Christian doctrines. This could provide valuable insights for both theologians and philosophers, fostering a nuanced dialogue between faith and reason in an increasingly secular world.

CONCLUSION

The Enlightenment period catalyzed crucial critiques of Christian theology, questioning key elements like revelation, inspiration, and the authority of Scripture. Enlightenment thinkers advocated for a human-centered approach, prioritizing moral truths discovered through reason rather than divine revelation. Despite the significant challenges posed to traditional Christian views of God, Christ, human nature, and salvation, a careful examination of these critiques against biblical teachings underscores that the core of the Christian faith is firmly rooted in historical and theological principles derived from Scripture. This foundation attests to Christian doctrine's continued relevance and authority in a shifting philosophical landscape.

The Enlightenment's emphasis on critical discussion has transformed the way theologians communicate. It has also empowered believers to reevaluate and strengthen their understanding of Christian truths amid shifting intellectual trends. The Bible affirms God as the Creator of the universe, countering the skepticism regarding His existence and creation through robust biblical evidence. The revelation of God through Christ's death and resurrection further supports the assertion of His enduring presence and purpose. Consequently, the critiques aimed at God, His Word, and His works ultimately fall short when scrutinized through the lens of Scripture, which serves as humanity's guide in navigating its erring nature and provides the pathway to salvation through Christ.

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