Church of God Theological Seminary
TS 601 Pentecostal Spirituality I

Reading Notes
Faith Seeking Understanding:
An Introduction to Christian Theology
Daniel L. Migliore

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Chapter 1 – The Task of Theology

Migliore addresses the task of theology largely in terms of the pursuit of understanding one’s faith and relationship with Jesus Christ. For the author, “Faith and inquiry are inseparable.”

In fact, the idea of thinking about and examining one’s faith is held as both a necessity and, in theology, and as a great opportunity for discovery and spiritual enrichment. True Christian faith even invites inquiry and thus, inquiries should not be viewed as pertaining to the shadows of unbelief.

For the Christian doing theology is about pursuing “truth not yet possessed, or only partially possessed.” Migliore notes the “fundamental roots,” of the pursuit of faith as the “object of Christian faith” – God. God is, of course, beyond our human understanding. The second root is the “situation of faith” which relates to our contextual existence and understanding of faith and God.

Questions are not viewed as a problem or as a symptom of inadequate faith, but as a means of doing theology which results in a thinking faith. Questioning in the process of theology leads us into the inquiry which leads ultimately to understanding. Migliore sets the starting point of inquiry as the point one becomes aware of the “reality of God.” In addition, it is this pursuit of inquiry that radically transforms our old way of thinking. In turn, Christian faith is not blind faith, but a faith that is very much aware of its surroundings and opportunities.
The author goes on to press his case for the importance of questioning an inquiry by asserting that it is the difficult questions which, in reality, offer freedom and not fear. Thinking that we must possess all of the answers for fear of losing something of our faith will actually “imprison our faith.” Theology which is about seeking out the understanding of our faith is the challenge we face as Christians in doing theology.

Migliore continues his discussion concerning thinking about one’s faith with the assurance that this process will not leave one weary. On the contrary, thinking and inquiry are only part of what faith produces. It is the practice of one’s faith which offers increased meaning and even joy. Faith cannot be overly intellectualized or purely a matter of one’s feelings without losing the balance of true living faith. Faith transforms both mind and behavior. Theology is a reflection on that transformation process.

The author offers greater clarity concerning the process of doing theology by alluding to the various veins of theological thought, but settles on the task of systematic theology because it takes on the challenge to “Rethink and reinterpret the doctrines and practices of the church in the light of what the church itself avows to be of central importance.”

Following this, Migliore addresses four basic questions which come to bear on Christian faith and practice. The focus of these questions is upon the bond between our trust in the grace of God and our call to serve God. The questions considered are as follows: 1) Are the proclamation and practice of the community of faith true to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as attested in scripture?; 2) Do the proclamation and practice of the community of faith give adequate expression to the whole truth of the
revelation of God in Jesus Christ?; 3) Do the proclamation and practice of the community of faith represent the God of Jesus Christ as a living reality in the present context?; 4) Does the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ by the community of faith lead to transforming practice in personal and social life?

In addressing his concerns about the manner in which theological questions are asked, Migilore offers three methods for asking theological questions. Those methods are first Karl Barth’s Christocentric theology or the theology of the word of God. For Barth, theology is the process of subjecting the church and its proclamation to questioning and testing by reference to the living word of God in Jesus Christ. Secondly, there is the method of method correlation associated with the apologetic theology of Paul Tillich. In this instance, revelation is not normed by the situation but it must speak to it if it is to make sense, and this can only happen if theology attends to the actual questions raised within a particular situation. A third method is the praxis approach of liberation theology. Praxis denotes a way to knowledge that binds together action, suffering, and reflection. Later the author notes that he has been primarily influenced by Karl Barth’s approach. In this chapter, Migliore has stated his case for taking on the task of doing theology in the Christian community as a necessity for the health and well-being for all that are in the community.

Chapter 2

The Meaning of Revelation

In this chapter Migliore undertakes the issue of God’s divine revelation of himself through people and various means. Centering his thoughts on key questions such as
“What is the source of this knowledge of God? What kind of knowledge is it? What place do scripture, the witness of the church, and human reason, experience, and imagination have in the knowledge of God?”

He begins his examination of Revelation as it pertains to the community of faith. For God to offer a revelation of Himself is to understand it as self-disclosure of Himself to His creation. This, in turn, essentially challenges the human mind in all areas of one’s existence and should leave one at the point of experiencing a personal transformation. After all, for God to disclose Himself to us through personal revelation, we must come to the obvious conclusion that we are being shown something which has been previously unknown to us. This is a transformative experience in itself. It is about more than gaining knowledge or information, it is the entrance into a new place with God.

Although revelation is nothing new, the critics will argue either that it is over emphasized or the idea of revelations promises more than can be delivered because of all that cannot be known. Thus the idea of revelation is an exasperated concept from the standpoint of the critics. However, Migliore argues that knowledge goes hand in hand with faith and works, and it is in God’s actions that he makes himself known. This does not, however, take away from the hiddenness of God or of His mysteriousness. Even His revelation of Himself through Jesus Christ does not bring knowledge of God into our complete grasp.

The objective and subjective issue of revelation is about more than a point of view of a tangible event. It cannot be put into the category of human imagination. True revelation affects not only the human imagination, but also the course of one’s life. The
transformative process begins with a revelation and understanding of God that one opens oneself up to willingly. It is important to remember that when we speak of revelation, revelation refers first to God’s own self-disclosure. Secondly, it points to particular events and to particular people through whom God has communicated His identity and will. Thirdly, it is a paradoxical hiding of God which always makes our total comprehension of God beyond our grasp. Fourthly, the revelation of God calls for our personal response and appropriation which results in a transformed life. Fifthly, the revelation of God is always a disturbing, even shocking event which sometimes encounters resistance and rejection. Sixthly, revelation becomes the new interpretive focus for our understanding of God, the world, and ourselves.

According to the scriptures God reveals Himself openly through nature and creation. However, the self-disclosure of God, in Jesus Christ going to the cross, expands our revelation from that of a general revelation. Nevertheless, it does not stand alone. It is important to remember that revelation of God is never finished and cannot be confined solely to history, events, or experiences.

God’s revelation through Jesus Christ was uniquely understandable to us as human beings because it was a personal disclosure through the person of Jesus Christ. Coupled with scripture, which offers a witness to God’s revelation of Himself, we see the importance of experiencing God’s presence and voice in our lives.

God’s revelation of Himself involves all of His redemptive and creative activity, thus the work of the spirit, the word of God, and the work of Christ together bring us light
and understanding. Therefore, this revelation is always within the control of God Himself and not human beings. Hence, we must always be open to what God has to say to us.

Chapter 3—The Authority of Scripture

In chapter 3 Migliore does not examine the issue of whether or not scripture has authority but rather what kind of authority it possesses. Approaching this central thought he examines the primary content and function of scripture as it pertains to the community of faith. The relevance of his argument is based on the unique and irreplaceable witness of God’s activity in the history of his people. Noting that the very idea of authority is controversial, he nevertheless is seeking to hash out a proper understanding of biblical authority.

To begin with, the question is raised as to what is meant by the authority of the scriptures. It is not seen by Migliore as connected to tradition or particular doctrines, rather it pertains to the inherent truth of scripture and the message of Jesus Christ. It is the authoring of a new way of life through Jesus Christ that sets us free and not the proclamation of an authoritarian rule over us that is the foundation of scripture. Approaches to understanding scriptural authority which have fallen short in the past, such as its supernatural origin or the scripture as a historical source, or the scripture as a religious classic, or even viewing the scripture as a private devotional text, are all inadequate attempts to address the issue of scriptural authority.

All meaningful discussions on the subject of scriptural authority must address the meaning within the context of the community of faith. This is necessary because within
the community of faith the faith is being put in the God revealed by the Bible and not merely a belief in the Bible. The scripture is a witness to and about the grace of the God in whom the Christian community has placed its faith. It is a witness to the acts of God’s power and revelation of God and His work through Jesus Christ. In fact, its authority is inseparably linked to its revelation of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

The diversity of scripture does not take away from its cohesiveness. Instead, it is a natural element of its narrative construction. Central to Migliore’s argument is that biblical authority has a different basis and works in a different way from that described by traditional theories. The Bible witnesses to God and all that He is, yet God remains greater than our imagination.

Migliore continues to press his thesis by addressing several principles of interpretation in light of his previous assertions about the nature of scripture. As pertaining to historical and literary sensitivity, the author affirms the importance of understanding the actions of God within the historical context and in regard to the human relationships and limitations of those within the community of faith. This is seen throughout the recorded narrative.

In relation to interpreting the scriptures theocentrically, God is certainly seen as the central figure in the scriptures. It is all about God and His actions in relation to humanity and His eternal purposes. God is not an abstract idea or force. He is the living God at work in creation and history. It is this revelation through scripture that opens our eyes to a greater reality and purpose for our existence and it leads us to a revelation of Christ who is the perfect revelation of God himself to humanity.
Scripture that is interpreted ecclesially is done so within the scope and practices of the entire community of faith. What the scripture has to say within the context of the community is an important part of understanding the role scripture plays in the formation and the function of the faith community. These interpretations of scripture and the practices and creeds which are inspired by them are part of the work of assisting in arriving at and maintaining a correct understanding of the scripture.

Interpreting scripture contextually involves a wider context than simply that of our personal experiences or personal location. It must be understood in light of varying context which differ from our own. Scripture cannot be limited by culture or locality, just the opposite. The scriptures continue to offer new light and understanding through the work of the Holy Spirit which knows no limitations. Multiple opportunities for greater understanding have been offered throughout history and throughout cultures around the world as the message of the scriptures has been revealed to the heart, mind, and context of believers world over through the working of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, we are challenged to be open to a greater sensitivity to the work of the Spirit and that of scripture.

Chapter 4—The Triune God

The need to arrive at an understanding of God in a manner which clarifies and enlightens the community of faith is of central importance in the task of Theology according to Migliore. His assertion is that what we have to say about God will influence everything we say and believe as Christians.
Questions about God and His nature are not new in light of the prevalence of evil in the world. Traditional interpretations of the doctrine of God’s person have opened the door for criticisms ranging from their inadequacy to their oppressive patriarchal structures. Migliore believes that we must return to the fundamental questions of our theology concerning God – who is God, and what is His nature and what is the nature of our relationships with Him?

The path we take in our search will be of great importance. We must not adopt general notions about God because they appear Normative. Our task is to be specific and firmly based in truth.

The doctrine of the trinity often presents a challenge to the community because it is not a revealed doctrine in the sense of being clearly written out in scripture. It is, however, revealed through the working of God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. As clear as it may appear to most, it nevertheless is a problem for those who view the doctrine of the trinity as speculative or even sexist.

Although scripture affirms that there is one God, the biblical basis for the doctrine of trinity is not as clear except in certain texts. Just the same, our understanding of God and His actions reveal a triune relationship – not of three Gods – but of three distinct personal expressions of the one, eternally rich God who is love. The Trinitarian view finds its basis in the extension of God’s love through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Although this does not give us complete knowledge of God’s person, it does reveal the depth of the divine being.
Migliore goes on to discuss what he calls distortions of the trinitarian faith: subordinationism, Modolism, and tritheism. His objection to subordinationism (one God and two exalted creatures of inferior divinities) is that if Christ and the Holy Spirit are inferior to the Father, how can they be agents of divine transformation?

Migliore’s problem with Modolism (Father, Son and Holy Spirit are only masks God wears) is that believers can never be sure of knowing God since His true identity remains hidden. Tritheism views the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three separate deities, yet this contradicts the scriptural admonition to love only one God. Tritheism, therefore, calls for the Christian to love, serve and trust three separate Gods.

The author continues by reminding the reader of guidelines in accurately discussing the trinity by questioning a well-known theological rule, all of the acts of the triune God in the world are indivisible. He continues his assertions by a discussion concerning the nature of God and His power. God is accurately understood, not as domineering in His power, but as liberating and renewing in His power and expressions of love. Distortions of the doctrine of God appear as the discussion of the trinity deepens. Migliore mentions the Unitarianism of the Creator which presents God the Father as the origin of all things, often seen in tribal religions.

Second is the Unitarianism of the Redeemer, which separates Jesus from His Savior and Lord over all designation to a sentimental view of Jesus which only affects the individual.
Thirdly, there is the Unitarianism of the Spirit, where one’s experiences and exercising of the gifts of the Spirit are all important. This leads to an over emphasizing of the work of the Spirit at the expense of the work of Christ and our heavenly Father. Migliore stresses the need for understanding God, lest we lose our identity. By understanding the triune God we understand that eternal life in God is about our life in relationship with God, the communion of God is much deeper than that of our human relationships. In addition, it is to understand the life of God as essentially self-giving love and understanding of the human existence.

The attributes of God are seen by Migliore as best interpreted in pairs that point to the being and act of God. Thus, the grace and holiness of God are joined, as are God’s constancy of purpose and His changing actions as He fulfills His purpose. God’s love is vulnerable yet unconquerable. His wisdom and patience reside together as He exercises judgment and love in His omniscience. God is not only everywhere, but He is everywhere freely. In all these and more we must be careful to allow the scriptural witness of the scriptures to reveal God to us.

In the last section of the chapter Migliore addresses the misunderstandings concerning the eternal decrees of God. The electing grace of God is often misunderstood because it is used to answer questions it was never intended to answer, such as why some accept Christ and others do not. It is best explained as serving the purpose of declaring the works of God. In election, God is choosing to include others in His life of communion. In election God is declaring that we have no claim on Him, our salvation is purely by His grace. God’s election serves His purpose of a creation of a people of God
and not the salvation of certain individuals. Furthermore, God’s election and gift of salvation does not eliminate the necessity of obedience. Those who perish will be those who were excluded by decree. Migliore reminds us that knowing God and knowing ourselves are inseparable. The doctrine of the trinity should give direction to the church in its search for understanding itself and its purpose.

Chapter 5—The Good Creation

In the act of creating the world God called into existence those things which did not exist, and though all was not realized due to the fall, the goodness of God was already and is now at work in creation. Though Christians see God as the creator of all that is good in creation we are nevertheless confronted with an ecological crisis.

Those critical of the Christian translation often indict Christian theology as the central problem in the ecological crisis of today. Citing the belief that humans are created in the image of and have been ordained by God to exercise dominion over creation, the charge is that this has led to ruthless consumption of natural resources and a disregard for the environmental impact of human progress.

Migliore feels that there is some truth to the charges and that, historically, many have felt that the world in which we live has been given to humanity for our use and consumption. In fact, Christian thought has been much more concerned with the salvation of souls than with the saving of the environment around them.

A misuse of power is at the heart of the problem according to the author. Advancement in theology has given humanity great power over nature which can be used
for good or for evil. A misunderstanding of Christian theology has contributed to the problem in part. Although we have been given dominion over nature, the question is, was that dominion meant to become a total conquest of nature.

Christian theology has often failed to address the interconnectedness of all life on earth. This in turn has led to a lack of respect for the existence of either life forms or creatures. Often it has been assumed that the earth’s resources were without limitations and thus led to the exploitations of natural resources for human purposes.

Migliore also cites the market place and economy which drives consumerism. This consumerism, unabated, leads to the unregulated consumption of goods to the point that other societies, less fortunate, go without basic necessities. It is easy to see that it is the responsibility of the church to seek to address this crisis which threatens God’s creation. In this sense, it is a theological and spiritual crisis which the church faces. The idea that the creation of humanity is more meaningful than the remainder of creation must be replaced with the understanding that God views all of creation as good and the whole of creation as very good.

Although God created the earth to sustain humanity the earth belongs not to humans but to God. As humans we have been given the responsibility of caring for His creation. Humanity and creation are bound together in suffering and hope, according to Migliore. Both wait for the time of redemption. Thus we cannot justify the abuse of nature by the argument that God has given us rule over it.

When we confess that God is the creator we are making a statement about God. We are speaking of his generosity as the giver of creation and life. Creation is evidence of
God’s desire to give life and to share His life with those He has created. Another thought develops out of this understanding. God is our creator and thus we are dependent upon Him. We exist because He chooses for us to. We are not responsible for our existence and are unable to guarantee our continued existence, thus a sense of total dependence on God emerges from the doctrine of creation.

A third theme of the doctrine of creation Migliore addresses is the idea that the gift of life is good. This stands in opposition to the belief of dualism which states that some of creation is inherently evil. To say that all of creation is good is to recognize the value of all of creation – even if we do not see its value or usefulness. However, it is not to say that all that happens in creation is good. We are not denying the fallenness of the world or its need to be redeemed. It is rather to say that all that God purposes in creation is good.

The author continues with a fourth theme of creation with the coexistence and interdependence of all created beings. This is an important theme which highlights the relationality of creation. All of creation exists together in community.

Fifthly, he goes on to discuss the purposefulness of God’s act of creation. God was intentional in creation and reveals His purpose in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In addition, God continues to create and work freely. He invites us to join with Him in accomplishing His purposes in order to see the good of creation.

Migliore moves onto the discussion of the trinity, creation and ecology in the next section. Various approaches in Christian literature seek to defend Christian theology as being responsible for the ecological crisis we face. Others say that it is the Christian
faith’s responsibility to address the crisis in an effective manner. The author seeks to address the reflections which deal closest to the trinitarian approach on the subject.

A trinitarian approach is important for several reasons. First, creation is seen as the work of a God who is free and connected to His creation. Secondly, a trinitarian view of the unity of all things sees the source of unity and difference and their harmony in the triune creator. Thirdly, it underscores the goodness of creation, its groaning and its longing to be renewed and perfected.

In the author’s discussion of the models of creation, he notes three particular theories (which fall short of a trinitarian doctrine): theism, pantheism and panentheism. Additionally, he offers several models which claim biblical support and that have roots in shared human experience.

Finally, Migliore deals with the relation between faith and science in creation. Although complex in their relationship, both should be open to exploring aspects of the other. The conflicts between the two must be put aside and a dialogue must be opened to see the importance of presenting God’s creation.

Chapter 6—The Providence of God and the Mystery of Evil

Migliore had begun the text by defining theology as faith seeking understanding; however, he asserts that we must be cautious in attempting to provide a system of thought which provides answers for all questions. Some questions or mysteries are simply not easily explained. In particular, in this chapter, he is speaking primarily of the relation
between the providence of God in light of the obvious evil that is present in our world. Does one contradict the other?

God’s providential care assures us that God has not abandoned creations, but remains very present and at work in divine care for all of creation. He remains the one who sustains creation. Although, some would argue that God’s activity is apparently sorely limited as evidenced by the prevailing evil which is present in creation. Migliore seeks to address the truth of scripture in spite of the troubling questions.

It is these troubling questions which present apparent contradictions. Natural evil—the sufferings received by living in a fallen world—often provokes some to question God’s providential care. Additionally, the mystery of evil is also present historically as we look back over past events such as the Holocaust. Where is God in the face of such evil and suffering? Christian faith confesses that God’s providential care is real, but evil is real also. How can they exist together?

Traditionally, the doctrine of providence was not developed in denial of the evil present in the world. Both Augustine and Calvin struggled with the issue, but held to the truth of God’s providential care in spite of unanswered questions. It was enough for both that God reigned and that evil remained under God’s control.

As Migliore examines the traditional doctrines of providence, he presents three prominent answers to the theodicy question. The just answer argues the incomprehensibility of God. The truth is that God’s ways are often beyond our human ability to understand. The problem, however, in this view is the tendency of some to suppress all questions and to encourage people to accept all suffering.
A second argument sees adversity as divine punishment (of the wicked) or chastisement (of the people of God). This view centers on people getting what they deserve, either now or in eternity. Migliore sees this as too simplistic. All suffering is not that easily explained.

Yet another argument is that of divine pedagogy. This argument sees suffering as a means of turning us to God. It sees suffering as an opportunity for spiritual growth. Nevertheless, we must be careful here not to view suffering as good.

Though each of these have helped many to make sense of their sufferings and each may possess some truth, they all lack a strict adherence to the truth of the gospel and Christ’s divine lordship.

In the process of rethinking the doctrine of providence there must remain a difference in our understanding of divine and human activity. Truth can never be found through mere logic or abstract claims about God and His actions. God operates in freedom and purpose. What He does, He does in gracious action for His creation in order to sustain it all. Additionally, God respects the autonomy and freedom of His creatures. He wills to have communion with them but allows them freedom to return His love and to participate with His plan as revealed through Jesus Christ.

Recent theodicies on the subject of providence include ideas such as protest theodicy. The tendency of this theodicy is to question the total goodness of God. In this thought there is simply too much evil activity present to be able to reconcile present reality that God is good. Secondly, there is process theodicy. Metaphysical in nature, the view is that God’s power is limited and can only exercise influence by
persuasion – not through coercion. Though God is seen as responsible for evil He is not totally to blame because He has created good which can have influence as well as evil. This theodicy is least connected to the Biblical witness.

Third is person-making Theodicy – influential in modern thinking. Here, we see the working of grace dismissed in spiritual development. Humans must become what they are intended to be in God on their own. Finally, liberation theodicy sees the plight of the poor and oppressed in direct contradiction to the belief that God is working to liberate the poor. It sees Christians as being empowered to struggles against evil.

Migliore follows by continuing to address the present evil and diverse providence. He continues to relate the power of God’s love as he relates to and co-suffers with his creatures. God is at work, not only where life prospers, but also where it is in jeopardy. God’s love is at work in all phases and areas of His creature’s experience. The love of God is at work in preparation of all that God has planned and contained in new life. He is at work transforming all things for His purpose in Christ.

In the face of present evil how can we remain confident in divine providence? What do we know about providence?

First, accept no view of providence that is not founded on the gospel of Jesus Christ. There must be trust in God’s promises. Second, prayer is a central need in the Christian life if we are to properly respond to the power of evil. Third, though questions may persist, our call to discipleship is clear. It is our faith and hope through Christ that will transform and sustain us.
Chapter 7—Humanity as Creative Sinner and New Being in Christ

Human beings often are multifaceted in our nature. Although we are created in the image of God, the fall has left that image distorted. Yet through Christ we find forgiveness and the ability to start a new and to live a life of obedience rather than disobedience. It is in this new life in Christ that we must come to fully know ourselves so that we may truly know God. Through God’s grace this can become a reality.

When we look at the concept of being made in the image of God, we find various interpretations of its meaning. Some have interpreted this as a physical resemblance though the scripture offers little support for that – rather it is more likely that it refers to God’s transcendence. Some have offered the suggestion that it refers to the rational nature of human beings. This may be partially true but would depreciate the emotional and physical dimensions of the human existence. Yet others offer the interpretation that it is humanity’s dominion over the earth, in that, humanity resembles God in the power over creation. Then there are those who point to human freedom as the source of the image or reflection.

Migliore offers his understanding as that of the image of God referring to human life in relationship with God and with other creatures. After all, the image of God is seen more in terms of a reflection of God’s image.

As we live with others and creation, we are to reflect the God Christ has made known to us. After all, Christ is the perfect expression of what God expects humanity to become. The author continues with an explanation of the essential dimensions of human beings in relationship both with God and others. To begin, he asserts that humans, created
in God’s image are freely addresses by God and have freedom to respond to God. God lives in relationship and calls us into relationship with him with the expectation of our free response to him.

Secondly, created in the image of God means that humans find their true identity in coexistence with each other and with all other creatures; our existence is a communal existence and calls for continued interaction with others. We see this in the accounts of creation. We exist in communion which implies living in partnership with others.

Thirdly, created in the image of God refers not to a state of being but as a goal to which we are moving toward. We seek for the fullness we have not yet realized.

Sometimes seen through obedience and now through the gospel of Jesus, it is through an understanding of the promises of God that we orient our lives. The dimensions of our freedom are outlined as relationship to our responsibility before God, life in relationship with others, and openness to God’s promise – are tightly bound to each other. This is Migliore’s understanding.

Addressing the issues of fallen humanity, Migliore begins with the rupture in humanities relationship with God. The task he undertakes is to describe in greater detail this condition of sin as a disruption of the created dimensions of human existence. He begins by saying that if being in the image of God is about life in our free response to God, then sin could be described as a denial of our relationship to God and our need for his grace. Secondly, if being in God’s image is about responding to God’s call in relationship, then in dealing with others sin takes a dual form of domination and servility.
Thirdly, if being in God’s image means being open to the coming of God’s reign, then sin is the denial of human destiny as appointed by God.

The question of the origin of sin has been the subject of much debate. Here Migliore seeks to clarify the issue. His assertion is that the origin of sin cannot be traced by the bodily existence or sexuality or natural condition of life. It is the doctrine of original sin not the origin of sin that has affected the condition of humanity through its captivity to sin.

To clarify we are faced with several paradoxes. First, sin is a universal condition, but it is also a chosen act for which we are responsible. Secondly, sin insinuates itself into all human actions, including not only what is widely condemned as evil but also what is commonly promised as good. Thirdly, sin is the corruption of the individual person, but is also active and powerful in public and corporate structures of life. Sin can be understood as our refusal to live in relationship with God and our denials of God’s grace, as well as our refusal to live in a just and peaceful community that participates in and reflects God’s own life in communion.

The good news is that God has not left us alone in our condition. Through God’s gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, we can face even death as a conquered enemy. Death reminds us of God’s judgment on sin, which we are assured has been borne by Christ for us all.

Our new humanity in Christ is characterized by freedom from the bondage of sin to join with God and others in partnership. In this new Christian life we now participate by faith, love, and hope in the new humanity made possible through Christ. Through faith
we trust and have confidence in the divine care of God extended to us by Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Love becomes our response, living out our humanity with and for others which is embodied in Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Finally, we find new freedom and hope for the future in which we live in the expectation of the fulfillment of the gracious promise of God in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. We find the realization of God’s promises through living in faith, hope, and love.

Chapter 8—The Person and Work of Jesus Christ

It is of necessity that the basis for all Christian theology remain centered on Jesus Christ and the salvation he brings. This is the point from which all illumination of Christian doctrine begins. The question of who Jesus is, and what work is accomplished through him, has traditionally been thought of as that of salvific in nature due to his lordship and position as the Son of God. Yet, in modern times we find that many Christians are uncertain of the meaning of these affirmations. Christianity, therefore, faces several difficult questions concerning who Christ is and the work he accomplishes.

In order to do this, Christological creeds must be interpreted and not merely repeated. The rise of historical consciousness and the application of the historical – critical method to the Gospels must center on Jesus’ proclamation of the coming of the Kingdom of God and his unconditional love for the poor and marginalized of society. Another issue that must be addressed is the numerous and various pictures of Jesus in the New Testament. In the diversity, Christian identity must not be lost through ideological distortions.
The principles of Christology as set forth by Migliore are summed up in the following working principles. To begin with, knowing Christ is not an academic pursuit or found in historical knowledge; it is faith knowledge. This contains the necessary element of trust. It is to affirm that God has brought salvation to the world through Jesus Christ. Secondly, Jesus cannot be understood apart from an understanding of God’s covenant with the people of Israel or if it is viewed as a work for a limited group of people or individuals. Thirdly, the doctrines of the person and work of Christ are inseparable. The person Jesus Christ and his work can never by split apart. Fourthly, every understanding of Christ comes out of particular situations and reflects particular needs and aspirations of people. Lastly, Jesus is greater than all of our confessions, creeds and theological reflections.

Historically, various church confessions, debates and schools of thought have contributed to our understanding of what Migliore calls “Patristic Christology” and thus must be examined. These encompass the following: the divinity of God and the gospel, the divinity of Christ, the Trinity, the incarnation, and the nature of the incarnate Christ, the communication of properties which relate to the union of the divine and human nature.

Migliore goes on to point out some deficiencies of the classical Christological tradition and offers proposals for exploration and reformation. First is the issue of Jesus being fully human. Migliore asserts that Jesus was indeed fully human, but his was a new humanity – it was the promise of what humanity could be in relation to God and others. Secondly, he addresses the fully divine aspect of Jesus’ person. The life, death and
resurrection of Jesus Christ was not the victory of a solitary human being, it was God’s victory. As Migliore states, “God acts, suffers, and triumphs in and through Jesus. Thirdly, the mystery of the unity of the person of Christ is presented as a dynamic union of divine and human natures and not only the static union at conception. Fourth, the union of God and humanity in Jesus Christ is a “Kenotic unity” which involves the act of free self-limitation or “emptying” by Jesus Christ. All of these analogies involve the mystery of the eternal exchange of love in the life of the triune God.

Migliore moves on to prominent theories of atonement in his discussion. The “Christ the Victory” theory uses a battle metaphor and focuses on the dramatic struggle between God and civilization. The “satisfaction” theory centers on the biblical passages that suggest that it was through Christ’s vicarious suffering that humanity is redeemed.

The “moral influence” theory, also referred to as the “subjective” theory suggest that God’s love through Christ is so compelling that we are constrained to respond to Him. Migliore presents the violence of the cross as the demonstration of the profound truth that in order to redeem humanity Jesus Christ must suffer. Scripture is clear in pointing to humanity as the reason for Jesus going to the cross. His death on the cross exposes a world under God’s judgment, God’s desire to mediate forgiving love to fallen humanity, and God’s plan to provide a new future of reconciliation and hope.

The author concludes with the resurrection of Christ presented as the center of the New Testament witness. Avoiding the extreme ideas that the resurrection can be proven by modern historical research, and that the meaning of the resurrection can be reduced to a change of mind or heart on the part of the early disciples.
What must be considered is the crucial “theological” dimension that God is faithful. Jesus’ resurrection was an act of the Father which altered the human situation once and for all. Second, the “Christological” dimension reminds us that in Christ, our humanity is seen in its exaltation. Third, there is the “pneumatological” dimension which centers on the life-transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Fourth, the “ecclesial” dimension reveals that through the witness, life and practices of the community of faith the power of the resurrection is revealed. Fifth, the “political” dimension reveals that the risen Christ constitutes a challenge to all principalities and powers of the world. Finally, there is the “cosmic” dimension which means that because of the resurrection of Christ there is hope for the entire cosmos which groans to be released from its bondage. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is truly “good news.”

Chapter 9—Confessing Jesus Christ in Context

Who we confess Christ to be and how he helps us will often be shaped by our particular context in which these questions arise. This is the study of contextual theology. It is important to remember that all theology is contextual as it relates to our historical and cultural context. In addition, we are reminded that engaging the study of Christology is not without risk. Finally, we will see that the entire church does something to gain from the newer contextual or local Christologies. This chapter is a further reflection on the person and work of Christ.

Internal and external factors affect the development of contextual Christologies. Many outside the United States challenge the western based philosophical concepts of
Christ. Internal factors which affect the development of contextual Christologies must acknowledge the particular stories and struggles of various groups without emphasizing one to the exclusion of another.

Latin American Christology offers fresh thought in several areas of emphasis which may influence the work of Christology for the church as a whole. Latin American theologians develop their Christology in consideration of the particular historical situation in which the biblical message is heard. They also interpret scripture in light of this situation and their situation in light of scripture. By this they see God in Christ entering into solidarity with the poor. They see God’s solidarity with the poor as inclusivity and not exclusivity.

Additionally, their theologians see the sin that keeps people in bondage and the salvation that frees them have both personal and political dimensions. Jesus comforted both sinful individuals and a sinful structure of life.

The cross and resurrection of Christ are also given a distinctive interpretation. They see the crucifixion of Christ as a result of his scandalous message and ministry. The cross is not seen as being demanded by God or necessary to change God’s attitude toward humanity. Thus, the cross is more than a life beyond death issue, it is also about the transformation of this world.

For Latin American theologies, knowledge of Christ is inseparably linked to following Christ. Understanding what it means to follow Christ is linked to our connection to those who are oppressed and mistreated in need of justice.
For the African American theologian, the development of theologies has taken them through several phases to a contextual theology with many voices.

Black Christology is rooted in the history and experience of African American people. Their encounter with the scripture has brought them to a rediscovery of their faith as the good news of God’s liberation of the oppressed. Black Christology focuses on the ministry, cross, and resurrection of Christ for the poor and the despised of the earth. God’s grace may be universal, but it is partial towards the poor. Black theology is also a political theology which seeks to unmask evil forces such as racism and the attitudes, structures and practices in North America. Like other liberation theologies it sees confessing Christ and following Christ as inseparable. The primary means of sustaining its theologies has been through its worship practices more than through its academic theologies.

Feminists, womanists, and Mujerista Christologies emphasize the oppressive power of racism and classism in addition to sexism in society and the church. Feminist theology has arisen out of the particular experience of women in church and society. Their theology seeks to expose and struggle against the systemic injustice of patriarchy. It is their contention that traditional Christologies only reinforce the attitudes and structures of patriarchy. Many take issue with traditional doctrines of the atonement saying that they foster child abuse and that brutality is the cost of forgiveness in such views of atonement. Hispanic theology is the history of a struggle and the experience of discrimination against the Hispanic people in North America. Hispanic theology is closely related to liberation theology and focuses on God’s partiality toward the poor. To the Hispanic theologian, the
Galilean identity of Jesus identifies him as among the marginalized, shamed, and rejected of the world. The cross was the result of the conflict of his message and ministry to the marginalized. Many see their own identity in that of Jesus’ social identity. The gospel brings new hope and dignity to them as a people in their Christology.

A recent contextual theology is that of the Asian American theology. Migliore’s understanding is based mostly on Korean theological literature. Asian American theologians often draw upon Eastern philosophies and religious traditions because they consider them to be more suitable to Asian people than western styles.

For many, marginality is a key concept in their theologies. They, too, identify with Jesus as one who understands the condition of marginality. In general Asian American theologies are critical of western interpretations of the atonement as satisfaction. Instead they focus on the solidarity of Jesus with the poor, abused, and the suffering. Finally, they struggle with the meaning of Jesus as Lord in light of a history of subordination and oppression.

The relation between local and global Christologies must be understood in order to prevent more and continuing confusion. The global church needs to hear the witness of the local churches and their experiences. Likewise, the local church must hear the church globally as expressed in creeds, confessions, and liturgies.

For the contextual and ecumenical concerns to be held together every effort at ecumenical theology must be open to the voices of contextual theologies. The same must be reciprocated from the contextual theologians. Responsible local theology must be
ecumenical in intent even as truly ecumenical theology must be open to the insights and
the calls to action that come from local theologies.