

A Post-Structural Theological Critique of the Perspectives of Christopher Hitchens on Vicarious Redemption.

Patrick Brian Segaren Pillay

Student Number: 871873990

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Supervisor: Prof. Roderick Hewitt
School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics
University of KwaZulu Natal
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COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
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I, Patrick Brian Segaren Pillay, declare that

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Student: Patrick Brian Segaren Pillay

Date: 29 November 2013

Supervisor: Prof Roderick Hewitt

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Abstract

The guarded mind-set with which this study was initially constructed , was influenced by the notion that all that could have been said on the subject of vicarious redemption within the Judeo-Christian belief system, has been produced through scholarly research on the theories, doctrinal positions, and systems of belief, around the constructs of redemption and vicarious redemption within the Judeo-Christian worldview. However this study is premised on the view that there is a noticeable gap in the body of scholarship around the critique of the Christian belief system, and in particular, one of its doctrinal pillars, that of vicarious redemption. This thesis argues that this gap is being confronted by the resurgence of new challenges to the proposition of redemption, as raised from within the New Atheist movement, in which the late British-American author and public figure, Christopher Hitchens became the central and leading figure.

A theological critique of the construct and doctrine of vicarious redemption, as undertaken by Christopher Hitchens, forms the core academic focus of this study; which is conducted within a post-structural theoretical framework. The study, whilst examining the archaeology and architecture of the idea of vicarious redemption within the theological superstructure of Christendom and its founding doctrinal formations and theories, does represents an intentional step outside of the conventional trajectory of theological scholarship and analysis. In this latter regard, and alongside conventional literary resources on the subject, this study, has been inspired and informed by the convergence of, online New Media as a rich set of resource platforms for new research on this important subject. Given these new opportunities for research, alongside conventional research methods, this study captures the outright rejection, by Christopher Hitchens, of the doctrine of vicarious redemption; in what could be argued to represent a Kairos moment in biblical interpretation and criticism on the idea of redemption; a crucial and opportune moment in scholarly theological reflection, to which the special insights, hermeneutics and life and work of Christopher Hitchens has made an indelible contribution.

Acknowledgements

For whatever scholarly merit this study may possess, this page will always serve as a recording and reminder of the many who stood in firm support of this academic project, whom I invite to share in such credit and completion; a completion which, it is hoped, would mark the start for new conversations and serious reflection on the subject matters brought under focus in this study. However, for any shortcomings, errors, oversight and for any damage which this study may inflict on any reader, by virtue of its outcomes, I must claim full and sole responsibility. To highlight the names of a few, for special mention, carries with it the obvious yet unintended risk of excluding others who may stand in equal recognition; a decision for which I must also bear responsibility.

This study would have been a non-starter, an outcome which would not have been entirely unwelcomed by what has now grown into a small group of loyal detractors and critics with which this study has been gifted; save for the initial intervention and efforts within the administration wing of The University of KwaZulu Natal, on the part of Professor Sarojini Nadar, Dean of Research and my Academic Supervisor, Prof Roderick Hewitt, to welcome me as a student, capable of an academic pursuit such as this. It is only hoped that the outcome vindicates the confidence which they have shown in me. The dearth of financial resources which has long been a strong life companion of mine, has never dulled my desire to visit Jamaica, a desire to which I still cling, albeit hopelessly; so, to have undertaken this study under the sound academic guidance of Dr Hewitt, a proud Jamaican national, was, for me, a special part of Jamaica coming to me. This I count as a special privilege; amidst my sincere gratitude to Dr Hewitt for his support and understanding throughout this enterprise. I must, also, record my sincere appreciation to Mrs Catherine Murugan of the Faculty Office, for her kind assistance on administration matters.

Throughout this study, even when I was convinced that my collective academic efforts had past the point of diminishing returns, I was reminded, repeatedly, of the perseverance, gentle

tenacity and sheer personal strength of two very important persons in my life who continue to serve as my inspiration and strength; my parents. I was always mindful that any related completion ritual, must include a serious visit with my parents, if only to thank them for instilling in me the constant desire to pursue new knowledge for as long as I could. The fact that both my parents have been dead for many years makes no difference. Lest the continuum, where I stand betwixt my Ancestors and my dear son Matthew, be severed, I must, at least, visit the Garden of Remembrance at my local Parish – St. Matthews Anglican Church to spend time with my parents, in thanks.

I must record my appreciation to my week-day Church Group from St. Matthews, Hayfields who, over many years, have created a special space for engagement on issues of faith and church. In addition to the valued friendships which we are fortunate to enjoy within the Group, this forum afforded me a unique opportunity through which to reflect upon many of the key issues which came under focus within this study.

The pressures which accompanied undertaking this study whilst in full-time employment, was made all the more bearable and, indeed, more meaningful, through the ongoing encouragement and unreserved support I received throughout the project, from my cousin and business colleague Cedric Sigamoney. To be anything but unrepentant for any intellectual abuse which his sound mind may have suffered at my hands over the past year, on issues of faith which are so dear to him, would be totally out of character for me; a position which I know Cedric understands completely, for which I am grateful.

I am deeply grateful to my sisters and brothers for the constant encouragement which they always afforded me. Special mention must be made of the inspiration I have always found in my relationship with my nieces and nephews. In many respects this study found its meaning in the bonds of friendship within family which I have been so fortunate to share in. To my nieces Divina and Shivani and their father, Victor, who have stayed in regular dialogue with me throughout this study, may I never wish to be redeemed from the debt I will always carry in my

ledger, under your accounts, for the support, insights and inspiration which you have often passed my way, particularly this past year.

To my dear son, Matthew, who, in ways unspoken, knew of my need to embark on this study and supported this effort throughout, I am deeply grateful. Matthew will recall that one day, in recent weeks, when we both watched a television programme on volcanos and I attempted to explain to him that volcanos were only an expression of God's anger on account of the sin of humankind, which sin could only be expiated by the slaughter and sacrifice of male first-born children younger than one year old and females older than 16 years who did not 'lay with a man'; to which Matthew responded uncontrollably with loud and lengthy outbursts of hearty laughter, to stop only on my retraction and comment that such explanation was said only in jest. That day, I knew that credulity was not one of his strong points, and it is good that it be so.

It is a good thing, too, that I may not be able to fully articulate on this page, my gratitude to my wife and life-partner, Esther for her concern, support, and friendship, throughout this project, for any such attempt will surely fall short of the credit due to her. Through a trying year of very difficult health circumstances, Esther's commitment to her Job, our Family and, indeed, this project never fell dim or faltered. Through my preoccupation with this study, where I have been underserving, her grace and care only multiplied.

To Esther, and others mentioned above, as well as to those unmentioned, whose support I have felt in a tangible way throughout this study, I know for certain that, in the very unlikely event of my ever having need to create a god whom I could look up to, I know that I have found in all of you, the intellectual integrity and moral material for the makings of such a being. I know that the best I could do, would be to create that god in your image.

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Introduction

This study examines the unique hermeneutics and contributions of British-American author Christopher Hitchens on the subject of vicarious redemption¹ within the Christian belief system. Given the impact which Christopher Hitchens (1949-2011) has had within the public sphere throughout his career, but particularly following the publishing of his book, *'God is Not Great : How Religion Poisons Everything'* (2007), a key motivation of this study was the need to examine the substance of his arguments, against current and historic scholarship. In this regard, the subject of vicarious redemption, which holds together the core of the Christian belief system, and which earned particular critique from Christopher Hitchens, represented good ground for such an examination.

This study also marks an investigation into, firstly, the nature of historical and contemporary theological discourses on vicarious redemption, as the doctrinal pillar of the Judeo-Christian Religious belief system and secondly, the hypothesis that the work of Christopher Hitchens represents a significant theological critique of the Christian proposition and doctrine of vicarious redemption. The extent to which his work has contributed towards the establishment of a more equitable and balanced academic and public discourse on the subject will remain of central concern throughout this study.

This study identifies and examines constructs of redemption, with particular focus on the 'vicarious' nature of the Christian doctrine of redemption; with the specific purpose of forming a post-structural understanding of these doctrines, as the framework through which to engage Christopher Hitchens. The contributions of Christopher Hitchens, as well as the channels

¹ It is declared at the outset that whilst 'vicarious redemption' is not, strictly, a biblical construct, it is the pivotal idea of the Christian belief system. The very nature of vicarious redemption places it at the centre of the Christian belief system and will therefore, of necessity, require of this enquiry an understanding of the discourse on the historicity of the biblical figure of Jesus Christ; within the context of what may constitute the divine plan, through which the Christian doctrine of 'vicarious redemption' is given its purpose and meaning. Towards this end, the work of Horace Bushnell (1866), *'The Vicarious Sacrifice: Grounded in Principles of Universal Obligation'*, has been particularly enlightening; with the key aspects of this work being explored in detail within this study.

through which his works and his perspectives are now available to the academia and the general public, do mark a significant departure from the conventional academic discourse on the subject. This constitutes an aspect that has influenced the theoretical framework of this study.

Whilst the focus of this study is ‘vicarious redemption’, the mandate to understand Christopher Hitchens’ critique of the doctrine, will need to be undertaken within the context of his broader critique of the monotheistic religions², particularly that of the Christian theological and doctrinal framework, in order to extrapolate the full value of his contribution to the discourse on the subject.

The September 11, 2001 attacks on the Twin Towers in New York, USA and other parts of the country, has had an important impact in shaping the direction of Christopher Hitchens’ life within the arena of politics and religion. These highly controversial areas of his life will be considered, where it may relate to the core subject being researched.

This study will be undertaken within the theoretical paradigm of ‘post-structuralism’, which is considered the most appropriate framework through which to engage the subject at hand, as well as the character and contributions of Christopher Hitchens towards this discourse.

One of the reasons which motivated this academic undertaking, is the need to move beyond just a mere surface level examination of the history and meaning of vicarious redemption; towards reaching an understanding of the contemporary scholarly views on the subject and how they actually shapes public policy and public life at present. Christopher Hitchens, being the principal theorist in this study has argued against any religiously inspired positioning on redemption, whether vicarious or otherwise. The study creates new critical space for scholars from within academia and the wider public sphere to interrogate Hitchens’ perspectives.

² The phrase ‘monotheistic religions’ may be considered an oxymoron, however the phrase should be taken as read.

Vicarious redemption is central to any form or “Brand” of Christianity. Put conversely, there is no Christianity without the key of vicarious redemption; which is itself, non-existent outside of the person, the life, the death, and the resurrection of the biblical figure of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, an understanding of the historicity of Jesus Christ, in relation to the construct of vicarious redemption, will be afforded due attention in the study. Furthermore, the discourse on vicarious redemption, in Christian terms, cannot be undertaken outside of some understanding of the concepts of “sin” and “original sin”; which are explored in sufficient detail within this study

The current proliferation of what appears to have developed into a less than critical and almost mass acceptance of popularized notions of redemption, presents an urgent and compelling argument to engage in academically credible research, which will serve to affirm, or call into question, constructs such as “redemption” and “vicarious redemption” within religious belief systems. The fervour with which Christopher Hitchens chose to carry this mantle of broadening the discourse on the subject, singularly and as a key figure within the global New Atheist movement, is considered a significant ‘push-back’ to the propagation of such doctrinal and faith-based belief systems and their sociological implications. As such, the works of Christopher Hitchens, irrespective of whether one may choose to agree with his views on religion or not, represents an important focus for academic study.

Chapter One

The Research Project.

1.1: The Personal Journey to this Study.

This Research Project marks an important point in a long and diverse personal journey; of a life lived within the church and community and a diversified academic background in commerce, political studies and theology. Notwithstanding a long career in Finance, the pursuit of knowledge within the faculty of theology has been ever-present; spurred on by the deep need to understand the core doctrines of the Christian faith, not just for the fact that the church has been a central aspect of my life, but also for the simple fact that the Christian faith impacts upon the everyday lives of people, communities and countries, everywhere. As with many such expeditions within the fields of religion and academics, a preparedness to engage new thinking and new literature on subjects as complex as the Christian belief system and its supporting doctrines, does come with a concomitant challenge to embrace new paradigms through which to interpret and critique such systems of belief. In this sense, this study is timeous within a personal journey, but also necessary, given the shifting trends within the broader discourse on faith and doctrine. Having followed the work of British-American author and polemicist, Christopher Hitchens for the past 4 years, it was found that his critique of the Christian faith and the doctrine of vicarious redemption, in particular, does present any such academic enterprise with a set of meaningful interpretive instruments through which to re-engage this discourse.

Lurking beneath all of this is the long-held, and sometimes suppressed, inner 'calling' to pursue a career in journalism; which has, for good reason, been sacrificed on the altar of career stability, or the illusion thereof, within the world of commerce and finance. However, to apply an idea inspired by title of the work by Mark Heim (2006), '*Saved from Sacrifice*', which has made a significant contribution to this study, perhaps the moment is ripe for the *sacrifice to stop*, to make way for deeper and dare it be said, sacred, considerations of new paths and

career permutations previously unexplored. The close encounter, academically, with the work of personalities such as Christopher Hitchens and Christopher Hedges, in particular, who, both, hold up long and respected careers in journalism, have added new dimensions and urgency for a serious rethink of a pursuit now at its due date. It is apparent, though, that any future new path may resemble the diversity reflected in the academic and career experiences of the past, particularly in the light of opportunities now presented, to constructively engage in journalism alongside an established path in commerce and business. Recounting these personal circumstances, may serve to offer the reader a further context as to some of the factors which have inspired and shaped this academic project in the first place.

1.2. : Structure of Study.

The sets of Chapters presented in this submission reflect the academic territory which had to be traversed in order to arrive at any meaningful critique of the responses of Christopher Hitchens to the doctrine of vicarious redemption within the Christian belief system, which objective could be framed in the form of the following key research question undergirding this study;

What are the perspectives of Christopher Hitchens on vicarious redemption and in what ways are his arguments theologically significant?

Derived from this is the following set of sub-questions which served as a constant guide throughout this study.

- What is the understanding of vicarious redemption, within the classical Judeo-Christian religious belief system?
- To what extent is the construct of vicarious redemption relevant to the religio-culture of the modern era?
- What are the contributions of Christopher Hitchens to the discourse on vicarious redemption?
- What is the post-structural theological critique of his arguments?

- What are the alternatives to Hitchens' arguments on vicarious redemption?
- To what extent is the perspective of The New Atheist Movement on vicarious redemption worthy of any consideration?

As this study progressed it became evident that the documentation and final presentation of the research findings could not follow the *order* in which the sub-questions are set out above. Whilst it is held that this submission holds a sufficient body of results which adequately address the main research question and the sub-questions posed, the structure of this submission, along the lines of the Chapters and their constituent parts, as detailed above, was considered most appropriate, academically, for reasons expounded on further, below.

Chapter 1 guides the motivation, Research Method and Theoretical Framework, of this study. In addition to the theoretical framework of *post-structuralism* within which this study is framed, this Chapter addresses the key contributions from within New Media resources, which shaped this study and its outcomes. A further important aspect highlighted in this Chapter is that the Research Method and the Theoretical Framework adopted are integrally tied in with the nature of the subjects under review. It is noted plainly that the research outcomes achieved in this study would not have been possible without such New Media resources and that this project would have been a non-starter in the absence of such material.

The necessity to deconstruct the Christian doctrine of redemption, into its constituent elements, as a precursor to attempts at understanding the construct of vicarious redemption, is dealt with in detail in Chapter 2. The need to trace through the historical development of the idea of redemption, prior to the onset of Christianity, and even prior to the formation of the Judaic religious worldview, was considered an important theoretical platform upon which to build further understandings of redemption within the Christian belief system. Central to this endeavour is the place of Scripture³, within the Old Testament and New Testament, in shaping

³ It is noted that throughout this study the texts of the Christian Bible used as a source reference was; The Dakes Annotated Reference Bible (1992) : Containing the Old and New Testaments of the Authorized or King James Version Text.

understandings of related constructs and recorded events, such as 'Sin', 'Original Sin', 'The Passion Story', the 'Resurrection of Jesus Christ' and the very substance and nature of 'vicarious redemption' itself. How these elements worked their way, since the advent of Christianity, into various theories of redemption and atonement, stands as a chapter on its own. Understanding the meaning and purpose of the Holy Eucharist in relation to the Christian doctrine of redemption was considered an important aspect worth examining, albeit in brief.

The life and work of Christopher Hitchens comprise the first part of Chapter 3, with the second dealing with the formation of his critique of religion. A literature review of Hitchens' published works is aimed at identifying the common threads which tie into the formation of the '*Hitchens-hermeneutic*' which underpinned his responses to doctrinal positions such as that of vicarious redemption. The body of Hitchens' works, including books such as, '*The Missionary Position : Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice*', '*The Trials of Henry Kissinger*', '*The Triangulations of William Jefferson Clinton*', '*The Portable Atheist : Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever*' and '*God is not Great : How Religion Poisons Everything*', is characterised by his opposition to the abuse of positions of power and influence. The Section also deals with Hitchens' adoption of The Socratic Method and Okham's Razor as the method and principle which can be applied in attempting to understand and critique theological constructs such as vicarious redemption. The issue of the historicity of Jesus Christ feeds directly into the formation of Hitchens' critique of Christianity and is an aspect that is considered in further detail in this Section.

Chapter 4, focuses primarily on a set of public debates (recorded on film), between Hitchens and prominent theologians and public figures, which serve as an important resource through which to gain insights, directly from Hitchens, on the aspect of redemption within Christianity. The set of debates assessed within this study are an indication of Hitchens' preparedness to engage with anybody who wished to challenge him on his position on religion, generally, and the Christian faith, in particular. The debates also draw out the Hitchens-hermeneutic which guides the construction of his case against the Christian proposition of vicarious redemption.

Chapter 5, works at converging the findings from within the recorded debates and the key literature published by Hitchens, with particular focus on the books, '*God is not Great*' (2007) and '*The Portable Atheist*' (2007), to establish his position on the doctrine of vicarious redemption.

1.3. : Challenges Facing the Study.

The depth and scope of this study faces two significant challenges; firstly, the voluminous material available on the subject of redemption. Secondly, in the other important area of need, that of critical academic responses to the Christian doctrine of redemption, the dearth of information proved a challenge. Four key areas are worth noting for the manner in which the shape and course of this study will proceed:

- Although the key focus of this study is not centred on offering a treatise on the subject of redemption itself, an understanding of the doctrine of redemption is a necessary theological grounding upon which the study is built. For the purposes of this study, the main interest is focused on the *core understandings of redemption and vicarious redemption* within the Christian belief system, in order to pursue a meaningful critique of the works of Christopher Hitchens.
- Whilst there may be little scope within this study to examine *why* there is a wide range of interpretations of Scriptural texts and doctrinal formations within the Christian faith on the subject of redemption, it is acknowledged that as much as the intended meaning of the authors of the biblical texts is important, the interpretation of Scripture is often a function of the readers' or interpreter's background and *positions of interests*. It is this hermeneutical paradigm that has shaped the discourse of this study.
- The challenge in dealing with Christopher Hitchens' work, in relation to the subject of vicarious redemption, relates to the necessary deconstruction of his critique of religion, generally, and Christendom, in particular. Besides his direct engagement with biblical texts on the subject, Hitchens' approach and critique is carried out in a multi-

disciplinary framework which draws on the disciplines of anthropology, philosophy, politics, literature, psychology, the scientific realms of astronomy, and biology, amongst others. The challenge is to hold in tension all of these diverse and the competing interests, influences and interpretations that are available on the topic. Therefore there cannot be any appropriate understanding of Christopher Hitchens and his critique of Christian religious doctrine, without taking into account this multidisciplinary approach.

- Finally, an aspect which had to be brought under some consideration in this study is that of the apparently contradictory elements within Christopher Hitchens ideological perspectives, as they emerged in his controversial support of the American invasion of Iraq, following the September 2001 attacks in The United States of America. Whilst this may be considered an issue too distant from the subject of vicarious redemption, it does deal directly with the person at the centre of this study. In response to Hitchens', 'war-on-faith', which ran parallel to his 'faith-in-war', his close friend and author Ian McEwan, on the day after Hitchens' death⁴, suggested in a Channel 4 Interview (7.40 minutes) that Hitchens' distaste for the Argentinian leader, Galtieri, whom he considered a tyrant and against whom he noted his support for Margaret Thatcher's decision to invade the Falklands Island, influenced his opposition to totalitarian and tyrannical leadership. So intense had Hitchens' opposition grown over the years since the Falklands War, to those whom he perceived to be dictators, that, according to McEwan, and as explained in the same Channel 4 Interview, Hitchens viewed Saddam Hussein as yet another dictator, whom he could not resist the idea of seeing toppled. Being a serial opponent of dictators and dictatorial regimes⁵; Hitchens, one could

⁴ Ian McEwan was interviewed on Channel 4 TV on 16 December 2011, the day after Hitchens died. Reference: wjr1ftkt (2011). Christopher Hitchens 1949-2011 Channel 4 tribute. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4yvPSZN5ZQ>>. [Accessed 11 May 2013]. [07.40 minutes].

⁵ It is also noted that the political state of Israel did not escape his rebuke, on account of their position on the rights of the people of Palestine, with the latter cause being one for which Hitchens canvassed and supported for decades; a point alluded to by Ian Parker, in his Article on Christopher Hitchens, published in The New Yorker (Online) on 16 October 2006, entitled, 'He Knew He Was Right : How a former socialist became the Iraq war's fiercest defender'. Online Reference :

argue, viewed God as representing the ultimate and supreme dictator. Like him or loathe him for his perspectives, but such is the person of Christopher Hitchens at the centre of this study.

1.4: Research Method and Format.

*"What the printing press did for Europe in the sixteenth century, the convergence of telecommunications media is doing in our own time."*⁶

David Batstone (2001, p.226).

Two significant aspects relate to this extract from David Batstone's work. Firstly, it is an apt summary of the impact of new communications technology and, secondly, that his writings were published in 2001, in the infancy of New Media.

Whilst this research plan is based on a detailed literature review of selective works past and present, the advent of new and evolving communications and media technology, have broadened, both, the interest in, and the contributions towards the debate on redemption and indeed the role of Christianity, in particular, and religion in general within western society. The discussion below, on the extract from Batstone (2001, pp.235-236), will serve to illustrate this point further. Being a non-empirical study, this body of research will be largely based on a literature review of the subject. As indicated, however, the source material available on the subject via New Media⁷ platforms will form an important contribution to this study because

Parker, I. (2006). Profiles: He Knew He Was Right - How a former socialist became the Iraq wars fiercest defender. 16 October 2006. *The New Yorker* [online]. [Accessed 2 November 2013]. Available from:

http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/10/16/061016fa_fact_parker; in which Parker noted,

"Hitchens has been a decades-long agitator for the Palestinian cause; he co-edited a book on the subject with Edward Said, the late Palestinian-American scholar."

⁶ Batstone, D. (2001, p.226), 'Dancing to a Different Beat: Emerging Spiritualities in the Network Society', in Hopkins, Lorentzen, Mendieta and Batstone, (eds) (2001), *'Religions / Globalizations : Theories and Cases'*. Duke University Press, London.

⁷As opposed to methods of research which were previously based on **written hard-copy** books, articles and journals, and which could be seen to constitute the era of 'Old Media', 'New Media' marks a significant shift

New Media represents a significant new resource channel and a new and exciting medium for engagement.

Some of the data for this study will be accessed from postings from the New Atheist School; from the works of Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, and Sam Harris, in particular, available on a select set of Internet Websites.

In addition to exploring the meaning of vicarious redemption within the broader theological context of Christendom, it is important to explore opposing arguments to the concept because they constitute important elements of the total discourse on the subject, particularly the perspectives shared by advocates within the 'New Atheist School'⁸. The important role of the electronic New Media, in making available within the public domain, research materials which would otherwise be unavailable to the general public and academia, has contributed to reshaping, both, the method and narrative of the discourse. In this regard, also, the contributions of Batstone (2001: 235-236) proves insightful.

"It's hard to imagine how fixed theologies like those of most organized religions will survive intact the on-line scrutiny given to ideas, opinions and proclamations. The network is a natural leveller of established institutions. Once individuals get their hands on the machinery of communications, they make and disseminate their own personal theologies."

In some respects, the comments of Batstone points to the dynamics of the discourse having already changed, on account of the role of New Media. Not to engage with this important open-format, non-structuralist and indeed, post-structuralist platform for new resources, will be a missed opportunity for credible and comprehensive academic enterprise.

towards electronic or digitally based formats and resources for research. In its simplest form, 'New Media' according to, Siapera (2012, p.5), in the book, '*Understanding New Media*', refers to on-demand access to content; anytime, anywhere, including on mobile digital devices.

⁸The New Atheist School or Movement; including prominent figures such as, Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, Lawrence Krauss, Neil DeGrasse Tyson, Anthony C. Grayling and Victor Stenger.

1.5: The Literature and Resources Review.

One of the most welcomed challenges of this study was the very experience of discovery; of having to mine the depth and breadth of literature on the subject under focus and to constantly balance the joy of pushing the boundaries of this discovery, with the academic imperative to set out and adhere to clear lines of enquiry on the subject matter, within a coherent and scholarly framework of analysis.

A thematic approach was applied to identify and analyse available literature on the subject of vicarious redemption as the dominant theological concept or theme for the study. Library searches were undertaken for key texts and online search engines were sought for theological data bases on vicarious redemption, including journals and newspaper articles. The intended outcome of this approach was to converge the resources from the conventional library with material obtained from online or New Media platforms, to frame an opportunity to examine, both, the key religious construct of vicarious redemption as well as its contemporary understandings, as expressed primarily through the arguments presented by Christopher Hitchens; in order to respond to the central research question at the core of this study.

After spending many of the initial weeks and months of this study ‘shooting in the dark at a moving target’, in an academic sense, the proverbial ‘penny dropped’, with the identification of five authors in this field and their respective works; which set the course for discovering and understanding the etymology of ‘vicarious redemption’ and the central place of this religious construct within the history of Christendom and its foundational belief systems. The authors were, Horace Bushnell⁹ (1802-1876), [*The Vicarious Sacrifice : Grounded in Principles of Universal Obligation*’ (1866)], Hastings Rashdall (1858-1924), [*The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology*’ (1919)], Laurence W. Grensted (1884-1964), [*The Atonement in History and in Life*’ (1929)], Vincent Taylor¹⁰ (1887-1968) [*Jesus and His Sacrifice : A Study in The Passion-Sayings in the Gospels*’ (1939)], and Frederick Dillistone (1903-1993), [*The Christian*

⁹ Horace Bushnell was an American minister in the Congregational Church and a theologian.

¹⁰ Vincent Taylor was a British biblical scholar and theologian.

Understanding of Atonement' (1968)]. Scholars such as Hastings Rashdall (1919)¹¹, Laurence Grensted¹² (1929) and Frederick Dillistone (1968)¹³ in particular, whilst carrying the term 'atonement' within their titles, do offer us insights into the historical and theological contexts for the subject of redemption in this study.¹⁴ In a similar mould, the work of The Reverend L.W. Grensted¹⁵ offers a detailed background on the development of the idea of redemption within Christianity. Amidst this set of literature, however, the work of Horace Bushnell is considered a particularly significant find, for having set the pace, in 1866, for the discussions on the subject which were to follow. The work of Frederick Dillistone (1968) made an important contribution to this study, by tracing the formation of the idea of atonement back to the experiences of Greek Theatre, then through the history of Judaism and through to the development of the construct within Christianity.

These five works contributed significantly to setting in place the core ideas and theories of redemption and atonement, as a literary platform from which to synthesise the works of subsequent scholars in the field. Furthermore, and most importantly, these works offered this study the requisite body of knowledge and critical parts of the theological framework through which to interpret and critique the work of Christopher Hitchens on the subject.

Amidst the voluminous literature available from current scholars on the subject of redemption within the Christian belief system, the literature review was guided by the need to establish the key theological positions of recognised and respected scholars on the subject, with a view to bringing such positions into dialogue with the arguments presented by Christopher Hitchens.

¹¹ Hastings Rashdall (1858-1924) was a philosopher and member of the British Anglican Church.

¹² Laurence Grensted was a member of the clergy within the Anglican Church and Canon of Liverpool Cathedral, England.

¹³ Frederick William Dillistone was a Theologian and a member of the Anglican Clergy in England.

¹⁴ Hastings Rashdall's (1919) work, *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology*, as well as Frederick Dillistone's (1968) work, *The Christian Understanding of Atonement*, has had a significant influence on the discourse on Atonement and redemption. Fiddes (1989, p. X), in his publication, *Past and Present Salvation : The Christian Idea of Atonement*, had the following to note about Frederick Dillistone's work, "The Christian Understanding of Atonement (1968:F.W. Dillistone) has a beauty of writing and depth of perception that makes it a theological classic of our age, and an enduring witness to the faith." Paul Fiddes was, himself, Professor of Systematic Theology at University of Oxford at the time of his publication.

¹⁵ Grensted, L.W. (1929), *The Atonement in History and in Life*. SPCK, London.

Whilst respecting the work of many theologians who could have come under consideration, but were not, the contribution of the following authors adequately met this requirement of this study. It is noted that the works by these authors fell into two broad categories, which categories, in turn, shaped the structure and nature of this study.

The first category on current scholarship consisted of works which were directed at drawing out the core understandings of redemption and vicarious redemption, with particular focus on the Scriptural underpinnings of these constructs as well as aspects relating to the historicity of Jesus Christ. Amongst the full set of literature considered in this regard, the following publications stood out for their particular contributions; Alister McGrath's, *'Redemption'* (2006) and *'Iustitia Dei'* (2005), Thomas F. Torrance's two works, *'Incarnation : The Person and Life of Christ'* (2008) and *'Atonement : The Person and Work of Christ'* (2009), Gordon D. Kaufman's, *'Systematic Theology : A Historical Perspective'* (1968). Given the significance of the Holy Eucharist within the Christian church and its place within understandings of vicarious redemption, an examination of this sacrament was a necessary consideration for this study. Towards this end, the works of Joseph Martos, *'Doors to The Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Christian Church'* (1981) and John Macquarrie, *'A Guide to The Sacraments'* (1997), proved enlightening.

The second category of current scholarship builds upon historic literature to point to the current and possible future trends in the discourse on vicarious redemption; as represented by, Paul S. Fiddes, *'Past Event and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement'* (1989), Stephen Finlan, *'Problems with Atonement'* (1999), S. Mark Heim, *'Saved from Sacrifice'* (2006), and J. Denny Weaver, *'The Nonviolent Atonement'* (2011).

Without having to recount the total list of references on the literature engaged with during this study, the authors and works highlighted above are representative of a broader collection of literature which informed this study. It is held, though, that a sufficient understanding of the

construct of vicarious redemption was achieved from this body of literature, as a basis from which to examine and critique the contributions of Christopher Hitchens on the subject.

The discourse on religion and constructs such as vicarious redemption, within the 'public square', has changed significantly in recent years, through the emergence of and rapidly evolving communications technology and the growing role of 'New Media' within this domain. In addition to the works of Christopher Hitchens, the perspectives of key scholars will converse and interrogate the debate. Hitchens' and the key scholars, who are considered within this study, are widely represented within 'New Media', such as YouTube, which academic discourse must engage. In this regard, the works of Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, in particular, will enter the discourse on the doctrine of vicarious redemption, alongside Hitchens' debating counterparts such as theologians, Alister McGrath, William Lane Craig, and Douglas Wilson.

With regard to Internet-based resources, it is noted that, firstly, the source material, such as the Debates between Christopher Hitchens and his counterparts as well as his Interviews, are, in most instances, not accessible through any other channel or format, other than through YOUTUBE or other Internet-based sources. Secondly, the recorded film material obtained through these Internet-based channels, form an indispensable research component of this study, without which, any attempt at a meaningful critique of the contributions of Christopher Hitchens on the core subject matter, will be seriously prejudiced.

The wide range of subjects engaged with by Christopher Hitchens, in both his written material as well as in the resources available online or through New Media channels, presented this study with both a challenge and an opportunity. The extensive material published by Hitchens in both of these resource categories did prove to be a challenge, initially; until, after many months of detailed examination of his works, certain distinct patterns started to emerge. The road to a meaningful understanding of Hitchens' position on redemption, culminating in his publication, *'God is not Great'* (2007), had to pass through his earlier works; which held the pointers as to the issues, authors and life experiences which shaped his critique of religion.

Amidst the wealth of online material brought under examination, four of his written works were given particular focus in this study, they are; *'The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice'* (1995), *'The Trials of Henry Kissinger'* (2001), as editor of, *'The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever'* (2007) and *'God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything'* (2007). Whilst Hitchens' other written publications did form an important part of this study, these four works, with their accompanying documentary films, in the case of Mother Teresa and Henry Kissinger, captured the unique Hitchens-hermeneutic through which his strong critique of religion, and the Christian belief system, in particular, were articulated. In attempting to understanding the makings of the Hitchens-hermeneutic and Hitchens' critique of the doctrine of vicarious redemption, particular consideration is given to the publication by Thomas Paine, *'The Age of Reason'* (1938), for the common threads of biblical criticism which are apparent between their works.

Critics of Christopher Hitchens are brought into dialogue with his work, in particular, in their responses to the publication, *'God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything'*. In addition to the set of Hitchens' public debates (online resources) which are considered in detail in this study, the following written works of prominent authors are given consideration; John F. Haught, *'God and The New Atheism : A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens'* (2008), Christopher Hedges, *'I Don't Believe in Atheists'* (2008), Terry Eagleton, *'Reason, Faith, and Revolution : Reflections on the God Debate'* (2009) and Conor Cunningham, *'Darwin's Pious Idea : Why the Ultra-Darwinists and Creationists Both Get it Wrong'* (2010).

In working towards a synthesis of the various components of this study, guidance was found in two unlikely sources; Eugenia Siapera's, *'Understanding New Media'* (2012) and the publication by, Hopkins, D.N., Lorentzen, L.A., Mendieta, E. and Batstone, D., (eds.), *'Religions Globalisation : Theories and Cases'* (2001). In highlighting the critical role of New Media in the accessibility of information, these works brought to the fore the impact of New Media in **mediating** (Siapera 2012, p.6) the future discourse on matters of faith and religion. The very reality that this study would not have been possible without the online and New Media resources now available,

points to the possible future direction of the discourse and the added reality that voices such as that of Christopher Hitchens, together with others of equal mind as himself, as well as his critics, will continue to find expression in globally accessible communication platforms.

1.6 : The Theoretical Framework of Post-Structuralism.

The choice of a post-structural theoretical framework for this study, is influenced, largely, by, firstly, the nature of the contemporary debates on the subject of vicarious redemption and secondly, the person of Christopher Hitchens, himself. The task of this study does not require a detailed account of the evolution of post-structuralist thinking, from its origins within the school of 'structuralism'. Rather it will be important to note only the key elements of post-structuralism at this point.

As a critique of structuralism¹⁶, post-structuralism recognises the complexity of human nature and human interrelations and represents a rejection of the containment of the analysis of human experiences within preconceived structures, which determines structuralism, itself (Sim 1992, p.425). Catherine Belsey (2002, p.114) notes *structuralism* to be based upon the,

"Identification of universal structures underlying culture, usually in binary oppositions; belief that human beings are the effect of structures that escape their awareness."

Whilst it is acknowledged that the formative elements of structuralism and post-structuralism, found initial meaning within the realm of Linguistics¹⁷, the principles which emerged from the evolution of these schools of thought does offer this project a useful theoretical framework. Therefore the essential ***paradigm*** of post-structuralism, and the constituent elements within that paradigm, serves as a theoretical guide for this study.

¹⁶ When viewed within the areas of Language, Literature and the Social Sciences; structuralism is viewed as a theory which "*considers any text as a structure whose various parts only have meaning when they are considered in relation to each other.*" Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (2006: p. 1468).

¹⁷ With Swiss Linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) considered as the key proponent of Structuralism.

The social milieu of the 1960s influenced the advance of post-structural thinking marked by a critical assessment of western philosophy. Post-structuralism represented an umbrella for different critiques that came from diverse critics; which were far from homogeneous. As such, deriving and focusing on a singular definition of post-structuralism may escape the import of the range of principles and constructs which emerged from this school of thought.

The key figures within the post-structuralism school were French philosophers Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. In addition to the comments discussed below in relation to Professor Fry's presentation, we note the following pertinent summary of Derrida's position on post-structuralism, as made by Stuart Sim (1992, p.425),

"Derrida's work is part of a broad intellectual movement, ranging over several disciplines, called post-structuralism, which has reacted against institutional structures and received authority in general. The initial thrust of Derrida's attack is against philosophical structures"

With regard to the objective, on the part of Derrida, of shifting away from any 'pre-existent essence' in a text, and the objective on the part of Barthes, to move from 'The Death of the Author' to 'The Birth of the Reader', it would appear that both positions exist on the same philosophical page. This represents a shift away from preconceived and limited notions of 'institutional structures' and 'received authority' on truth and meaning, towards an unrestricted and 'active interpretation' of text and circumstance (Sim 1992, pp.422-426). The Lecture of Yale Professor Paul Fry¹⁸, captures Derrida's (1966) advent of post-structuralism in his work on, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences". Fry's explanation of the paradigm of structuralism and the post-structuralist thinking of Derrida, outlined the transition in philosophical thought from a theocentric world (with 'God' at the centre of the structure), through the Enlightenment period (17th and 18th Centuries), to the rise of anthropocentrism

¹⁸ The Lecture of Yale Professor Paul H. Fry, entitled, Lectures in Structuralism and Post-Structuralism. Published online. Reference : YaleCourses (2009). *Semiotics and Structuralism*. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VsMfalOsT3M>>. [Accessed 15 May 2013].

(with humankind at the centre of the structure)¹⁹. It is for this reason that the analysis of Christopher Hitchens' critique of religion is being located within the paradigm of post-structuralism, as a frame for his interdisciplinary approach; often combining the subjects of philosophy, religion, science and interpretations of popular culture.

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was an important figure of the era of post-structuralism. However, Fulkerson and Dunlop (1997, p.117)²⁰ noted that Foucault "refused the labels of structuralism and post-structuralism". This study will focus its attention on analysing the key guiding concepts of the post-structuralist paradigm. One of Foucault's key contributions to modern philosophical thought was the concept of '*subjugated knowledge*', which marked an important departure from the inclination to exclude, alienate and subjugate knowledge, based on preconceived notions, understandings, structures and intentions related to a particular body of knowledge.²¹ This post-structuralist approach is aimed at peeling away the masking and suppression of knowledge, in order to re-establish safe and open space for in-depth enquiry; to which this study is committed. Foucault's 1976 Lecture captures his position on the subject²².

"By subjugated knowledge I mean two things: on the one hand, I am referring to the historical content that have been buried and disguised in a functional coherence or formal systemisation.....On the other hand, I believe that by subjugated knowledges one should understand something else. Something which in a sense is altogether different, namely, a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated....that it is through the re-appearance of this knowledge, of these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work".

¹⁹The Lecture of Yale Professor Paul H. Fry, entitled, Lectures in Structuralism and Post-Structuralism. Published online. Reference : YaleCourses (2009). *Semiotics and Structuralism*. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VsMfalOsT3M>>. [Accessed 15 May 2013]. [3.45 Minutes].

²⁰ Fulkerson, M.M. and Dunlop, S.J., *Michel Foucault (1926-1984) : Introduction*, in Ward, G.(ed)(1997 : p. 117), *The Postmodern God*.

²¹Foucault, M. (1976, p.3). "*Society must be Defended*" : *Lectures at the Collège de France*, 1975-1976.

²²Foucault, M. (1976, p.3). "*Society must be Defended*" : *Lectures at the Collège de France*, 1975-1976.

Working from this premise offered by Foucault, it can be argued that any attempt to explore the subjugation of sectors of knowledge on the subject of vicarious redemption will take the study into an examination of the power dynamics which influence the nature and direction of the discourse and how new knowledge is formed, framed, dialogued, dispensed, and interpreted within the current era of New Media and communications technology. The concept of power which previously characterised the discourse was shaped in a hierarchical manner. However the current trends may point towards an inversion and diffusion of power to the populace. On the subject of faith based religion, generally, and doctrinal formation in particular, received authority is brought under examination rather than being accepted as being sacrosanct. In this regard, Belsey (2002, p.107) notes the following of post-structuralism,

“in its emphasis on the degree to which we make our own story, subject to certain specifiable constraints, poststructuralism is at once sceptical towards inherited authority and affirmative about future possibilities.”

The critique of Christopher Hitchens to the current body of knowledge on the subject of redemption within the Judeo-Christian framework, in many respects, goes beyond just considerations of contributions to new knowledge, but also points towards new terms of engagement between the different schools of thought on the subject. This, however, opens up the opportunity for this study to undertake a detailed examination of Hitchens’ own ideological orientation, his history, biases and assumptions which shape his rhetoric, his analysis of the Christian belief system and its foundational doctrines, and the construction of his arguments.

The decision by Christopher Hitchens to challenge the established order of the discourse and for the last 10 years of his life, to take his critique of the Christian faith, into the practicing heartland of American Christendom, represents, both, an acknowledgement of, as well as a challenge to, the structures of power within the State, the academy and the church, which shape the *archaeology of knowledge*²³ and the trajectory of the discourse. In some respect, particularly when considering the position quoted by Foucault above, it could be found that

²³ To apply the concept of Foucault (1972), from his work, entitled, *‘The Archaeology of Knowledge’*.

both Foucault and Christopher Hitchens are of equal cause in their efforts to broaden meaningful, open and honest academic discourse, on subjects such as religion. In this regard, also, the study at hand, albeit within a post-structuralist framework, could take guidance from Thomas Paine, a critic of religion, long admired by Hitchens.

“When a book, as is the case with the Old and New Testament, is ushered into the world under the title of being the Word of God, it ought to be examined with the utmost strictness in order to know if it has a well-founded claim to that title or not, and whether we are or not imposed upon; for as no poison is so dangerous as that which poisons the physis [psyche²⁴], so no falsehood is so fatal as that which is made an article of faith.”

Thomas Paine (1795, p.221), *‘The Age of Reason’*.

This extract from, *‘The Age of Reason’*, is of significance to this study, firstly, for highlighting the need to question any ‘received authority’ within sacred texts, as well as the religious doctrines which derive from such texts. Secondly, it is interesting to note Paine’s use of the term ‘poison’ in this context, particularly in the light of the subtitle of Hitchens’ (2007) publication, *‘God is Not Great : How Religion Poisons Everything.’* The following extract from Christopher Hitchens’ (2007, p.283) work, *‘God is Not Great’*, captures the intensity with which he carried the causes which, both, Paine and Foucault and the school of post-structuralism advanced.

“Above all, we are in need of a renewed Enlightenment, which will base itself on the proposition that the proper study of mankind is man, and woman. This enlightenment will need not to depend, like its predecessor, on the heroic breakthrough of a few gifted and exceptionally courageous people. It is within the compass of the average person. The study of literature and poetry, both for its own sake and for the eternal ethical questions with which it deals, can now easily depose the scrutiny of sacred texts that have been found to be corrupt and confected. The pursuit of unfettered scientific inquiry, and the availability of new findings to masses of people by easy electronic means, will revolutionise our concept of research and development.”

²⁴ It would appear that the 1938 publication by Watts and Co., of Thomas Paine’s, *‘The Age of Reason’*, which contains Paine’s critique of the biblical Gospels as additions to the original text of *‘The Age of Reason’*, records an editorial error on page 221, where the word ‘psyche’ was intended instead of ‘physis’.

Chapter Two

The Christian Doctrine of Redemption.

2.1 : The Christian Doctrine of Redemption : An Overview.

'Redemption', as a term used within religion and theology, is the act of saving, or state of being saved from, the power of evil.²⁵ As a most basic entry point into this enquiry and building upon this definition of redemption, the meaning of the term, does extend to a person's life being **repurchased**, in a religious sense, or being **bought back, from sin**. Within the Judeo-Christian religious context, understandings of the historical act of the death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, is the central pillar of the theology of redemption. Accordingly, the primary focus of this academic exercise will be the examination of this concept within the Judeo-Christian religious worldview; an analysis of the basis and composition of this theology, as well as its general application in the practice and profession of church and faith.

This journey through Judeo-Christian theology on redemption will pass through understandings of the origins of the idea of redemption within Christianity, as found within Judaism; with the focus being the interpretations of relevant extracts within the biblical Old Testament, as well as through the pronouncements found within the Biblical New Testament which underpin the theology of redemption. The theological perspectives of the New Testament church leader, Apostle Paul of Tarsus, will be utilised in establishing the foundation of the discussion, as well as establishing the possible reasons for variations²⁶ in the interpretations of Scripture on the

²⁵It is noted that the decision to apply the definition of the term 'redemption', at this point of the study, using the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, 7th Edition (2006, p.1220), was motivated by the need to draw out the meaning of the term redemption alongside the meaning of associated terms such as 'atonement' and 'salvation' from the **similar source** and to not commit this aspect of the enquiry to publications from within Christian theology, to avert encountering possible divergent meanings and interpretations of the same term; where the core understandings of these terms from this single reference will suffice, at this stage. It is also noted that the definition of 'Redemption' is further developed as this study progresses, using the works of recognised scholars of Theology.

²⁶ Renowned British theologian, Bishop N.T. Wright refers to the central focus of the 'cross' within Christianity as a "storm-centre" for controversy, on the part of scholars, on interpretations on the meaning of the cross. Online

subject and the manner in which such interpretations manifest themselves within doctrines on redemption.

For the purpose of this study mention must be made of the close affinity in meaning and substance between the terms 'redemption', 'salvation' and 'atonement', when applied within the theological framework of the Christian religion. 'Salvation', which, in Christianity, is theologically allied to 'redemption', is noted in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary²⁷, as, "*The state of being saved from the power of evil*"; a definition similar to that offered for 'redemption', from the same source, "*the act of saving or state of being saved from the power of evil*".²⁸ A further theological construct which is allied to any understanding of salvation and redemption within the Judeo-Christian religious complex, is that of 'atonement'; which, using the same source, denotes one's attempt at making right for a past wrong committed; an attempt at seeking reparation for an act committed or a required act omitted²⁹. The common thread which runs through all three of these terms, when applied within Christian theology, is the common doctrinal reality that an individual does not and cannot attain 'salvation', 'atonement' or 'redemption' off their own doing, but only through the life and death of the principal mover, Jesus Christ; thereby pointing to the 'vicarious' nature at the core of all three constructs.

Having considered a 'non-religious' source, in the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, it will be necessary to examine the perspectives offered by credible scholars of the Christian faith. In this regard the works compiled by Alan Richardson³⁰(ed.)(1969), '*A Dictionary of Christian Theology*', and James Hastings³¹ (ed.)(1902), '*A Dictionary of the Bible*', offered the necessary guidance on these foundational terms of the Christian faith.

Reference : AllthingsNTWright (2013). N.T. Wright THE ATONEMENT DEBATE. [online]. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gi_ixf7YxCo>. [Accessed 10 August 2013]. [00.15 minutes].

²⁷ Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, 7th Edition (2006, p. 1292).

²⁸ Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, 7th Edition (2006, p. 1220).

²⁹ Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, 7th Edition (2006, p. 79).

³⁰Alan Richardson (1905-1975) was Professor of [Christian Theology](#) at the [University of Nottingham](#) (1953-1964).

³¹ James Hastings (1852-1922) was a Scottish Presbyterian Minister and Biblical Scholar.

Alan Richardson (1969) notes the following definitions of these terms.

- **Atonement** (p. 18),

“The English word ‘atonement’ is derived from the words ‘at-one-ment’, to make two parties at one, to reconcile two parties one to another.....In current usage, the phrase ‘to atone for’ means the undertaking of a course of action designed to undo the consequences of a wrong act with a view to the restoration of the relationship broken by the wrong act. This is the meaning which the word ‘atonement’ carries in a religious or biblical context: to speak more precisely, it means the work of Christ culminating at Calvary.”³²

- **Redemption**, (p. 285),

“From the latin redimere, this word signifies the buying back, or paying the ransom, of a slave to ensure his freedom. The idea is usually conveyed in the NT [New Testament] word lutron (ransom) and its associated word group, sometimes also with the words connected with buying. The biblical usage of these words is in connection with the saving action of God which culminated in the cross.”

- **Salvation**, (p. 300-303),

Following a detailed account of the history of the Israelite, as recorded in the biblical Old Testament, as being characterised by “*God’s activity in saving his chosen people from all their enemies, material and spiritual*”, (p. 300), the following summary of the meaning of ‘salvation’ is drawn from the New Testament; “*This is exactly what the salvation of Christ means. This is the real nature of it. The cross and Passion show the reality of God’s forgiveness, and the brutal cost to Christ who, though sinless, and though pronounced sinless by the highest secular court of the day, faced the penalty of the worst sinner in society (death by crucifixion). When the cross and passion are preached to men the*

³²Paul S. Fiddes (1989, p.3), in his work, ‘*Past Event and Present Salvation : The Christian Idea of Atonement*’, notes the first application of the term ‘at-one-ment’, to the Greek word meaning ‘reconciliation’; by English scholar and translator of the Bible, William Tyndale (1494-1536). Paul Fiddes is Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Oxford.

power of this gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation, is generated afresh by the Holy Spirit, for this story awakens the penitence necessary to receive the forgiveness of God in Christ.” (p. 303).

The following definitions or sets of meaning of the three terms under discussion are offered by Hastings (ed.) (1902).

- **Atonement**, (Volume I, p.197),

“By its derivation, this word describes the setting ‘at one’ or reconciliation of two parties who have been estranged.....The effect of the atonement is therefore to remove altogether the obstacle introduced by sin, to undo the work of the devil (1 Jn 3⁵), and to open anew the way by which sinful men can return unto communion with their Father in heaven (He 10²⁰). The blood of Christ, understood in the full measure of its spiritual reality, reveals the true law of man’s being, and brings home to him the extent of his degradation. By its revelation of the love of God triumphant over sin, it wins men back from their spiritual alienation, making them ready to return to their allegiance, and willing to give up their sin. It cleanses their consciences from the stain of sin, and sets them free from the curse of the law, by the assurance that a perfect satisfaction has been offered to the righteous claims of the divine justice, and by enabling them to make their own the perfect confession of their sins that has already been offered in their name.” (p. 198).

- **Redemption**, (Volume IV, p.211),

In the context of the Christian belief system, Hastings constructs the following meaning of the term, ‘redemption’;

“The blood of Christ is represented as the ransom price by which Christians are redeemed from their former sinful life. Observe that in 1 P 1¹⁸⁻¹⁹, as in Tit 2¹⁴ and He 9¹⁵, the thought is not primarily of deliverance from punishment, but of deliverance from sin.”

- **Salvation**, (Volume IV, p. 373),

Hastings notes the following summary of the Biblical doctrine of salvation;

“salvation reaches its climax in the concept of a redemption of the universe. Foreshadowed in the OT doctrine of new heavens and a new earth, developed in the period between the Testaments in extravagant and non-spiritual forms, it remains an element in the Biblical conception to the last. It is not God’s purpose merely to save men out of the world, but to save the world. Whatever is hopelessly evil – whether in nature, man, or spirit – shall at last be utterly destroyed. No foe will longer remain to dispute the authority of Christ or mar the glories of His eternal Kingdom.”

Given the close meaning now established between the three constructs, the terms ‘salvation’ and ‘atonement’ are also used and referred to in this study, as **broadly** conveying the similar theological substance of the term ‘redemption’. It is noted, though, that these terms will not be simply applied interchangeably, but will be examined and understood within their respective literary contexts. For the purpose of this research exercise, the frame of reference is and will remain that of redemption and vicarious redemption. In this regard an understanding of the life and death of the ‘historical’ figure of Jesus Christ will form a significant component of this body of research. It forms the core elements, within the Christian belief system, which opens the way to attaining redemption and being saved from the power of sin and evil.

This approach, at least in the proposed treatment of these terms mentioned, is offered some validation in the publication, ‘Redemption’, by Professor Alister McGrath (2006), the leading Oxford scholar in theology. In this work, McGrath uses fine art paintings and poetry, as a ‘repertoire of metaphors’, to bring to the fore, his interpretations of the meaning of redemption within Christianity.

“The New Testament provides us with an album of such images. Some are drawn from the cultic system of the Old Testament, speaking of the death of Jesus in terms of a sacrifice or offering to God. Others are drawn from the cultural world

of the New Testament period; purchasing the freedom of a Bondsman, liberating someone from captivity, wiping the slate clean, healing someone's wounds, being declared innocent before one's accuser – all are seen as aspects of the greater whole that we call 'redemption'. The task set for Christian theology is to integrate these ideas, putting these snapshots together so that they disclose something of the great panorama of redemption. "(2006: p. vi)³³

An interesting dimension of this study is the combination of the literature and New Media offerings available, to engage **first hand** with the pronouncements of scholars such as Professor McGrath; through his recorded debates with Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins³⁴. In the case of the latter, the interaction between Richard Dawkins and Alister McGrath is particularly revealing on Alister McGrath's position with regard to his understanding of the 'historical' figure of Jesus Christ and the concept of Redemption.³⁵

2.2: Pre-Christian Understandings of Redemption.

To fully understand the early historical and socio-religious contexts of the theological constructs of redemption, salvation or atonement within Christendom, it will be necessary to present an overview of these central pillars of the faith; from their pre-Christian origins, through the recordings and propitiations of the Old Testament, through to the New Testament manifestations of earlier prophetic accounts on the promise of redemption being realized in the

³³ At the time of publication (2006), Alister McGrath was Professor of Historical Theology at Oxford University. He holds two Doctorate Degrees from Oxford University; a Doctorate in Molecular Biophysics (1977) and a Doctorate in Theology (2001) – Systematic Theology. McGrath (2006, p. 6) summarises; "*Perhaps the most basic meaning of the concept of 'redemption' is 'buying back' – as in the practice of redeeming slaves, a familiar event in New Testament times.*"

³⁴ Richard Dawkins debates Alister McGrath. Online Reference: Ciaran Mac Uistin (2012). *Richard Dawkins Debates Alister McGrath*. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LGm0iWPC80>>. [Accessed 21 February 2013].

³⁵ Richard Dawkins debates Alister McGrath; focuses on the ideas of 'Original Sin' and 'Redemption' within Christianity. Online Reference: Ciaran Mac Uistin (2012). *Richard Dawkins Debates Alister McGrath*. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LGm0iWPC80>>. [Accessed 21 February 2013]. (23:50 minutes – 30:10 minutes).

life of Jesus Christ, the pinnacle of which is witnessed in what is generally referred to as the 'Passion' Story; the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Richardson (1968, p.252) offers a succinct account of the meaning of the 'Passion' story;

"In a Christian context, this word applies exclusively to Christ's redemptive suffering, particularly to the last days culminating in his crucifixion. It derives etymologically from the Latin passio (suffering) not from the Greek pascha (Passover). We have grown accustomed to think of Christ's Passion and suffering, but that should not blind us to the fact of its utter inappropriateness and incongruity to a Greek who could never allow suffering and sympathy and feeling to be associated with God. The very adoption of the word begs the entire work of God's costly redemption of man, and carries the whole connotation of atonement."

Whilst there may be no need to enter into the debate opened up by Richardson on the etymological nature of the term 'Passion', the meaning of the term, as now offered, is a valued contribution to a key objective of this study; to understand the life and death of the 'historical' Jesus Christ, within the broader plan of redemption within the Christian belief system.³⁶

The innumerable accounts and interpretations of the constructs, redemption, atonement and salvation, point to their pivotal importance in preserving, both, the meaning and relevance of the Christian faith. However, these accounts also allude to the significant degrees of disagreement on the key doctrinal issues, which persist to the present era. Whilst this study makes no claim to having completely interrogated all aspects of the debate on the subject, the work of Frederick William Dillistone (1968), *'The Christian Understanding of Atonement'*, is an important find amidst this literary 'haystack'. The treatment of the subject by Dillistone, in this work³⁷, reflects a sound grasp of both the technical, or academic, elements of the issues, as well as the practical effects of atonement and redemption in the lives of Christians. Dillistone's

³⁶ This understanding of the Passion story will find resonance and congruity with the idea of 'The Supreme Tragedy' which Dillistone (1968, p.115-160) develops, in dialogue with the makings of 'The Greek Tragedy', in his work, *'The Christian Understanding of Atonement'*.

³⁷ As earlier indicated, the use of the term 'atonement' becomes necessary and important in interacting with works such as that of Dillistone.

account of the origins of these constructs is both succinct and insightful. Perhaps, it could be argued, that, Dillistone's clarity in forming the linkages and 'connecting the dots', from pre-Christendom through to the manner in which the Passion Story plays out in the lives of parishioners and society's artists, is a reflection of the life of a serious academic, as Dillistone was, as well being a committed and respected Cathedral Chancellor (Liverpool UK : 1952-1956) and Chaplain (Oriel College, Oxford UK : 1964-1970).

2.2.1: Learnings from Greek Theatre and The Greek Tragedy.

This examination of the origins and evolution of the constructs of atonement and redemption, will focus on the systematic manner in which Dillistone threads through the pre-Christian foundations of these constructs, towards shaping meaningful contributions to current theological and practical understandings of what atonement and redemption means. Dillistone (1968), Chapter IV: *'The Supreme Tragedy'*, serves as a key reference from which to work.

Dillistone (1968, p.120) suggests that one of the most developed pre-Christian or pre-Judaic forms of purification, or practices aimed at purging a community, is found in Greek tragedy. Whilst it could be validly argued that this view is restrictive, to the exclusion of other advanced indigenous social structures elsewhere, it is noted that the continuum offered by Dillistone, illustrates the linkages to Judaism, post-exile, as well as to developments in the New Testament era and in this sense, is of direct relevance to this study.

Beyond just being an art-form, Greek tragedy has long been held as a prism through which life's tensions, conflicts, contradictions and paradoxes could be interpreted and 'acted' upon. This attempt to establish the threads of atonement and redemption from within Greek culture and tradition, will assist inform an understanding of the construct of redemption in post-exilic Judaism. Furthermore, and according to Dillistone (1968, p.124), in ways not dissimilar, a Greek tragedy and the Passion Story are, both, aimed at drawing the audience into the midst of the

story; beyond holding just spectator-status, to becoming a participant in the drama. It is in this regard and in the understanding of the *“special effects”* of Greek tragedy that the cathartic and redemptive capacity of Greek tragedy should be interpreted.

Prior to any further analysis of the important trajectory offered by Dillistone, from Greek Tragedy to redemption within Christianity, it will be necessary to garner an understanding of what were the basic constituent elements of Greek Tragedy. In this regard the work of Michael Silk (ed.) (1996) and Nancy Rabinowitz (2008) were particularly useful. Silk (1996, p.3) highlights the challenges faced by scholars in reaching consensus on a definition of Greek Tragedy and the centrality and role of the ‘tragic’ within this construct, and notes;

*“there is no current consensus on how, precisely, tragedy should best be defined or understood, or indeed on how, precisely, Greek tragedy should best be defined or understood.”*³⁸

Rabinowitz (2008, pp.14-15) uses the work of Aristotle to elucidate the understanding of tragedy within the Greek context and notes that;

*“According to Aristotle, a tragedy is “an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play, in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions.”*³⁹

Rabinowitz (2008, pp.14-15) further highlights that, for Aristotle, tragedy need not have been characterised by an unhappy ending; it was sufficient, *“if something terrible almost happens, but does not.”* Therefore the fortunes with the story can move in either direction; from bad to good or from good to bad. Rabinowitz (2008, p.15) does note Aristotle’s position that it was the latter scenario which made for better drama.

³⁸Silk (ed.)(1996, p.3). *‘Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond’*. At the time of publication of this work, Michael S. Silk was Professor of Greek at King’s College, University of London.

³⁹Rabinowitz (2008, p.14). *Greek Tragedy*. At the time of publication of this work, Nancy Rabinowitz was Professor of Comparative Literature at Hamilton College, New York.

To return the study to Dillistone's synthesis between Greek tragedy and redemption, the important characteristic of Greek drama pointed out by Segal (1996, p.149) is noted;

"It is a deeply held assumption among the Greeks of the archaic and classical periods that the sharing of tears and suffering creates a bond of common humanity between mortals.....Drama effects a concrete, public sharing of grief through the collective responses of the chorus, and more broadly through the community of spectators in the theatre."

The origin of 'the Greek tragic form', as Dillistone (1968, p.120) frames it, had its earliest manifestations during the 7th-6th Centuries BCE., in the form of ritual dancing, poetry and songs, interspersed with speech-making, at festivals. Even during its earliest period, according to Dillistone (1968, p.121), these practices, through expressions of sorrow and mourning, were thought to hold the seeds of corporately representing the community in what was amiss with life and community, as well as in the performance of the rituals, in song and dance, which were required to restore the community and their lands from these ills.

The 5th Century BCE saw the use of dialogue as an important medium to start to expound the depths of the Greek tragic form. This format of the theatre of Greek tragedy served to illustrate the very paradoxes and shortcomings of human existence and held within itself the path to catharsis. The format of Poetry and short satire plays set the dramatic tension through which to play out the **conflict** riddled drama of real life. (Dillistone 1968, p.121). If Greek life and culture were some of the key building blocks upon which Western Civilisation was built, then Greek theatre and art and Greek tragedy in particular, which sought to present these paradoxical forces within the human condition, represented the antidote to the disequilibrium in life, as brought about by these competing forces. In hindsight, an examination of this Hellenistic art form, through a 21st Century window, will likely find that the Gods and theatre settings have changed but the drama of life, in all its paradoxes, pains and possibilities remain, in the large, unaltered; still in search of a sense of restored coherence and balance. In this latter regard, Dillistone (1968, p.122) paints the eternal relevance of the Greek tragic form, through any age

in which Zeus may have been replaced by the multiple choice of gods, prophets or deities encountered or conceived of through the different ages; Yahweh, Lord Krishna, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, Haile Salassie, or Allah. It could be argued that, for many, the nature of the human condition shows little sign of having completely evolved from the yearning to experience some form of divine intervention. In speaking of Greek tragedy 5th-4th Century BCE., Dillistone (1968, p.122) calls for the Greek tragic form to be viewed as being more substantial than just an art form. According to Dillistone (1968, p.121) the dynamic tensions and conflict within the human condition and the expression thereof on stage, in the Greek experience during this period, was about drawing the spectator *into* the core of the drama of life, to grapple with these very conflicts themselves. A central aspect of the Greek portrayal of the conflicting and competing powers and forces which motivates human behaviour is that these tensions and conflicts are universal; across time and space, and *across Gods*. The instrument of the Greek stage to heighten the spiritual and very human sensitivities of the observer was best achieved through the character of a hero, who struggles with and through these conflicts. (Dillistone 1968, p.122).

Where redemption, atonement and salvation were the spiritual offerings which were meant to flow from the Cross of Christianity, it could be argued that a similar key offering within the Greek tragic form was that of '*catharsis*'; a journey from *conflict*, to the *expression of conflict*, to achieving some degree of *catharsis* or *purgation*. (Dillistone, pp.124-125). In this latter regard, the Greek tragedy was aimed at restoring the natural order which fell under the divine providence of the Greek god Zeus. Dillistone's (1968, p.158) analysis of the contributions of Allardyce Nicholl⁴⁰ and Joseph Campbell⁴¹ to this discussion, offers plausible linkages between the theatre of Greek tragedy and the doctrine of Christian redemption through the *supreme Christian tragedy*, as found in the Passion Story of Jesus Christ. To illustrate this point, Dillistone employs the following extract from Nicholl (1962, p.107), '*The Theatre and Dramatic Theory*',

"Even though we may be left with a feeling of waste, a great sense of emptiness, there comes a reconciliation for ourselves, if not for persons in the play; and the source of this

⁴⁰ Allardyce Nicholl (1894-1976) was a British Literary scholar, who went on (1933) to serve as Professor of history of drama at Yale University.

⁴¹ Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) was an American Scholar and Author.

reconciliation seems to arise from the fact that, amid the contrasting passions aroused by the tragic action, we are left with a profound impression of the universe, not as kindly or inimical or indifferent towards man, but rather as something inscrutable, obeying laws of its own beyond our imperfect understanding. It is the mystery of the world which tragedy presents to us".

In a similar vein, Dillistone (1968, p.158) cites the work of Joseph Campbell's (1960, p.50), *'The Masks of Gods'*⁴², to expound on this power of the tragic form.

"Tragedy transmutes suffering into rapture by altering the focus of the mind. Released from attachment to one's mortal part through a contemplation of the grave and constant in human sufferings....one is united, simultaneously, in tragic pity with the "human sufferer" and in tragic terror with the "secret cause"".

Whilst not attempting a simplistic reduction of the life and death of Jesus Christ, as depicted in the biblical Passion Story⁴³, to the pain and heroism which may be found in Greek tragedy, one cannot escape the mirror of Greek tragedy found in this pinnacle of Christian redemption; where the competing and conflicting universal forces within the human condition are brought into real tension and displayed for all in the culmination of the Passion Story and in this regard the summary offered by Dillistone (1968, p.160), leaves no doubt as to his position on the Passion Story of Jesus Christ being the, *"archetypal tragic drama of the ages"* and *"the supreme Tragedy of the ages"*. The following extract summarises the path lit up by Dillistone; from Greek tragedy to redemption within the Christian belief system.

"But time and time again when the Passion Story has been read or sung or re-enacted in drama or liturgy those participating in the recital have been arrested (the word used by James Joyce in his description of tragic experience), purified (in the pattern of Aristotle's catharsis), transfigured (a favourite word of St. Paul). In a mysterious way, every presentation of authentic tragic experience leads to a certain metamorphosis. In the presentation of the supreme Tragedy

⁴² Dillistone (1968:158) quotes Joseph Campbell's responses to James Joyce's interpretation of Aristotle's phrase, 'whatsoever is grave and constant in human suffering'.

⁴³ Matthew 27 : 27-50. Mark 15 : 16-37. Luke 23 : 26-46.

of the ages there can be the most wonderful transformation of all-the rebirth into the likeness of Him Who 'in the days of his flesh, offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and was heard for his godly fear. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him' (Hebrews 5 : 7-9)."

Dillistone (1968, p.160)

The significance in exploring the category of the pre-Christian Greek theatre, for this study, extends beyond just the correlation between the format of the 'Greek tragedy' and the Christian account of redemption. As will become evident through the engagement with the debates between Christopher Hitchens and his counterparts, the format of the 'road to Catharsis' (Greek tragedy), or the 'road to redemption' (The Passion account of Jesus Christ), is as important as the intended objective or outcome. Where the format of Greek Theatre and the Greek tragedy, in their strictest forms, may be no longer, the format of public debate and engagement does serve the cause of knowledge formation and the articulation of argument.

2.2.2. : The Foundations of Redemption in Judaism.

Understanding the formative constituent elements of redemption within Judaism is central to any understanding of the morphing of this construct within the early Jesus movement and Christianity; as it subsequently evolved. To assist us embark on this rediscovery, the work of Hastings Rashdall (1919) will be engaged with, as a start-point. Rashdall (1919, pp.64-74) offers a set of key elements to shape an understanding of the Jewish doctrine of redemption, which necessarily contributes towards the understanding of the doctrine of redemption within Christianity. However, before embarking on this examination, it is important to acknowledge that an enquiry into any aspect of Judaism cannot escape being influenced by an understanding of the biblical account of the 'nation' of Israel, pre-exilic and post-exilic, as well as contemporary understandings and interpretations of the present political state of Israel. As for

the validity, or otherwise, of the *historical* state of Israel, it is significant to declare that this study holds to no assumption on the integrity of the biblical account of the Abrahamic 'nation' of Israel, but recognises and respects the works of scholars such as, Israeli Archaeologist Israel Finkelstein, renowned academic Noam Chomsky and fellow academic Norman Finkelstein who offer credible critiques and contestations of the biblical accounts of the origins of the state of Israel and the perceived entitlements which emerged from such an understanding of history.⁴⁴

Rashdall's highlights the following key influences of the Judaic worldview as the formative contributing elements to the Christian understanding of redemption.

1. Rashdall (1919, p.64) makes the point that, not unlike general primitive religions, early Judaism looked upon their God as the deliverer or saviour, not just from sin, but from calamities which could befall a person, society, or the nation, which were of a material kind. Central to this Jewish worldview was the deliverance of the Jewish people out of Egypt. Also important to this 'exodus' experience was that the hand of the Jewish God

⁴⁴Of these three well published scholars, of particular interest to this study is Israel Finkelstein, whose work, *The Bible Unearthed* (2001) was referred to by Christopher Hitchens, in *God is not Great* (2007, p.102) and is covered further at a later point in this study.

During an Interview with Kathleen Jones, published 16 August 2010 on the New Media Website of Huffington Post, Noam Chomsky alluded to the influence of the view of divinely warranted land entitlements in Israel's favour, as one of the significant causes to the current conflict in the Palestinian territories. Chomsky noted;

"The history is reasonably clear. This was not the case up until 1967. In fact, before 1967, the relationships were not very different from relationships among other powers. There was sympathy and support for Israel, which has many, many sources, including the Christian Zionism, which is a very powerful force that precedes and is numerically far stronger than Jewish Zionism. But for somebody like, say, Harry Truman, raised in a deeply Christian tradition, it was just taken for granted that the Bible instructs us that God gave the land of Palestine to the Jews. So it is kind of like in his bones. And that's true for a very large part of the American population, much more so than - far more than any other country. So that is one factor, and there are other factors."

Online Reference: Kathleen Well, J.D. (2010). Noam Chomsky on Israel. 16 August 2010. Huff Post World [online]. Available from: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kathleen-wells/noam-chomsky-on-israel_b_683558.html>. [Accessed 20 October 2013].

A more recent instalment on the contestations over the land within the Palestinian territories could be found in an Article by Noam Chomsky, published 16 August 2013 on the CNN Opinion Website, Online Reference, Chomsky, N. (2013). Noam Chomsky: Israel's West Bank plans will leave Palestinians little. 16 August 2013. CNN Opinion [online]. Available from: <<http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/16/opinion/mideast-talks-noam-chomsky/>>. [Accessed 10 October 2013].

Norman Finkelstein is an American sociologist and critic of Israeli policies in the Palestinian territories. Finkelstein is the author of the books; *The Holocaust Industry* (2000), *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict* (1995), and *Knowing Too Much : Why The American Jewish Romance With Israel is Coming to an End* (2012).

Jahweh was seen to have been instrumental in this deliverance. This interpretation saw God entitled to certain reciprocal claims upon the Jewish people, led out of captivity. The fate and indeed the national identity of the Jewish people and the nationhood of Israel, is sealed in their bond with their God and as experienced through the exodus event.

2. The expectation, within the Jewish mind-set, of the coming of a 'kingdom of God', and the very nature of the same 'messiah-God' who was at the centre of their deliverance, was, for a large part, a function of the socio-political circumstances in which the Jewish people found themselves (Rashdall 1919, p.64). The deliverance from Roman rule was a very real expectation, in which the 'messiah-God' was to be viewed as the liberator. Beyond just the idea of liberation and deliverance, the Judaic belief system has, at its core, the establishment of a temporal 'kingdom of God' centred on ancient Zion. (Rashdall 1919, p.65). The two broad dimensions of this 'kingdom of God' were, firstly, the inauguration of the physical and terrestrial statehood of Israel and secondly, a state of nationhood which had a more spiritual dimension, which reflected a set of more ethical and righteous characteristics than any known temporal ruler. Rashdall (1919, p.65)

The workings of the 'messiah-God' took on the role of a saviour; a saviour from the enemies of the Jewish people; for which enemies the harshest treatment was reserved. (Rashdall 1919, p.65). To secure the favour of their god and to stand on the right side of God's judgment, the Jews had to, accordingly, maintain their piety. The desire to enter into the 'kingdom of God' through a pious and ethical way of life brought on the idea of atonement and redemption from what was perceived to be sin (Rashdall 1919, p.65).

3. Rashdall (1919, p. 66) offers his interpretation of the possible linkage between the idea of redemption on the one hand and suffering or death, on the other, as being rooted in primal religious beliefs, where the tribal God is seen to be incarnate in certain species of

animals, in particular, in its blood and that the sacrificing or slaying of a particular animal and the eating of its flesh and the drinking of its blood, brought a person in communion with their God; where such a relationship had been previously disturbed or severed. Central to this primal religious experience was the belief that God could be influenced by the sacrificial slaying of animals. Rashdall (1919, p.67) simplifies the motivation behind such sacrificial offerings to God, to being similar to the offering of gifts to a king or any position of authority, in the hope of securing some assistance or favour.

According to Rashdall (1919, p.68), within the primal Judaic worldview, sin was largely viewed as a transgression of ritualistic obligations and rites. The idea of moral transgressions against a god who had evolved into a more moral and ethical figure, sparked the shift away from sacrificial offerings being considered just for ritual observances.

4. A further key element introduced by Rashdall (1919, p.70); is the religious and spiritual 'mechanism' which allows for the sins of a person, or a community, or the nation as a whole, to be borne by the suffering of another. The evolution of the idea had its origins in the religious sacrifice of animals, as described above, which bore the sins of the community.

2.2.3: The Old Testament and Judaic Customary Redemption Practices.

If we are to consider any interpretation of the concept of redemption, as offered by the founders of Christianity, such as Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul, some account must be presented of the sacrificial practices of the Jews, as recorded in the Biblical Old Testament⁴⁵, from which, much of the Christian belief system on redemption would appear to have developed. However, this analysis will need to be conducted within an understanding of context of the Jewish concept of God. In this regard, one such perspective is offered by British theologian, L.B. Cross (1929)⁴⁶, who stated that the Jewish conception of God was primarily that of a ‘war God’ (1929, p.34)⁴⁷ and a God at the centre of the liberation of the Jewish people. This point is made, citing texts such as Exodus 14: 25 and Exodus 15: 1; which embodies the liberation narrative of the Jews from the rule of the Pharaohs in Egypt.

“²⁵And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians.” (Exodus 14: 25), and,

“³⁰Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore.” (Exodus 14: 30).

The theme of the ‘war God’ and the God of Liberation, continues strongly through the Song of Moses in Exodus Chapter 15.

“¹Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.”

(Exodus 15: 1).

⁴⁵ The Dakes Annotated Reference Bible (1992), containing the Old and New Testaments of the Authorised or King James Version Text, is used as the reference for Scriptural texts throughout this study.

⁴⁶ Cross, L.B. (1929, pp. 33-64). ‘Sacrifice in the Old Testament’, in, Grensted, L.W. (1929). ‘The Atonement in History and in Life’. SPCK, London. Reverend Leslie Basil Cross (1895-1974) was an Anglican priest and lecturer of Theology at Oxford (1941-1947).

⁴⁷ Cross (1929, p. 34).

Cross (1929, p.34), further, roots this conception of God⁴⁸ in the everyday life of the Jewish people, with the following comments.

“As a landed proprietor, he was also the God of productivity, giving to the earth her increase, making the folds full of sheep and oxen strong to labour, and giving the former and latter rains.”

The synthesis of the Jewish God as a liberating ‘war God’ and a provider and sustainer of the Jewish people, is well captured by Alister McGrath (2006, p.26), in his book, *Redemption*.

“For Israel, the greatest act of God’s many acts of redemption was the deliverance of Israel from her bondage in Egypt. Moses was raised by God to set his people free. Seeing that his people were oppressed and enslaved, God prepared the way for their deliverance and their eventual entry into the promised land of Canaan. The exodus brought the people of Israel into existence as the people of God. It was their story about their God. In retelling this story, Israel shaped her identity in the present and nourished her future hopes. It was a story that should never be forgotten.”

Whilst the aim, at this point, is to establish the Jewish concept of God, as the context from which their sacrificial practices are understood, the exploration of the themes expounded from the Book of Exodus and, particularly, the summary just noted by Alister McGrath, are pivotal to understanding, firstly, the construction of the concept of redemption or salvation and the resultant doctrinal formations of the early church, and secondly, the critique presented by Christopher Hitchens of these doctrines and the Judeo-Christian religious complex as a whole⁴⁹.

The summary of Hebrew sacrifice, as offered by Finlan (2005, p.19), in his book, *‘The Problem with Atonement’*, is noteworthy and directly relevant to the development of this study.

⁴⁸ A further critical element of the relationship which the Jews corporately developed with their God, was that, within their formation of this concept of God and indeed their very national identity, “Patriotism and religion were synonymous”, as summarized by Cross (1929, p.35)

⁴⁹ Christopher Hitchens (2007, p.102), in his book, *‘God is Not Great’*, refers to the work of respected Israeli archaeologists, Israel Finkelstein and Neil Silberman, which challenges the biblical and traditionally accepted accounts of the Exodus of the Israelites. The significance of this point for present day Israel and Palestine, an aspect which Hitchens develops strongly through his debates and presentations, is self-evident.

“Hebrew sacrificial offerings sometimes constitute a gift, sometimes a payment, and sometimes a means for rectifying one’s relationship with Yahweh. Sacrifice is fundamentally pragmatic in motivation, relating to issues of survival and well-being.”

This statement gains more meaning and application for this study, when considering two key categories under which sacrifice is often understood; that of *propitiation* and *expiation*. In relation to sacrifice, Finlan (2005, p.15), notes the following pointer and poses the defining question;

“...propitiation and expiation, which correspond to persuasion and wiping-away, and again to appeasement and cleansing. Was the sacrifice a payoff, a gift meant to soothe God’s anger (propitiation), or was it a means for obtaining a sin-cleansing substance (expiation)?”

Whilst both ideas, propitiation and expiation, will occupy significant roles within this study, it is towards the latter understanding of sacrifice, that of expiation, which this study gravitates. In this regard, the place of ‘blood’ becomes a central aspect within the sacrificial practices of the Hebrews.

“¹⁴For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof: who-soever eateth it shall be cut off.”

(Leviticus 17: 14).

Finlan (2005, p.13) uses this key text, as well as the fuller context of Leviticus chapters 16 and 17 to highlight the central place of ‘blood’, as a ‘life-force’, in the sacrificial language of the Hebrews. Finlan’s approach in attempting to understand the relationship between sacrifice and atonement, he is on the same theological page with Weaver (2011, p.70), in his work, ‘*The Nonviolent Atonement*’; who uses Leviticus 17: 11 to illustrate the following point;

“The ritual did not involve destruction of an animal in place of killing a person. Rather, the life of the animal, namely, its blood, and with it the life of the worshiper, the animal’s blood goes to God.”

This perspective therefore sets in place a restored relationship between the person or community and their God, and Leviticus 17: 11 is cited to illustrate the point,

“¹¹For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.”

Weaver (2011, p.71) points to Leviticus 16: 20-22 and the ritual of the scapegoat to highlight the treatment applied to the more serious and comprehensive sins. This extract from Leviticus 16, as quoted below, is central to this study and ties in directly with Christopher Hitchens’ understanding of the construct of vicarious redemption and his critique thereof.

“²¹And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness. ²²And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.”

Leviticus 16: 21-22.

Whilst remaining within the ambit of the Old Testament, one cannot escape the critique, and often condemnation, of strictly sacrificial practices of the Hebrews; which forms a significant aspect of the ‘prophetic tradition’, of the likes of the Prophets Hosea, Micah and Jeremiah. This critique goes beyond the call for love and justice over sacrificial rituals; notwithstanding the clarity of the call to love and justice in texts such as Micah 6:7-8.

“⁷Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?⁸ He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.”

But, as Weaver (2011, p.72) points out, Jeremiah (Chapter 7:22-23), becomes more questioning of the tradition of sacrifice and takes the point right back to the basis of the Exodus, in the first place;

“²²For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: ²³But this thing I commanded them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.”

In summary, the engagement with the authors above, through interaction with the relevant biblical Old Testament texts, presents, albeit in brief, the theological understandings of sacrifice and redemption, upon which to further develop the post-Christ progression of these constructs.

2.3: Sin and Original Sin

Whilst the scope of this paper does not allow for a detailed account of the concepts of ‘sin’ and ‘original sin’, coverage of the essence thereof is important and necessary, as it represents a key building block of any Christian doctrine of redemption. This, however, does not point to any unanimity in meaning and interpretation through history, of the construct of sin within the academia or the Church.

The following excerpt from, Anderson (2009, p. ix-x), *‘Sin: A History’*, captures the essences of the evolution of the construct.

“For during the era in which sin begins to be thought of as a debt, human virtue assumes the role of a merit or credit. This first becomes evident in the book of Tobit (Listed as a Book of the Apocrypha), where we learn that the giving of alms to the poor creates a “treasury in heaven” for the virtuous person. In times of crisis, that treasury can be used to pay down the debt of one’s sin. From this notion will emerge the important Jewish

concept of the “merits of the fathers”, that is, the idea that the virtuous deeds of Israel’s righteous ancestors have produced an enormous treasury in heaven that subsequent Israelites can draw upon in times of trouble. A similar construal arose at the same time among Christians. For them, Christ’s life of obedience had funded a “treasury of merits” that was later supplemented by the work of the saints. As students of the Protestant Reformation know, this idea would become controversial in the sixteenth century, for it seemed to put a high value on human works at the expense of faith. Sin, I realized, had a history. The development of the characterization of sin had an immeasurable effect on how biblical ideas were put into practice. If one wants to address and overcome the theological disputes that arose from the Reformation, one must attend carefully to how the correlative concepts of sin and virtue developed over time. Their meaning and role in the religious life are not univocal over the course of the tradition’s development.”

Given the central place of the idea of sin within the redemption narrative of Christianity, it is important to also note the cautionary issued by McClendon (1994, p.125), that;

“‘Original Sin,’ the view that the pervasive presence of sin in the human species is caused by the first sin of the first human pair, is not the teaching of Scripture.”

This view is also well captured by Patricia A. Williams (2001, p.xiv), in the introduction of her work, *‘Doing without Adam and Eve: Sociobiology and Original Sin’*.

“The classical doctrine of original sin has two separable parts. One is the historical claim that the first human beings, Adam and Eve, sinned by eating fruit God had forbidden them to eat. The second is the psychological claim that human nature was once virtuous, but the first sin corrupted it. Part one of this book argues that both claims are false. The alleged corruption of human nature is not found in Genesis 3. It is not scriptural. Moreover, science tells us that Adam and Eve are not historical figures. Therefore, the narrative about them cannot explain our inclination to sin or the origin of evil. “

Whilst it may not fall within the scope of this study to explore all perspectives of the subject on 'the origins' of the construct of 'original sin', it will be important to note, at this point, that the doctrine of original sin was not a direct extraction from biblical scripture. Besides the point made by Williams, above, her work represents an interesting contribution towards this study, by virtue of her stated purpose in writing this particular book; "to unite Christianity with science", (2001, p.xiii), and the manner in which she attempts to pursue this objective.

An understanding of the concepts of sin and 'original sin' cuts to the crux of Christopher Hitchens' critique of vicarious redemption and the Christian belief system. In accounting for how, *"the metaphor of sin as a debt replaced that of sin as a burden and how that metaphor slowly worked its way into early Jewish and Christian thought"*, Anderson (2009, p.x)⁵⁰ notes further that, *"one cannot fully appreciate how the early church thought about Christ's atoning act apart from a careful study of the (originally) Jewish metaphor that stands behind it."*

In attempting to capture the essence of the idea of 'original sin', Alan Richardson (1969, p.204)⁵¹ notes,

"In the early history of the church, the story of Adam and Eve was taken as a historical account of the first man and woman. Because they disobeyed God's command, they were driven from the garden. In their disobedience all men fell into 'original sin'. One line of thought, represented by Augustine, saw the original sin as being biologically transmitted to later generations through the sexual procreation of the human race. This inherited sin meant that man is born guilty and with a corrupt nature that is prone to sin."

⁵⁰ At the time of publication (2009) of *'Sin: A History'*, Gary A. Anderson, was Professor of Old Testament/Hebrew Bible at the University of Notre Dame.

⁵¹In, *'A Dictionary of Christian Theology'* (1969).

More directly, though, DeLumeau (1990, p.190)⁵² notes the following;

“Christianity, taking its cue from Judaism, cast sin as an opposition of human will to that of a personal God. This opposition not only shows itself in external actions but also in one’s thoughts and feelings.”

As will be explored during the section on the works of Christopher Hitchens, this excerpt alludes to the notion of an all pervasive and omnipotent deity which Hitchens critically rejects.⁵³ Central to the whole narrative complex on sin within Christianity, or any rectification of, or redemption from, this condition, is the presence of a supernatural deity, or God. The entire Christian belief system, from the *“break-up to the make-up”*⁵⁴, can be said to hinge on this. A further vital point expanded upon by Delumeau (1990, p.190), is that the blame for this relationship being severed is placed entirely upon ‘man’ or humankind alone.

Delumeau (1990, p.190), succinctly traces the path from ‘original sin’, through its evolution in the biblical Old Testament, through to the promise of a redeemer of sins and restorer of this severed relationship;

“The Old Testament presents Adam’s sin as man’s wilful disobedience to a divine precept. Following this rupture – for which man alone takes the entire blame – sin enters the world: It will henceforth affect all human history, and notably that of Israel. The disobedient Israelites worship the golden calf, prefer meat to manna, and constantly deviate from the paths God traces for them. One after another, the prophets chastise them for their iniquities: violence, adultery, injustice, lies, and so on, which open a

⁵² At the time of publication (1990), of his work, *‘Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture 13th-18th Centuries’*, Jean Delumeau was Professor of History at the College de France, Paris.

⁵³ Christopher Hitchens’ rejection of this notion of a ‘celestial dictator’, who is prepared to convict a person of ‘thought crime’, or to convict a person whilst ‘one sleeps’; is central to his rejection of any faith-based religion. Extract from Christopher Hitchens’ Interview with Canadian Broadcaster Jian Ghomeshi on 21 September 2009, Online reference: Q with Jian Ghomeshi (2009). Christopher Hitchens in Studio Q. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeWpTjmtgXQ>>. [Accessed 2 May 2013]. [2.26 minutes]

⁵⁴ Which transaction could be read as being; from the rupture in the God-humankind relationship, to the restoration thereof through the redemption which the Christian faith sees as being offered in the life and death of the person of Jesus Christ.

chasm” between them and Yahweh. At the same time, the prophets will reveal the proportions and nature of sin: ingratitude towards a most loving father (Isa. 64:7), and infidelity, akin to that of a wife who prostitutes herself to all comers, neglectful of her husband’s inexhaustible love (Jer. 3:7-12; Ezek. 16:23). These seers indicate the ways of conversion – confession, expiation, ashes, faith – that will merit pardon. They announce the coming of the Redeemer, dispenser of this pardon.”

To subscribe, in any form whatsoever, if not through faith; to the Christian belief system, one **has to** accept and believe in this notion of sin and the Scriptural continuum towards rectification thereof, as expounded upon by Delumeau (1990, p.190).

Whilst the origin of the concept of ‘original sin’ may not, in its entirety be attributed to St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), he is afforded due credit for the substance with which the concept was accepted and transmuted through the life of the Christian church over the centuries. (Wiley 2002, p.56). Tatha Wiley (2002), in her work, ‘*Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings*’, summarises the influence of St. Augustine on the shaping of this doctrine within the church.

“Augustine’s influence on the church and its theologies of sin, redemption and grace has been incalculable. Likewise for original sin, Augustine fixed the meaning of the basic terms of the doctrine. The distinctions he brings to a theology of original sin – key among them are peccatum originans (the event of original sin) and peccatum originatum (the condition of original sin in humankind) – remain standard to the present day. Influenced by Augustine, the councils of Carthage (411-418 C.E.) and Orange (529C.E.) brought theological speculation about original sin into the official lexicon of the church.”

(Wiley 2002, p.56)

St. Augustine’s Letter 187: ‘*On the Presence of God*’ (Chapters 30-31), presents his interpretations of the *sin-link* back to the biblical Adam, in relation to the redeeming intervention of Jesus Christ;

“Christ did not will that His flesh should come into existence through this kind of encounter between male and female, but in His conception of the virgin, without any such human passion. He took on “the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom 8:3) for us that in us the flesh of sin might be purified. “For as by the offense of one,” the Apostle says, “unto all men to condemnation, so also by the justice of one unto all men to justification of life” (Rom 5:18). No one is born without the intervention of carnal concupiscence inherited from the first man, who is Adam, and no one is reborn without the intervention of spiritual grace given by the second man, who is Christ.”⁵⁵

If the remedy had to fit the diagnosis, then, for St. Augustine, the line of inheritance of this sinful nature⁵⁶, which is present in every human, post-Adam, can only be set right by the life and death of Jesus Christ; excluding any treasure of good deed or alms-giving to which Anderson (2009, pp. ix-x) may have alluded, as detailed above.

In forming an association between the position articulated on St. Augustine and the subject of redemption, at hand; Wiley (2002, p.57) notes the following;

“Like earlier theologians, Augustine’s primary concerns were in the person and work of Christ rather than in the matter of the first human sin itself. His appeal to an inherited sin, for example, reflects Augustine’s desire to ground the universal necessity of Christ’s redemption. It is the latter that Augustine considered the core of Christian belief. The idea of an inherited sin served an explanatory function for why sin is universal, and thus the universal need for redemption.”

The theological analogy offered by Alister McGrath (2006, pp.44-45), in his work, ‘Redemption’, also serves to illustrate this link between Adam and Jesus Christ. The biblical references in support of this linking are Roman 5: 19 and I Corinthians 15: 22. McGrath notes,

“For Adam, the tree of life became a tree of death; in Christ, the tree of death became a tree of life. And so on. This is not really a rigorous theological analysis, more a noting of patterns and the improvisation of a theological analogy that weaves them together into

⁵⁵Augustine of Hippo : *Selected Writings*. Translated by Mary T. Clark (1984, p. 419).

⁵⁶ Also considered as being ‘Ancestral Sin’.

a more or less coherent pattern. But the theme is fundamental to Christian theology: 'For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous'"

Romans 5 : 19.

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

I Corinthians 15: 22,

Notwithstanding McGrath's qualification on his analogy not being a 'rigorous theological analysis', the 'fundamental' theme emphasized by him, does indicate his alignment with the idea of 'original sin' (2006, pp.44-45). The position of McGrath, on such foundational matters relevant to the subject of redemption, will, in Chapter 4 of this study, be brought under further scrutiny through the analysis of his debate with Christopher Hitchens.

The only consistency in subsequent interpretations and understandings of 'original sin' was its inconsistency. The evolution of the idea of original sin within the Roman Catholic Church, and in particular, the fate of unbaptised children, upon death, illustrates this inconsistencies in the development of this construct, as alluded to by Anderson (2009, p. ix-x), as detailed above. The special International Theological Commission⁵⁷ established by the Vatican on this subject and the official document which published their findings and theological recommendations, also illustrates the oscillations, over the centuries in the position of the Catholic Church on the subject of sin, original sin and, particularly, the fate of unbaptised children upon death.⁵⁸

Such oscillations were not the reserve of the Catholic Church alone; and whilst the scope of enquiry of this study may not necessitate a broad spectrum analysis of this subject, it is

⁵⁷ The Report published 20 April 2007 of the International Theological Commission-The Vatican (2007). 'The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptised'. Online Reference : http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070419_un-baptised-infants_en.html

⁵⁸ Christopher Hitchens challenges the Catholic Church on this position. Online Reference: superale777 (2010). Christopher Hitchens - Pope Benedict closes the door to limbo. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzoyQDbtR2I>>. [Accessed 7 February 2013]. The extract (1.47 minutes in length).

significant to note the wide variances in interpretation and doctrinal formations which characterized the evolution of the ideas of sin and original sin, within the Christian religious complex. In this regard, it is important to note the view articulated by Professor Gordon Kaufman (1968, p. 362), in his recounting of what he refers to as the *historical process* of the ‘fall’ of humankind.

“But it nonetheless was an actual historical process, a development within the culture which man himself freely created. Man, not God, invented morality and religion; the act of man in his freedom was thus the source of human anxiety and guilt, and man, not God, must bear responsibility for this historical deterioration in human existence.”

Such is the written word of a person who was Professor of Theology at Harvard University’s Divinity School at the time of publication of his work, *‘Systematic Theology: A Historical Perspective’* (1968).

Notwithstanding the acknowledged variances in doctrinal formation over the years, on the idea of sin and ‘original sin’, Delumeau (1990, p.190), captures the central idea of ‘original sin’, as it relates to this study’s core subject of redemption. In commenting on the bleak outlook brought on by sin, Delumeau notes,

“Nevertheless, this bleak picture is made only to heighten, in contrast, the necessity and grandeur of Christ’s redemptive mission. Original and personal sin becomes an integral part of a system of salvation, whose other component is justification. In the very place where sin was abundant, grace is now superabundant. The fault of Adam caused and permitted the redemption that triumphs over it.”

Whilst the term ‘justification’ in this context is applied with some significance, McClendon (1994, pp.111-112) , notes that the term is controverted and that terms such as forgiveness and reconciliation, convey a clearer meaning of the restorative effective of redemption within the Christian belief system.

This section of the study concludes with the following extract from Thomas Paine (1795, pp.19-20), from his work, *'The Age of Reason'*; commenting on the works attributed to the Apostle Paul in this regard.

"He [Apostle Paul] makes there to be two Adams: the one who sins in fact and suffers by proxy; the other who sins by proxy and suffers in fact. A religion thus interlarded with quibble, subterfuge, and pun, has a tendency to instruct its professors in the practice of these arts. They acquire the habit without being aware of the cause."

2.4: Sin and Vicarious Redemption within the New Testament.

Given the wide literary terrain that had to be traversed through the course of this study, with the opportunity of having engaged with many respected authors and academics; it has to be noted that one of the works on the subject which stood out as being particularly enlightening and inspiring was the 1866 publication of Horace Bushnell, *'The Vicarious Sacrifice'*. Bushnell's analysis of the *vicariousness* of the idea of redemption and sacrifice within the Christian belief system, offers this study the required assistance in coming to terms with the concept. He noted in his discourse on redemption or sacrifice, that the term or concept, 'vicarious', does not derive *directly* from Scripture. (1866, p.4). He notes that if a term is appropriate to any discourse on Christianity, then all that is needed is to be sure about its meaning. In the case of the term 'vicarious', he notes (1866, pp.4-5) the following;

"Thus we have – "made a curse for us" – "bare our sins" – "hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" – "made to be sin for us" – "offered to bear the sins of many" – "borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" – "wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities" – "tasted death for every man." The whole Gospel is a texture, thus, of vicarious conceptions in which Christ is represented, in one way or another, as coming into our place, substituted in our stead, bearing our burdens, answering for us, and standing in a kind of suffering sponsorship for the race. Now the word vicarious is chosen to represent and gather up into itself all these varieties of expressions."

Bushnell goes on to emphasise that the words ‘vicarious’ and ‘sacrifice’, when considered separately, may not convey their full import, in the context of Christian theology, as they would combined. (Bushnell 1866, p.5). To follow the context of Bushnell’s explanations, and to draw relevance to this study, it may not be considered out of line to substitute the word ‘redemption’ for ‘sacrifice’, to fully understand the pivotal place of ‘vicarious redemption’ within Christian theology and doctrine. This (‘vicarious sacrifice’, or ‘vicarious redemption’) effect of *the whole being greater than the sum of its parts*⁵⁹, is what Bushnell (1866, p.5) describes as “*the true figure of Christ and His Gospel*”.

Further to his contributions on the meaning of the term ‘vicarious’, within the context of the Christian belief system, Bushnell (1866, p.7) offers the following idea, which takes the discourse closer to the meaning of vicarious sacrifice and vicarious redemption, as offered in and through the life and death of Jesus Christ.

“Love is a principle essentially vicarious in its own nature, identifying the subject with others, so as to suffer their adversities and pains, and taking on itself the burden of their evils.”

Said alternatively, love, finds its expression through its identification with the full context of the object of that love; its joys, grief, pains and suffering; love not for itself, or oneself, but *for the other*. Using the condition of ‘sicknesses’, within the context of the biblical text, Matthew 8: 7, Bushnell (1866, p.9) illustrates that it was through this love that Jesus Christ took these sicknesses upon himself, through his *feelings*; and Bushnell (1866, pp.11) extends this understanding to explain how Jesus Christ bears the sins of humankind.

“the bearing of our sins does mean, that Christ bore them on His feeling, became inserted into their bad lot by His sympathy as a friend, yielded up Himself and His life, even, to an effort of restoring mercy; in a word, that He bore our sins in just the same

⁵⁹ To append an idea from; Aristotle (350 BCE). *Metaphysics*, Part 6. Translated by W.D. Ross. Publisher: The Internet Classics Archive. Available from, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.8.viii.html>. [Accessed 10 October 2013].

The exact phrase used by Aristotle was, “*In the case of all things which have several parts and in which the totality is not, as it were, a mere heap, but the whole is something beside the parts*”.

sense that He bore our sicknesses. Understand that love itself is an essentially vicarious principle, and the solution is no longer difficult.”

To Bushnell, the approach adopted, in reducing the Christian case for redemption to *divine empathy* (*‘bore them on His feelings’*), may be considered theologically appropriate, whilst, to those seeking or advocating a more substantial understanding, his approach may be regarded as being less than necessary to support the case. Nonetheless, Horace Bushnell’s work, *‘The Vicarious Sacrifice’*, represents an insightful contribution to the subject.

The work of Thomas Torrance (2008), *‘Incarnation : The Person and Life of Christ’*, could serve as complementary, to the argument advanced by Bushnell, in understanding the theological and doctrinal mechanics of substitutionality and how Jesus Christ comes to bear the sins of humankind. Torrance (2008, p.63) notes,

“In the concrete likeness of the flesh of sin, he is unlike the sinner. The verse ‘he made him to be sin who knew no sin’⁶⁰ does not mean that God made him a man who sins, who sins again, but that he was made that by way of exchange, katallage, or substitution. That carries us right into the heart of the atonement.”

Whilst Bushnell may have offered a plausible account of *‘love’* as the delivery medium through which this divine empathy is achieved, his arguments are, in the absence of a position articulated to the contrary, predicated on the assumed necessity of a divine authority, who has to intervene in human history to bear the sins of humankind; demonstrated through the vicarious sacrifice which Bushnell attempts at explaining. It is these core ideas and assumptions which come under scrutiny and critique through the work of Christopher Hitchens, and will be analysed and assessed through this study.

⁶⁰ With reference to, II Corinthians 5 : 21, *“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”*

2.5 : The Apostle Paul and Vicarious Redemption.

For the foundational Christian response to the condition and effects of sin; the link between the biblical figure of Adam and that of Jesus Christ is made direct by the Apostle Paul in passages such as I Corinthians 5: 22;

“²²For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”

Further accounts of the Apostle Paul, in Romans 5: 12, expands on Adam as the source of sin and death;

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”

Jesus Christ is presented as the only source of redemption and restoration of the ruptured relationship between God and humankind. However, the basis of this restored relationship can only be achieved through faith in Jesus Christ. Romans 5: 1 notes the views of the Apostle Paul in this regard;

“Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Whilst these extracts from Scripture may point to the wherewithal necessary for the restoration of the relationship between God and humankind, they do not speak directly to the offer of redemption **from** sin, as embodied in the life and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ; on which the following set of Scripture, is more explicit.

In this regard, Paul’s writing to the Colossians 2: 14 is a good point to attempt the connection between our understanding of sin, with its origins and effects, and the offer of redemption in the passion account of Jesus Christ.

"¹⁴Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross."⁶¹

In further understanding the response of redemption to the condition of sin, Anderson (2009, p.192-193) extends the metaphor of debt, which characterized much of his work in examining the history of the concept of sin, by using an extract from the '*Golden Legend*'⁶².

"Jesus willed to shed his own blood, not the blood of a debtor^[63], for which reason he withdrew from Debtors. This sort of debt the apostle [Paul] calls a chirography [Col 2:14], a handwritten bill, which Christ took and nailed to the cross."

The idea introduced through this excerpt, of the price of the 'blood' of Jesus Christ being offered to remedy this "financial" crisis within the human condition, as Anderson (2009, p.102) explains it, is not inconsistent with the Christian idea of redemption, as the act of being saved from, or being bought back from evil, sin and death.⁶⁴ Further support for this metaphor and, particularly, the element of 'forgiveness' of such debts, can be found in the prayer urged by Jesus Christ himself (Matthew 6: 13);

"¹²And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

The following excerpt from Matthew 20: 28, attributed to Jesus Christ, would have to rank as one of the key Scriptural building blocks for the doctrine of redemption within the Christian church.

"²⁸Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; and to give his life a ransom for many."

⁶¹ It is interesting to note the link ("Blotting out") found in Colossian 2: Vs 14, to Anderson's (2009, p.3) metaphor of sin being a "stain"; in his attempt to draw out the formative understandings of the concept of sin.

⁶² '*The Golden Legend*' is regarded as a popular book of the medieval period. (Anderson 2009, p.192). Anderson's excerpt from; De Voragine, J. (1260). '*The Golden Legend : Reading on The Saints*'. Translated by W.G. Ryan. (1993). Princeton University Press : Princeton, New Jersey.

⁶³ This does allude to the vicarious nature of redemption within the Christian belief system.

⁶⁴ Romans 6: 23, "*For the wages of sin is death.*", could be viewed as further support for this point.

This text, also, affirms the idea of Jesus Christ standing in place of others and offering himself as the price of the 'buy-back' ("ransom") of humankind from sin; once again reinforcing the vicariousness of redemption within the Christian belief system. This theme of redemption flows through the writings of the Apostle Paul, alongside the re-immersion, in certain instances, of the metaphor of the cleansing properties of blood, as was evident within Jewish customary practices. The following set of texts illustrate the point further; together with re-statements of the vicarious nature of the Christian doctrine of redemption.

Hebrews 9: Vs 12

"Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

Ephesians 1: Vs 7

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

Galatians 3: Vs 13

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."

Galatians 4:4-5

"But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

The following set of Scriptural texts, regarded generally, as being outside of the pen of the Apostle Paul, further describe the workings of the divinely conceived redemption plan.

Matthew 20:28

"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Acts 20: 28

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over that which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

I Peter 1 :18-19

“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

Revelation 5: 9

“And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.”

2.6. : The Resurrection of Jesus Christ and Vicarious Redemption.

A further important question which will require serious consideration within this study, is whether the proposition of vicarious redemption within the Christian belief system and doctrinal framework, finds completion at the cross of the crucifixion, or beyond, at the claimed resurrection event of the person of Jesus Christ. In articulating his perspectives on the doctrine of redemption, Kaufman (1968, p.416) notes,

“If this event [the resurrection] in its power and meaning were to dissolve, much of the basis of the Christian claims would be destroyed. For then the end of the revelatory event would be Jesus’ crucifixion, and the meaning of human existence revealed in that occurrence taken simply by itself is bleak tragedy and death. Unlike the “virgin birth” which is a peripheral and dispensable symbol, “resurrection” points to the heart of Christian faith.”

Kaufman (1968, pp.416-417), uses the writings of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 15 : 14-17) to support this crucial point.

"¹⁴And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and our faith is also vain. ¹⁵Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. ¹⁶For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised : ¹⁷And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins."

The centrality of the resurrection event as, *"the decisive culmination of God's self-manifestation in human history, enabling man to become at-one with him"* (Kaufman, 1968, p.417), seems to be implied from this extract from the writings of the Apostle Paul.

In attempting to further understand the interrelatedness between the three key pillars of the Christian faith, the incarnation-the crucifixion-the resurrection, as the *organic material* of the Christian belief system within the Christian soteriology narrative, the work of Thomas Torrance (1995, pp.83-88), *'Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics'*, was particularly useful. In discussing the work of second century Christian writer, Bishop Melito of Sardis, or the works attributed to him, Torrance (1995, p.84) illustrates the interlocking nature of these three pillars of faith.

"As Saviour, Christ embodies the act and the fact of our salvation in his own Person. This is made very clear by Melito in a series of 'I am' statements put into the mouth of Christ who personally and directly identifies himself in his vicarious death and resurrection with divine salvation and stands forth as our divine Vindicator in the face of all accusation and judgment."

Torrance further noted in the related extract from Melito's, *Peri Pascha* (Homily on Passover), that Melito "puts into the mouth of Christ" the following statement;

"Who is he who challenges me? Let him stand against me. I freed the condemned, I brought the dead to life, I raised up the buried. Who is against me, I am the Christ. I am

the one who destroyed death, and triumphed over the enemy and trod down hades, and bound the strong one and lifted man to the heights of heaven. I am the one, says the Christ. Come then, all you families of men who are stained with sins, and receive forgiveness of sins, for I am your forgiveness, I am the Pascha of salvation, I am the lamb slain for you; I am your ransom, I am your life, I am your light, I am your salvation, I am your resurrection, I am your king.”⁶⁵

Having worked through Melito’s self-licensing to, “*put into the mouth of Jesus*”, words which construct the core pillars of salvation and redemption, it is important to note that the works of Melito offered subsequent scholars with foundational elements to the doctrinal formations which were to follow.⁶⁶

2.7: Theories of Atonement and Redemption.

To make sense of the ‘cross’, has to be a central and continuous objective for a Christian and for the Christian church. Heim⁶⁷ (2006, p.1), notes that;

“It is difficult to describe Christianity and leave out the crucifixion. This form of suffering death is seeded through the forms of every Christian tradition.”

The complex task of ‘meaning-making’, of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and the subjects of Atonement, Redemption and Salvation within the Christian belief systems has yielded various theories which have attempted to point Christians and the church towards an

⁶⁵Melito, cited in Torrence (1995, p.84).

The website of ‘Kerux’ : The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary, has proven useful for the reading of the full text of Melito’s ‘*Peri Pascha*’. Online Reference :

Melito of Sardis. On the Passover. Kerux [online]. K:NWTS 4/1, p.5-35 (1989). Available from: <<http://www.kerux.com/doc/0401A1.asp>>. [Accessed 7 October 2013].

⁶⁶ Rashdall, H. (1919, p.194), in his work, ‘*The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology*’, acknowledges the contribution of Melito to the foundational thinking on atonement.

“Then in a Syriac work of Melito we read: “For our Lord, when He was born man, was condemned in order that He might loose, was seized upon in order that He might let go, suffered in order that He might have compassion.” It will be observed that here, as often, the forgiveness of sins is attributed to the direct act of Christ – not to any actual consequence of His death or to the subjective contemplation of that death.”

⁶⁷ At the time of publication, Mark Heim was Professor of Christian Theology at Andover Newton Theological School, Massachusetts.

understanding of the makings of a divinely held purpose for their lives. Heim (2006, pp.2-6), sets the context of the redemptive plan central to the Christian faith, alluding to the need to further explore **how** such a plan comes into effect within the Christian belief system.

“Christians believe God’s action decisively centres in Jesus of Nazareth. From the earliest period, this conviction itself centred on that person’s death by crucifixion and resurrection from the dead. This is expressed in innumerable ways in the language of Christian tradition. Christ died for us. He gave his life as a ransom for humanity. Our lives are fundamentally changed by Christ’s death. Atonement and reconciliation – words used to refer to an explanation of what this change is – describe one detail in this Christian story. Yet they become a short statement of the entire story.”

S. Mark Heim (2006, p. 2), ‘Saved from Sacrifice’.

Said in an alternate manner, Richardson (1969, p.22) notes,

“The various theological theories in which the Church has expressed its theology of the atonement are quite simply various answers made by different theologians in different ages to the question : How did Christ effect this great change in man’s relation to God of which Christian life and faith are evidence?”

Richardson (1969, p.22), comments further on the important point that none of the theories expounded are, by themselves, sufficient and complete explanations of the meaning of the ‘cross’ within the Christian plan of redemption. He notes,

“No one theory should be allowed to be seen as antagonistic to another. In a very real sense they all belong to catholic truth; each expresses an element of the truth uniquely its own, and the wise man would seek to reconcile them knowing that no one theory, nor any combination of them all, is sufficient to contain the fullness of the reality.”⁶⁸

⁶⁸ This is a point to which Bishop N.T. Wright alludes to through his presentation on ‘The Atonement Debate’.

Online Reference :

AllthingsNTWright (2013). N.T. Wright THE ATONEMENT DEBATE. [online]. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gi_ixf7YxCo>. [Accessed 10 August 2013].

The following accounts, whilst clearly not exhaustive on the subject, represents a summary of, and sample from, the more prominent theories of redemption; to explain the key elements of the dominant doctrines of redemption and atonement within the Christian faith.

2.7.1. : The Ransom Theory.

The Ransom Theory of atonement and redemption places the lives and souls of people in the hands of Satan and proposes that God offered the life of Jesus Christ as a ransom payment, to *buy back* the lives and souls of people. (Richardson 1969, p.23). This theory is said to have arisen from the writings of Origen⁶⁹ during the 3rd Century CE [The Patristic period]. The explanation offered by Crisp (2009, p.431)⁷⁰, serves well to thought-process the mechanics of this theory,

“though sinning against God, human beings have sold themselves into slavery to the Devil. God, not wishing to see humanity remain in this benighted situation, designs to bring about the means by which human beings can be emancipated from their vitiated moral condition and indentured state. This involves the incarnation and work of Christ, who hoodwinks the Devil into bringing about his death on the cross. Instead of destroying Christ, this act actually enables Christ to pay the ransom price required to liberate human beings. Thus the work of Christ achieves two interconnected goals: to break the hold evil (in the person of Satan) has over human beings, and to enable human beings to be reconciled with God.”

Hastings Rashdall (1919, pp.259-267), in his work, *‘The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology’*, affirms the association made between Origen and The Ransom Theory of Redemption, and summarises Origen’s position in this regard, as follows.

⁶⁹Origen (186-255) was a second century Christian theologian and Church Father. (Richardson 1969, p.244)

⁷⁰ Crisp, O.D. (2009). In Flint, TP. and Rea, M.C. (eds.) (2009, p.431). The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology. Oxford University Press.

“To Origen the ransom is simply the price – the sufferings and death – which the Son of God had to pay to the Devil as the means of accomplishing the deliverance of man from sin and its penalty. That the ransom was paid to the Devil merely means that the Devil did actually succeed in bringing about Christ’s death.That in some mysterious way the bodily death of Christ (or sometimes simply His coming) prevailed over the powers of evil, Origen certainly held.”

Rashdall (1919, p.261)

Quoting from Origen’s work, *‘Homilies on Leviticus’*, 9.9.; Paul Fiddes (1989, p.131), notes Origen’s explanation of the key idea which gave rise to The Ransom Theory,

“the slain lamb of God...submitted to death, purchasing us back by his own blood from the devil who had got us in his power”

Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus*, 9.9.

In his work *‘Christus Victor’*, the Scandinavian Theologian Gustaf Aulén, pronounced the Ransom Theory as the core or ‘classic’ view of atonement (Kaufman 1968, p.361). In its simplest form, the approach places Jesus Christ as the victor over Satan, in which Jesus Christ, firstly conquers the power of Satan and thereby redeems people from the dominion of Satan.

Crisp (2009, p.432), finds the personification of evil and the need to position God within the theory as engaging in deception with the Devil, as being unnecessary. The question is then validly raised; that, if evil were not personified, then to whom is the ‘ransom’, within the Ransom Theory, paid? Whilst this may be a weak attempt at trying to explain the unexplainable, Crisp (2009, p.432) argues that there is no biblical basis for any theory which causes God to **enter into any pact** with the Devil for the redemption of humankind through the payment of any ransom and points out that biblical Scripture Verses, with references to the payment of a ransom, such as Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10: 45, offers no basis to place God in any such pact.

Matthew 20: 28,

“Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Mark 10 : 45,

“For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

2.7.2. : The Satisfaction Theory.

The earliest systematic exposition of The Satisfaction Theory of Redemption, according to Fiddes (1989, p.96), is generally associated with the works of the 11th Century Theologian, St Anselm⁷¹ of Canterbury.⁷² Whilst the idea of the fallen and sinful nature of humankind is not dissimilar to that held within the Ransom Theory, St Anselm rejects the further reasoning which leads to atonement or redemption and which afforded more power to the devil, than Anselm considered necessary. (Kaufman 1968, p.395). A key element of the Satisfaction Theory is the dishonour brought upon God by this very sinfulness of humankind. Furthermore and central to this theory is that the very *“nature of God is such that he requires satisfaction for sin committed against him”*. (Crisp 2009, p.432).

Kaufman’s (1968, p.395) description of Anselm’s reasoning in support of The Satisfaction Theory is significant. His hermeneutics is directly relevant to the critique levelled by Christopher Hitchens on the idea and doctrine of vicarious redemption. Kaufman notes,

“The problem, as Anselm formulated it, was essentially that of a stained and strained relationship between lowly man and the Lord of the universe (rather than God in mortal conflict with the powers of evil). What analogy could be more fitting for this new formulation than the relationship between lord and serf as found in the contemporary social structure? Lowly man has violated God’s holy will – a mere serf has defied the Lord of the universe – and this creates an intolerable situation. God must assert his righteous

⁷¹The key work of St Anselm (1033-1109), which set the basis for his Theory of Atonement was ‘*Cur Deus Homo*’ (1098), meaning ‘Why did God become man?’ (Fiddes 1989, p.97).

⁷² Such association of The Satisfaction Theory with St. Anselm, is also affirmed by Richardson (1969, p.22); a theory which Richardson refers to as ‘The Judicial Theory.’

lordship over the cosmos through punishing, even destroying, the evildoer. However, God is merciful and wishes to forgive man, re-establishing community with him.”⁷³

⁷³ It is noted that it is the very analogy of the ‘Lord-serf’ relationship, and the reality thereof, which Hitchens rejects; as best captured in the Debate, 15 February 2011 at Wadsworth Theatre, Los Angeles, CA.; facilitated by The American Jewish University. Debate Title : ‘Is there an Afterlife’, Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris Versus Rabbi David Wolpe and Rabbi Bradley Shavit. During the concluding segment of the debate (1 Hr 21.00 minutes), Hitchens appeals for a rejection of this ‘Lord-serf’ relationship. Online Reference : theinfiniteeyes (2011). Is there an Afterlife? - Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, David Wolpe, Bradley Artson Shavit. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjKJ92b9Y04>>. [Accessed 9 May 2013]. Also of significance in relation to this extract by Kaufman, is the very direct point raised during the Richard Dawkins – Alister McGrath Debate, in which Richard Dawkins enquires of McGrath, as to why God could not just forgive humankind if God so wished, and avert the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The following set of Question [Richard Dawkins] and answer [Alister McGrath] builds on the ideas expounded by Kaufman and ties in with the central focus of this study; that being the doctrine of vicarious redemption within Christianity. Richard Dawkins enquires of Alister McGrath [28.30 minutes];

“Obviously one of the central points is the idea of original sin and redemption. As I understand it sin is supposed to have been, in some sense, paid for by the death of Jesus; the torture and death of Jesus. Someone coming to that from outside might think it’s a rather unpleasant doctrine, because we have the idea of punishment as a way of expiating sin, which has some unpleasant aspects to it. It also has the idea of punishing somebody else for the sins that he didn’t commit. It has the idea of, at least in some theologies, punishing him for a sin which was committed by a man, Adam, who didn’t even exist. In other theologies it includes the idea of expiating sins which are yet to be committed in the future; whether or not we, we future people, choose to commit them. And finally one is left with a sort of slightly mischievous feeling; well who was he trying to impress anyway, because after all he was one of the manifestations of God. If he wanted to forgive us our sins, why didn’t he just forgive them instead of going through all that self-torture?”

Alister McGrath responds as follows. [28.36 minutes].

“I think you raised some more questions there and you quite rightly said that theologians differ slightly. What I want to make, will be this; that what Christianity is saying is, there seems to be something wrong with human nature, that we possess, we just don’t possess the capacity to transform ourselves and in some way, in order to experience and enter into the redeemed life, something has to be done for us. It’s a question of not having the adequate resources to actually transform ourselves to be saved and that the Christian understanding that in some way, the life and above all the death and resurrection of Jesus are the basis for this transformation. Now obviously theologians disagree, but the very key theme is that, in some way, by entering into the world, in Christ, God is demonstrating our, the extent to which we have wandered from him and also his yearning or longing that we should actually come back to him. So, for me the death of Christ is about God demonstrating love for us bringing home just how far we are from us [sic]. But also, if you like, making, making it possible to return to him, to relate to him with the removal of barriers such as sin or guilt, which stand in his way. And so for that reason, Christians have very often rightly thought of the death and resurrection of Christ as being right at the centre of the faith, because it is at this point, if you like, that this great act of redemption has taken place, which we are being asked to respond to in some way.”

Online Reference : Ciaran Mac Uistin (2012). Richard Dawkins Debates Alister McGrath. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LGm0iWPC80>>. [Accessed 21 February 2013]. [28.30 minutes].

Fiddes (1989, p.96) uses the idea of a breach in the 'system of justice' to explain the strained relationship between God and humankind which necessitates the remedy of 'satisfaction' which St. Anselm advocates. Fiddes notes;

"When we enquire why any penalty is imposed in human society, one possible answer that might be given is that it pays a moral 'debt' of some kind. Retribution falls on the offender, in the sense that he must repair through his own punishment the system of justice which he has broken."

Building upon this, St Anselm sees the incarnation of "God-as-Man", as a necessary requirement to achieve such redemption or restoration; which Fiddes (1989, p.97) explains as follows.

"Cur Deus Homo? Asks Anselm: why did God become man? He answers: because only man must pay the debt of honour, and only God can pay it."

The repayment or satisfaction of this '*outraged honour of God*' by humankind, as articulated by Richardson (1969, p.23), is an activity not within reach of any human. Vincent Taylor (1887–1968), in his work, '*Jesus and His Sacrifice*', uses the phrase '*the representative activity of Jesus*' to explain this point.

"The truer view of the representative activity of Jesus is one which recognises that in His suffering and death He has expressed and effected that which no individual man has the power or the spirituality to achieve, but into which, in virtue of an ever-deepening fellowship with him, men can progressively enter so that it becomes their offering to God."

Vincent Taylor (1939, p.283).

With the key position held within this theory, as explained above, by scholars such as Vincent Taylor, Paul Fiddes and St. Anselm, himself, that with God as a being of infinite honour, it is understood, then, that no human being can atone for the sin of humankind and thereby offer God the *satisfaction* that is required. Humankind is viewed as being sinful and not capable of

any act of any merit sufficient to achieve atonement. Accordingly, to root the Satisfaction Theory of St Anselm in his work *'Cur Deus Homo'*, must also lead to the point which places **only** God in the position to perform any act which will be of adequate merit to achieve atonement and redemption.⁷⁴ The following extract by Paul Fiddes (1989, p.97), from his work, *'Past Event and Present Salvation : The Christian Idea of Atonement'*, goes beyond just a summary of the Satisfaction Theory of atonement but also articulates the purpose of the life and death of Jesus Christ and, implicitly, the meaning of the 'cross' within the Christian belief system.

"We must either pay a satisfaction to God which restores his honour or suffer the punishment of eternal death. The human predicament is that we are obliged not only to restore the honour we have withheld, but also to pay 'additional compensation' to his outraged dignity, repaying 'something pleasing, in proportion to the injury' we have done to him. Since this is impossible, it seems we must vindicate God's honour in the alternate way, through punishment. But this is the reason for the incarnation and death of the Son of God; by dying as a perfect man who did not deserve to die, Christ offered his life freely to God and so gave him honour in an infinite amount. Thus Christ pays off our debt through his merit, releasing us from the threat of punishment, since God was bound to reward him for his great gift."

In summary, The Satisfaction Theory of St. Anselm represents a significant departure from the Ransom Theory; *"Since it was no longer from the Devil that man was delivered but from God Himself"*, as postulated by Hastings Rashdall (1919, p.357), in his work, *'The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology'*.

⁷⁴ In a strictly theological sense, it could be argued that Mick Jagger of the music band, The Rolling Stones, would have been entirely vindicated in his confession, "I can't get no, satisfaction."; this being the title of their successful tune(1965), written by Mick Jagger and Keith Richards; taken from the Record Album of the same name. 'Satisfaction', in the Anselm sense, was not Jagger's to *get*, it was only God's to *give*.

2.7.3. : The Moral Exemplar Theory or Moral Transformation Theory.

According to Richardson (1969, p.22), the Moral Exemplar Theory is associated with 12th Century French philosopher and theologian, Peter Abelard (1079-1142). The central aspect of this theory is that it was the life and teachings of Jesus Christ which pointed the path to redemption; a transformation towards righteousness, based on faithfully following the moral teachings of Jesus Christ. In this regard, Richardson (1969, p.22), notes the following,

“Abelard’s theory starts from his doctrine of sin which he understood to mean contempt for God’s will. Consequently his whole stress was on intention rather than commission or even omission. This view led him to the exemplarist theory of the atonement according to which the suffering Christ was a supreme example. Christ brought the message of divine forgiveness, and his whole life revealed the love of God in a way which stirs men’s hearts to fresh repentance.”

It is particularly interesting that two respected scholars, whose major works centre on theories of atonement within Christianity, Hastings Rashdall⁷⁵ (1919, p.358) and Robert S.Paul⁷⁶ (1960, p.82), would use the same extract from the work of Abelard himself, to capture the essence of the Moral Exemplar Theory. The following extract is from Rashdall’s work, in which he quotes Abelard⁷⁷;

“Every man is made juster, that is to say, becomes more loving to the Lord after the passion of Christ than he was before, because a benefit actually received kindles the soul into love more than one merely hoped for. Our redemption, therefore, is that supreme love of Christ shown to us by His passion, which not only frees us from slavery to sin, but acquires for us the true liberty of the sons of God, so that we fulfil all things not so much from fear as from love of Him who exhibited so great favour towards us, that favour

⁷⁵ Rashdall, H. (1919). ‘*The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology*’.

⁷⁶ Paul, R.S. (1960). ‘*The Atonement and the Sacraments*’.

Robert S. Paul (1918-1992) was a British born theologian, having earned his D.Phil. from Oxford University in 1945, who moved to America in 1958.

⁷⁷ Abelard’s commentary on the Epistles to the Romans, p.207.

than which, as He Himself attests, none greater can be found: 'Greater love', He says, 'hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.' “

In response to this extract, Paul (1960, p.82) offers the following assessment,

“Abelard has stated the theory here in all its simplicity and attractiveness.”

However Paul (1960, p.83) does go on to add that, *“the great characteristic of the Abelardian theory is that it is extremely simple to state but extremely difficult to live.”*

The latter point is one which Heim (2006, p.5) attempts to deconstruct, in explaining the Moral Exemplar Theory; which he also associates with Abelard. Heim notes,

“The moral influence or “exemplarist” theory that suggests the death [of Jesus Christ] is meant to save us by making such a moving exhibition of God’s love that we are inwardly stirred to gratitude and service in return. Jesus’ death is heroic. It demonstrates perseverance in the right to the final limit of a human life. Jesus’ death demonstrates God’s love to us because it shows the extent to which God is willing to identify with our lot as mortal creatures. It is a kind of shock therapy, appealing to the human conscience in the same way that Gandhi’s willingness to suffer sought to awaken his opponents’ shame and repentance.”

If God’s love is expressed as just described, then, the critique of the theory postulated by Abelard, as embodied in the question raised by Fiddes (1989, p.155), does beg some consideration. To the question; *“Why was love shown in a death?”*, Fiddes responds as follows,

“There is, of course, a straightforward answer to the question as to why the love of God is demonstrated finally in the death of Christ: it is because God himself undergoes the bitter depths of human experience in the cross. God, we may say, shows his love by enduring to the uttermost the estrangement of his own creation. This is the depth of God’s identification with us. But Abelard, like others of his time, is not able to give this answer.”

2.7.4 : The Penal Substitution Theory.

The Penal Substitution Theory has its foundations in the period of the Reformation⁷⁸ which, according to Fiddes (1989, p.9), cast the understanding of atonement within a legalistic paradigm.

“Thus the estrangement of human beings from God was understood in terms of their being law-breakers, summoned to receive condemnation at the divine bar of justice. Atonement, correspondingly, was a matter of satisfying not so much the honour of God as the demands of his Law, with Jesus punished as a substitute for guilty humankind.”

Fiddes (1986, p.9), *‘Past Event and Present Salvation’*.

Not unlike the other theories of atonement and redemption, as discussed, The Penal Substitution Theory is also a response to a set of questions which interrogate the theological systems which underpin the theory. In this regard an important question to be explored is whether the transference of punishment, en bloc, on behalf of the whole of humankind, onto an innocent being, in the person of Jesus Christ, is morally justifiable, by any moral standard, let alone that of the God of the Christian belief system? Flowing from the question of the moral justification of the substitution of the bearer of punishment; wherein the Penal Substitution Theory attempts to make sense of the punishment of the innocent for the sins of the guilty, the question remains, as to **why** God would consider it necessary and justifiable to punish Jesus Christ for the sake of the rest of humankind.

In responding to these fundamental questions, Taylor’s (1939, pp.283-285) notes of the suffering of Jesus Christ, that it is, indeed, *“representative and vicarious, but, in relation to men, it is neither crudely substitutionary nor automatic in its action, but something which is to be owned and appropriated.”* (p. 283). The full import of the point being articulated by Taylor should be understood alongside his application of the constructs of ‘a consciousness of

⁷⁸The Christian Reformation is time-framed within the 16th Century, and its leadership is associated with Martin Luther and John Calvin. (Richardson 1969, p.287). Fiddes (1986, pp.99-102) associates the Penal Substitution Theory with ‘the Reformers’ (p. 100), generally, and with Calvin, in particular (p. 101). Robert Paul (1960, p.92), in his work, *‘The Atonement and The Sacraments’*, accredits the formulation of the Penal theory to Martin Luther.

representation' and 'true self-identification', in his attempts to elucidate the principle of substitutionality within the Christian plan of redemption. Taylor notes,

"True self identification with others is the supreme act of love whereby, in the most intimate manner, they are regarded as oneself, seen in the pure light of God, as they are not able to see themselves, it is to enter at once into their joys and their sorrows, but especially to share the gloom and darkness of their sin, to be conscious of its weight and to feel its shame, so that the sin-bearing becomes a redemptive activity both in itself and in the lives of men. Such a relationship may exist between one individual and another, but in the personality of Jesus, conscious as He was of a unique vocation in relation to men, the self-identification exists not only between Himself and particular individuals, but between Himself and mankind; it is a communal relationship in which there is a consciousness of representing men before God. It is in this large sense that we must interpret the representative and vicarious element in His suffering."

Taylor (1939, p.285), 'Jesus and His Sacrifice.'

If the 'supreme act of love' of which Taylor speaks, is the substance which undergirds the idea of redemption and atonement within the Christian belief system, then, according to Fiddes (1986, p.103), and notwithstanding the paradigm of Law within which the Penal Substitution Theory is framed; *"both Luther and Calvin emphasise that love motivates God to provide the means of propitiation for humankind"*, with the resultant effect of this theory, said in its most direct form, by Fiddes (1986, p.101),

"Penal substitution simply achieves the wiping of a debt from the pages of a divine ledger. "

The question, requiring some consideration, which tends to percolate from this discussion, is whether penal substitution, in the secular or religious sense, serves the ends of justice or is, in essence, a miscarriage of justice. This point brings the issue back to the question of whether it is moral and just, on the part of God, to punish the innocent for the corporate and several offences and sins of the whole of humankind, through substitutionality; within the plan of

dispensing redemption, vicariously; a question which receives its full and severe treatment from Christopher Hitchens in Chapter 4 and 5 of this study.

2.8. The Holy Eucharist and Transubstantiation.

It is declared that this study is not intent on offering a detailed and comprehensive account of the broad and important subjects of The Holy Eucharist and transubstantiation, as practiced within the Christian faith. However, given the importance of these doctrines and religious practices, and particularly, their central place within the plan of redemption within the Christian belief system, an understanding of the significance of these sacraments will be a necessary element of this study.

Firstly, to understand the meaning of The Holy Eucharist and transubstantiation, it will be required that an understanding be reached of the term 'sacrament', itself. In this regard, and within the context of the Christian faith, the explanation of the term by John Macquarrie (1997, p.1)⁷⁹ is very useful.

"Perhaps the goal of all sacramentality and sacramental theology is to make the things of this world so transparent that in them and through them we know God's presence and activity in our very midst, and so experience his grace."

Using the Anglican Catechism, Macquarrie (1997, p.4), explains the meaning of 'sacrament' further, as;

"an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof."

⁷⁹ Macquarrie, J. (1997). A Guide to the Sacraments. SCM Press : London.

At the time of publication of this work, John Macquarrie was Professor of Divinity in the University of Oxford.

Richardson (1960, p. 116) deals with the etymology of the term 'eucharist', as follows.

"Thus the one Hebrew word berachah is translated by the two Greek words eucharistia (thanksgiving) and eulogia (blessing), and the fact that in all the primitive liturgies the bread and wine are consecrated by a prayer of thanksgiving bears witness to the essentially Jewish origins of the Christian Eucharist."

This meaning articulated by Richardson is affirmed and expanded upon by Joseph Martos⁸⁰ (1981, p.233), in his work, 'Doors to the Sacred',

"But the word eucharist refers to more than the body and blood of Christ. It comes from the Greek word meaning "to give thanks," and in the early church it designated not only the bread and wine but also the ritual of worship which surrounded their use. The history of the eucharist is therefore not just the history of sacramental objects but the history of a sacramental action."

Using the symbols of bread and wine, Jesus Christ instituted this sacrament with his disciples on the night before his crucifixion, as what is now written into the human consciousness and vocabulary, as 'The Last Supper'; which, according to Professor Heim (2006, p.231)⁸¹, has become, "the central ritual act of the Church's life".

Prior to any further examination of the The Holy Eucharist or the Last Supper, it is significant to note that understandings of, and religious and liturgical practices related to these sacraments, are not uniform within the whole body of the Christian Church. Richardson (1969, p.344) discusses one case in point; that of the Doctrine of Transubstantiation⁸² within the Roman Catholic Church and the rejection thereof by the Anglican Church. The Council of Trent of the Roman Catholic Church (1551): The Thirteenth Session–Chapter IV, defined 'transubstantiation' as follows;

⁸⁰ Joseph Martos is director of the Institute of Religion and Ministry at Spalding University in Louisville, Kentucky, USA.

⁸¹ Heim, S.M. (2006). 'Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross'. William B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan.

⁸² Richardson (1969, p.344) notes that, for the Roman Catholic Church, as affirmed at the fourth Lateran Council (1215) and the Council of Trent (1551), the term transubstantiation denotes, "the conversion of the whole substance of the bread and of the wine in the Eucharist into the whole substance of the body and blood of Christ respectively"; a position, which Richardson notes, is rejected by the Anglican Church as, "'overthrowing the nature of a sacrament."

“By the consecration of the bread and of the wine, a conversion is made of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and that of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood; which conversion is, by the holy Catholic Church, suitably and properly called transubstantiation.”⁸³

The Eucharist is shared through physical elements, as a constant reminder of the divine grace shown towards humankind, through the death of Jesus Christ. The biblical texts from which the Holy Eucharist is drawn are; Matthew 26: 26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22: 17-20 and I Corinthians 11: 23-25. Whilst all four sets of texts represent a call to remembrance, Matthew 26: 27-28 holds the significant link between the blood of Jesus Christ and the offer of redemption;

“²⁷And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;

²⁸For this is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

An important element of these foundational biblical readings is that they are the **direct** pronouncements of Jesus Christ himself. Macquarrie (1997, pp.36-38) expands on the idea of the life of Jesus Christ as being the perfect and ‘*primordial*’ sacrament⁸⁴, and notes the important point that Jesus Christ is both the, “*content of the sacraments as well as the minister of the sacraments*”. Understanding the foundational texts mentioned and the direct offer, ‘*for the remission of sins*’, made by Jesus Christ, is vital to understanding the ritual of re-commitment to the Christian redemption plan, which participation in the Holy Eucharist represents.

⁸³Extract from, The Council of Trent: The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Ecumenical Council of Trent. Online Reference: The Council of Trent: The Canons and Decrees of the sacred and oecumenical Council of Trent (1545-1563). [Online]. Trento, Italy. Edited and Translated by J. Waterworth (1848). Available from: http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1545-1545,_Concilium_Tridentinum,_Canons_And_Decrees,_EN.pdf. [Accessed 3 July 2013].

⁸⁴Macquarrie (1997, pp.34-44) dedicates a whole chapter of his book, ‘*A Guide to the Sacraments*’, to the idea of Jesus Christ as the ‘*Primordial Sacrament*’.

Macquarrie (1997, p.136), draws the understanding of the sacrament of The Holy Eucharist, which he regards as being the “*jewel in the crown*” of the sacraments, (p. 111), closer to the subject of atonement and redemption, and is, accordingly, of special significance for this study. He argues against the “*sacrifice on Calvary*” or the “*eucharistic sacrifice*” being interpreted in a negative light, “*as a means to overcome the threat of sin, death and hell, which loomed over the human race as the just reward for its sins.*” (Macquarrie 1997, p.136). Speaking of such interpretations, Macquarrie (1997, p.136) notes;

“Often they have used images which reflect a frankly barbaric understanding of the matter, one that should have been left behind with the coming of Christianity itself. I mean, for example, talk of Jesus’ death providing God with a ‘satisfaction’ to compensate for the dishonour done him by the sins of his creatures (Anselm), or of Christ being punished ‘in our place’ (Calvin). In any discussion of eucharist sacrifice, we must put away ideas which think of atonement as a negative transaction designed to save us from some unhappy fate, and see it in affirmative terms as making human beings ‘at one’ with God, bringing them new life from God.”

Macquarrie (1997, p.139) reflects on the elements of the sacrifice embodied within The Holy Eucharist and the idea of the ‘new testament’, as recorded in Mark 14 :22-24⁸⁵, against the Old Testament recordings [Exodus 12 : 24-27]⁸⁶of the Israelite sacrificial feast of the Passover⁸⁷ and offers his account, as follows;

⁸⁵ Mark 14 : 22-24,

“²²And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave it to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. ²³And he too the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. ²⁴And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.”

⁸⁶Exodus 12 : 24-27,

“²⁴And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons forever. ²⁵And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the Lord will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. ²⁶And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? ²⁷That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped.”

⁸⁷An understanding of the central place of the Israelite Passover, within the Judaic religious worldview, is pivotal to understanding the ‘new testament’ to which Jesus Christ referred, as recorded in Mark 14: 22-24. Macquarrie (1997, p.138) explains the ‘Passover’ as follows.

“According to this account [Exodus 12: 24-27], the blood of the sacrificed lambs procured deliverance for the Israelites. It was surely natural to see the new rite which arose out of the Last Supper of Jesus with the disciples as the equivalent of the old Passover, the sacrifice of a new covenant replacing the old. Jesus’ own death very soon came to be regarded in sacrificial terms. When he said at that last meal, ‘This is my body’ and ‘This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many’ (Mark 14 : 22-24), this could hardly fail to imply that here was a new Passover bringing deliverance, a Passover in which Jesus is himself the paschal lamb.”

In similar discussions of the associations between The Holy Eucharist and the temple animal sacrifices which were a part of the historical religious practices of the Israelites, Heim (2006, p.233), notes such associations but points the Eucharist beyond just the idea of a violently executed act of sacrifice, to what he views as the significance of the Eucharist for the Christian faith and the church.

“Celebration of the Eucharist explicitly mirrors the sacrificial event. But it gathers the community as a crowd around the altar and the victim. But it gathers to remember the victim’s innocence, to make peace without violence. In some communion services those who receive the elements enjoined to “feed upon them in your hearts by faith.” Just as bread and wine replace victims, so does this act become the unifying bond among the members, instead of a shared participation in killing. The spiritual practice of making Christ’s own inner life the model for ours is the communion that makes us one. As one postcommunion prayer says, “Grant that we who share these gifts may be filled with the Holy Spirit and live as Christ’s body in the world.” The crowd does not gather around a body; it gathers to become Christ’s body in the world, animated by the Holy Spirit of peace.”

Heim, (2006, pp.232-233), ‘Saved from Sacrifice’

“The Passover was a sacrificial feast. The account of the institution of the Passover in Exodus is presumably idealized, but it shows us how the Jews had understood the festival for a very long time. A lamb was to be killed and its blood exhibited on the lintel and doorposts of the house. When the angel of the Lord came to slay the firstborn of the Egyptians, he would pass over the houses on which the blood of the sacrifice was to be seen. This, it was believed, was the original Passover, and it was to be observed in all future years.”

It could be argued that this excerpt from Heim, reflects the essence of the ‘*new testament*’ spoken of by Jesus Christ (Matthew 26: 28),

“²⁸For this is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

One of the key themes which emerge from Heim’s (2006) work⁸⁸, ‘*Saved from Sacrifice*’, is the shift in focus **away** from the celebration of the Eucharist being viewed as a commemoration of ‘sacrifice’, towards something more audacious and significant.

“Christ has offered his very real body and blood, so that at the Last Supper he can set a new pattern and say of bread, “This will now serve for us as a sacrificial ‘body’,” and of wine, “This will now serve as our sacrificial blood.” Following that example, Christians believe this meal of the new community is able to accomplish the peace that sacrificial violence could, and more. Collectively gathering in community with the victim can spread a contagious unity every bit as powerful as that spread by collective violence against the victim. That is the audacious faith of this practice. In the celebration we recall a real sacrifice and celebrate a substitutionary atonement. Here on this table, bread and wine are to be continually substituted for victims, substituted for any, and all, of us. At this table, the sacrifice stops.”

S. Mark Heim (2006, pp.235-236).

The case postulated by Heim immediately, above, also points to the Eucharist being a **continuing expression** of the ‘*new testament*’ (Matthew 26: 28) of which Jesus Christ is recorded to have spoken; in which the plan of redemption within the Christian belief system is anchored. In his work, ‘*Eucharist and Sacrifice*’, Gustav Aulen⁸⁹ (1958, p.120) captures this point succinctly,

⁸⁸The publication, ‘*Saved from Sacrifice*’, by S. Mark Heim, stands out from the whole body of works researched during this project, as having made a special contribution to the understanding of the core subjects on which this study is focused and deserves special mention.

⁸⁹ Gustav Aulen (1879-1977), was a Swedish Bishop and a recognised theologian within the area of atonement in Christian theology; who argued, in his work ‘*Christus Victor*’ (1931), that the classical doctrine of the atonement,

"The eucharist is inseparably connected with the redemptive act of God in Jesus Christ. This redemptive act is from one point of view a finished act, while from another point of view it is continuous. Both of these viewpoints are equally emphasized. The eucharist has its presupposition in what has been once for all accomplished, and at the same time it is the bearer of the continuous work."

In this regard, it may be appropriate to conclude this section of this study with the same closing statement made by Joseph Martos (1981, p.530), in his work, *'Doors to The Sacred'*,

"For sacraments are not ends in themselves but means to an end. They are doors to the sacred, and so what really counts is not the doors themselves but what lies beyond them."

developed by Martin Luther, was, *"essentially the victory of Christ over the Devil and the powers of darkness."* (Richardson 1969, p.26).

Chapter Three

The Contributions of Christopher Hitchens.

3.1 : Christopher Hitchens - A Biographical Summary.

Full Name Christopher Eric Hitchens

Date of Birth 13 April 1949

Portsmouth, England

Date of Death 15 December 2011

Houston, Texas

Occupation Author and Journalist

For the purpose of this study and in the absence of any known detailed biographical exercise undertaken on the life of Christopher Hitchens, as yet, the biographical background of Christopher Hitchens is drawn largely from Christopher Hitchens, himself, through his recorded interviews and supplemented by related publications on the Internet⁹⁰, as well as from his published bibliography.

Christopher Hitchens parents were British nationals. His Father, Eric Ernest Hitchens was a commander in the British Royal navy and his Mother, Yvonne Jean Hitchens was a member of the Woman's Royal Navy Service.⁹¹ Christopher Hitchens was schooled in England and attended

⁹⁰Online References :

bio.TRUE STORY [online]. (2013). Available from: <<http://www.biography.com/>>. [Accessed 14 September 2013].

bio.TRUE STORY [online]. (2013). Available from: <<http://www.biography.com/people/christopher-hitchens--20845987>>. [Accessed 14 September 2013].

Secular Coalition for America [online]. (2013). Available from: <<http://secular.org/>>. [Accessed 14 September 2013].

Secular Coalition for America [online]. (2013). Available from: <http://secular.org/bios/christopher_hitchens.html>. [Accessed 14 September 2013].

⁹¹ Background information drawn from The Drexel Interview 15 June 2010 : Christopher Hitchens Interviewed by Professor Paula Marantz Cohen, Professor of English at Drexel University, Philadelphia, USA. Online Reference :

Balloil College, Oxford from which he received a PPE Degree (1970) (Philosophy, Politics and Economics). During his stay at Balloil College, he was strongly opposed to the Vietnam War.

The 1970s were very significant foundational years for Hitchens, prior to his decision to move to the United States of America in 1981. The significant aspects of this period, for the purposes of this study were, firstly, his tenure at the *New Statesman*, a London based weekly publication, where he formed a life-long friendship with writer, Martin Amis and secondly, the personal circumstances surrounding the death of his Mother in 1973. His Mother died in a suicide pact with her lover in a hotel room in Athens, Greece and left a note marked for Christopher Hitchens, indicating that, in time he will understand her actions.⁹² Hitchens had the task of visiting Athens to identify the body of his Mother and attend to the arrangements; which he did alone. Hitchens does note that his Mother's lover was a Christian priest.⁹³ He also notes that his Mother had tried to call him the night before her death and that he did not get to speak with her and he felt that had he spoken with her, he would have talked her out of her suicide pact. His Father died in 1987 (1909-1987) of oesophageal cancer; similar to the cause of Christopher Hitchens' death 24 years later in 2011. Speaking of his and his Father's encounter with the same cancer, he notes;

LeCaNANDian (2012). Christopher Hitchens - Drexel Interview (2010). [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUhXKyacMQM>>. [Accessed 3 January 2013].

⁹² Hitchens' detailed account of his mother's life and death are drawn from The Drexel Interview with Professor Cohen. Online Reference : LeCaNANDian (2012). Christopher Hitchens - Drexel Interview (2010). [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUhXKyacMQM>>. [Accessed 3 January 2013]. [7.45 minutes].

⁹³ In The Drexel Interview, Hitchens referred to his mother's lover as a spoilt priest from the Church of England, who could not hold down a Job. Online Reference: LeCaNANDian (2012). Christopher Hitchens - Drexel Interview (2010). [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUhXKyacMQM>>. [Accessed 3 January 2013]. [8.30 Minutes].

John Walsh, a journalist of *The Independent*, undertakes an in-depth review, 28 May 2010, of, *Hitch 22 : A Memoir by Christopher Hitchens*, in which he offers an accounts of Hitchens personal background, relating specifically to the circumstances around the death of his Mother. Online Reference :

Walsh, J. (2010). Hitch-22: a memoir by Christopher Hitchens. *The Independent*, 28 May 2010. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/hitch22-a-memoir-by-christopher-hitchens-1984845.html>. [Accessed 23 August 2013].

“My father had died, and very swiftly, too, of cancer of the esophagus. He was seventy – nine. I am sixty-one. In whatever kind of a “race” life may be, I have very abruptly become a finalist. “

Christopher Hitchens (2012, p.4), *“Mortality”*.⁹⁴

In 1979 Hitchens’s appointment as the *New Statesman’s* Foreign Editor, set the ground for his engagement with politics and religion; which position he held until moving to America in 1981. From his days at Balliol College, Oxford, to the time of his death, Hitchens claimed to be aligned to Marxist ideology.

The 1980s and early 1990s for Hitchens was marked by a set of publications⁹⁵ and the start of his association with *The Nation*, with his column, the *Minority Report*. His term at *The Nation* ended in 2002 over differences of opinion over the Iraq War. The set of books published, marked Hitchens as an uncompromising critique of power, authority and corruption; particularly through his challenges to the institution of The British Royal Family, Mother Teresa, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Ugandan Christian militia leader Joseph Kony, President Clinton and his final adversary, God⁹⁶. Right up until the time of his death, and despite the controversies which his works had stirred, Hitchens claimed that his publications were based on facts, on which he was open to being challenged and engaged on.⁹⁷ 1992 saw the start of his long relationship with the publication *Vanity Fair*, which lasted up until the time of his death.

⁹⁴ *‘Mortality’*, was the last book written by Christopher Hitchens, prior to his death in December 2011. The book was published in 2012.

⁹⁵ 1984 *Cyprus - Hostage to History: Cyprus from the Ottomans to Kissinger*.

1988 *Blaming the Victims : Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question* (contributor and co-editor with Edward Said).

1990 *The Monarchy*.

1990 *Blood, Class and Nostalgia: Anglo-American Ironies*.

1995 *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice*.

1997 *The Parthenon Marbles: The Case for Reunification*.

1999 *No One Left to Lie to: The Values of the Worst Family*. Also released with the Subtitle : The Triangulations of William Jefferson Clinton.

⁹⁶In this regard, his book, *‘God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything’* (2007) was a direct and forthright critique of religion.

⁹⁷ Hitchens’ 2001 publication, *‘The Trials of Henry Kissinger’*, and the Documentary film which followed this publication, is a case in point. The film represented an open challenge to Kissinger, on the case constructed by

The overarching points of significance of these early publications, for this study, is that they signalled the emergence of what was a unique journalistic and literary talent, which placed Christopher Hitchens in the 'public square' as an influential public intellectual who was worthy of engagement and which, already, began to point to the direction in which he was headed. Following his ground-breaking publication in 2001, *'The Trials of Henry Kissinger'*, which was later made into a documentary film⁹⁸, the years up to 2007 saw a set of publications⁹⁹ which prepared the way for Hitchens' 2007 work, *'God is Not Great : How Religion Poisons Everything'*; which is a central focus of this study. The publication of *'God is Not Great'* was followed by an extensive book tour through North America, with a series of debates with prominent theologians, political leaders and academics¹⁰⁰, which also represent an important body of source material for this study. It is significant to note that Hitchens specifically requested his publishers to arrange the book tour for, *'God is Not Great'*, through the American heartland of Christian conservatism; through the 'Bible Belt' and to wherever else practicing Christians, theologians and Academics wished to debate with him. Hitchens notes in the Hitchens-Ghomeshi interview¹⁰¹, examined in detail later in the study, in Chapter 5, that this

Hitchens, which led to his classification of Kissinger as a 'War Criminal' [7.25 minutes]. In the same documentary film Lewis Lapham, the Editor of Harpers Magazine notes [8.31 minutes], the concerns raised around the decision by the magazine to publish a serialised version of the book, with the possible risk of being sued for libel by Kissinger. The decision by Harpers Magazine and, indeed Hitchens, to present the case against Kissinger to the public, represented a challenge to Kissinger to respond to the charges levelled against him by Hitchens, a challenge which Kissinger never took up. Hitchens summarises his case against Kissinger as follows [7.25 minutes];

"The statement, 'Henry Kissinger is a war criminal' is one I have been making for many years. Its' now not a piece of rhetoric, not a metaphor, it's a job description."

'The Trials of Henry Kissinger' [7.25 minutes]

Online Reference :

Capriluvada (2011). The Trials of Henry Kissinger. [online]. Available from:
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bFOhAAYfqk>>. [Accessed 15 April 2013].

⁹⁸2001 The Trials of Henry Kissinger

⁹⁹2001 *Letters to a Young Contrarian*.

2002 *Why Orwell Matters*.

2004 *Love, Poverty and War: Journeys and Essays*.

2005 *Thomas Jefferson: Author of America*.

2007 *Thomas Paine's Rights of Man: A Biography*.

2007 *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever*.

¹⁰⁰British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, theologians such as William Lane Craig, Frank Turek, David Wolpe, Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, Alister McGrath, and Douglas Wilson, to name a few.

¹⁰¹ Interview: Christopher Hitchens and Jian Ghomeshi. Online Reference :

approach to the book tour sparked the international success of the book, as well as opened up the discourse to a broader audience.

3.2 : Hitchens - The Political Man

There were two key social events which shaped the course of the last ten years of Christopher Hitchens' life which needs mention; as it does influence any attempt at understanding his mind on religion. The first was the 1989 fatwa or edict issued by the Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini against the life of author Salman Rushdie for his publication, *The Satanic Verses*. (Hitchens 2007, p.28)¹⁰². Besides being a close friend of Rushdie, Hitchens strongly opposed any attack on an individual's right to free speech and expression; a position he held strongly through the Danish cartoon controversy of 2006.¹⁰³ The second event was the New York World Trade Centre Bombings of 11 September 2001; an event which changed Hitchens' position within the political arena; leading to his support for the Bush Administration's invasion of Iraq.¹⁰⁴ Whilst these issues are distant from the subject matter of vicarious redemption, they are a part of what makes up the person of Christopher Hitchens and particularly his fierce anti-totalitarian stand, which extends into his interpretation of matters religious. Hitchens' support for the War in Iraq, placed him in the Neo-Conservative camp with the likes of American Vice-President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz.

Q with Jian Ghomeshi (2009). Christopher Hitchens in Studio Q. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeWpTjmtgXQ>>. [Accessed 2 May 2013]. [15.40 minutes].

¹⁰² Hitchens (2007 : 28), *'God is not Great'*,

¹⁰³ Debate: Christopher Hitchens and Shashi Tharoor (2007) : Freedoms of Speech. During this debate, Hitchens remains steadfast on his support for freedom of speech, particularly where any infringement thereof was brought upon by religious influences. Online Reference :

ChristopherHitchslap (2011). Christopher Hitchens vs. Shashi Tharoor FREEDOM OF SPEECH. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jw3dDbc1BHE>>. [Accessed 13 February 2013].

¹⁰⁴ Hitchens was unambiguous in his support of the American led invasion of Iraq, as recorded in his presentation "Why Orwell Matters". Online Reference :

TheHitchensArchives (2013). Christopher Hitchens - [~2005] - Why Orwell Matters. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rY5Ste5xRAA>>. [Accessed 17 May 2013]. [1.20-1.27 minutes].

Whilst it is no intention of this study to delve into Hitchens' case for or against any war, the point being highlighted is that his special hermeneutic in interpreting religion and its constituent elements was shaped by his analysis and convictions from within the political sphere. Whether one needs to consider his utterances on God being a 'celestial dictator'¹⁰⁵, or his position on the 'axis of evil' not being North Korea, Iraq and Iran¹⁰⁶, but being Christianity, Judaism and Islam¹⁰⁷; one has to consider his political analysis which shaped such hermeneutic over the years. Therefore it could be argued that his polemic on religion, infused with his strong political convictions, was central to establishing Hitchens as one of the most formidable iconoclasts of his generation.

3.3 : Christopher Hitchens - A Brief Literature Review.

To undertake a theological critique of the works of a non-theologian and anti-theist, who has had no formal graduate qualification in theology could, in itself, be considered to be '*out of structure*' or, in a sense, post-structural. How and with what instruments would such an analysis be undertaken? Given the wide range of subjects covered within Christopher Hitchens' published material, the response to this question, also falls out of conventional structure and method. Having earlier accounted for his written publications, this section of the study will focus on a specific set of his written material, which represent the theological markers along his journey of anti-theism; culminated in the publishing of his book, '*God is Not Great*' (2007), which multiplied his prominence, internationally, as a vociferous critic of religion.

¹⁰⁵ Hitchens (2007, pp.248-250), '*God is Not Great*', describes, in his view, the totalitarian regime of North Korea.

¹⁰⁶ Taken from extracts of USA President George W. Bush's State of The Union Address: The Axis of Evil Speech, 29 January 2002. Online Reference :

KellyWurx (2013). President Bush Axis of Evil Speech. [online]. Available from:

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btkJhAM7hZw>>. [Accessed 17 May 2013]. [7.50 minutes].

In this regard, Hitchens notes that he had travelled to all three 'Axis of Evil' countries. It is evident that his personal experiences in all three of these countries shaped his staunch anti-totalitarian stance.

¹⁰⁷ During his presentation on the axis of evil (Iran, Iraq and North Korea), Hitchens notes that he has travelled to all three countries. Online Reference :

Christopher Hitchens (2013). Christopher Hitchens - The axis of evil. [online]. Available from:

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTti3qrju5s>>. [Accessed 10 October 2013]. [0.25 minutes].

Whilst certain of Hitchens' publications, such as, *'The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice'* and *'The Trials of Henry Kissinger'*, may not relate directly to the subject of vicarious redemption or the Christian faith, they point to the formations in thought, purpose and hermeneutic, on the part of Hitchens, through his engagement with such content. The purpose in focusing on these publications is to draw out and examine the impact on his critique of religion, done by the contempt with which Hitchens looked upon persons who, in his view, had abused positions of public office and who were public figures of influence in society. In this regard, the book *'The Triangulations of William Jefferson Clinton'*, could be considered a reading companion to the two works on Mother Teresa and Henry Kissinger just highlighted.

A further important aspect demonstrated within Hitchens' accounts in these three works is his confident disregard for any potential negative legal blow-back which could have resulted from the serious allegations which he levelled against the respective key parties within these publications. Such was his confidence in the factual content of the cases which he constructed; which up until his death, had not been challenged legally.

To work to the top of the pack, with regard to Hitchens critique of religion, getting to the publication, *'God is not Great'*, requires a compulsory stop at *'The Portable Atheist'*, which could be regarded as its reading companion. As Hitchens had drawn heavily from all of the contributors to *'The Portable Atheist'*, to construct his critique of religion, this study is required to do likewise, to glimpse into the makings of the Hitchens-hermeneutic and the case built against the Christian proposition of vicarious redemption.

3.3.1 : The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice (1995).

Christopher Hitchens' scathing critique of the life and work of Miss Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu – popularly known as Mother Teresa (1910-1997), was, in many respects ground-breaking. Through a detailed account of her and her activities in Calcutta, India; Hitchens offered a view

of Mother Teresa, alternate to that which the world was accustomed to. The view of Mother Teresa presented by Hitchens in his book (1995), *'The Missionary Position : Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice'*, is that her overriding objective was to proselytize the Christian faith and is, in the process, accused of providing the minimal care to sick residents, for which she received sufficient funding, which funding was redirected to the establishment of faith-based Missionaries of Charity stations around the world, and for courting known dictators and fraudsters for financial reward. (1995, pp.66-71).¹⁰⁸ This was a case of proselytizing Christianity under the banner of Christian humanism, which had gone badly wrong, according to Hitchens.

The following extract¹⁰⁹ affirms the point just made. The extract is from an Interview with Christopher Hitchens conducted by the publication, *The Free Enquiry*, a bi-monthly journal of secular humanist opinion and commentary published by the Council for Secular Humanism in America. The transcript of the Interview was published in *Volume 16, Number 4*, (1996). The Interview was conducted by Matt Cherry, executive director of the Council for Secular Humanism.

"Free Inquiry: According to polls, Mother Teresa is the most respected woman in the world. Her name is a by-word for selfless dedication in the service of humanity. So why are you picking on this sainted old woman?"

¹⁰⁸In this publication, Hitchens refers particularly to the Duvallier Family of Haiti and Charles Keating, a convicted fraudster of the American Savings and Loans racket. Of particular significance is the fact that Mother Teresa wrote a letter to the presiding Judge Ito in the Keating Court Case and pleaded for his clemency. A copy of the letter by Mother Teresa is recorded on Page 67 of this book. Whilst Mother Teresa claims to have had no knowledge of Mr Keatings fraudulent activities, these were pointed out to her in a detailed letter by the Deputy District Attorney Mr Paul Turley, a copy of which is recorded on page 68 of this book. Mr Turley explained the seriousness of the crime to Mother Teresa and called for the return of the ill-gotten gains donated to her Charity. Hitchens records (page 70), that three years after the letter was sent to Mother Teresa there was no acknowledgement thereof, nor any attempt made by Mother Teresa or her Charity to return the funds.

Besides his detailed coverage of Miss Bojaxhiu in his book, Hitchens' scathing critique of Mother Teresa is also well covered during the Debate between Frank Turek and Christopher Hitchens: *'Does God Exist?'* Dated 9 September 2008, held at Virginia Commonwealth University. Online Reference:

Frank Turek (2011). Turek vs Hitchens Debate: Does God Exist?. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7WBEJJIYWU>>. [Accessed 29 April 2013]. [35.20 minutes].

¹⁰⁹ Online reference for full transcript :

Cherry, M. (2006). Christopher Hitchens On Mother Theresa (Interview). [pdf] Free Inquiry Magazine (Vol. 16, Number 4). Available from : http://www.philosophy-religion.org/world/pdfs/christopher-hitchens_mother-theresa.pdf. [Accessed 17 September 2013].

Christopher Hitchens: *Partly because that impression is so widespread. But also because the sheer fact that this is considered unquestionable, is a sign of what we are up against, namely the problem of credulity. One of the most salient examples of people's willingness to believe anything if it is garbed in the appearance of holiness is the uncritical acceptance of the idea of Mother Teresa as a saint by people who would normally be thinking - however lazily - in a secular or rational manner. In other words, in every sense it is an unexamined claim. It's unexamined journalistically - no one really takes a look at what she does. And it is unexamined as to why it should be she who is spotlighted as opposed to many very selfless people who devote their lives to the relief of suffering in what we used to call the "Third World." Why is it never mentioned that her stated motive for the work is that of proselytization for religious fundamentalism, for the most extreme interpretation of Catholic doctrine? If you ask most people if they agree with the pope's views on population, for example, they say they think they are rather extreme. Well here's someone whose life's work is the propagation of the most extreme version of that."*

One of the most revealing claims to emerge from Hitchens' investigations into the life of Mother Teresa is that her rise to international prominence was triggered by a misapprehension on the part of documentary film-maker Malcolm Muggeridge, who had mistaken the scientific advances in light enhancement in Kodak Celluloid Technology at the time, to be some divine light brought to shine upon the inside of the Missionaries of Charity facility, which event he described as "*the first photographic miracle*" (2007, p.146).¹¹⁰

What would be the point in Christopher Hitchens choosing to discredit the life of somebody who went on to earn the Nobel Peace Prize (1979), (Hitchens 1995, p.56), and what would be the relevance of his actions to this study? Hitchens disproved the basis upon which Mother Teresa has garnered her public status and sought to disprove and discredit the supposed

¹¹⁰ Hitchens (2007, p.146), '*God is Not Great*'.

'miracle' upon which her beatification was confirmed in 2003¹¹¹. Hitchens' objective was to expose false claims made under the banner of faith-based religion; a theme that cuts through all of his work on religion since, *'The Missionary Position'*¹¹². Further relevance of this publication for this study can be found in the following summary of his critique of Mother Teresa.

"Yet there will come a day in Rome when a vast and solemn ceremony will proclaim the sainthood of Mother Teresa, as one whose intercession can improve upon medicine, to the entire world. Not only is this a scandal in itself, but it will further postpone the day when Indian villages cease to trust quacks and fakirs. In other words, many people will die needlessly as a result of this phony and contemptible "miracle". If this is the best the church can do in a time when its claims can be checked by physicians and reporters, it isn't difficult to imagine what was rigged in past times of ignorance and fear, when the priests faced less doubt or oppression." (2007, p.148)¹¹³

3.3.2 : The Trial of Henry Kissinger (2001).

Why would Christopher Hitchens wish to take to task another Nobel Peace Prize recipient, in Henry Kissinger and why would such purposes have any application to this study? Not unlike his work on Miss Bojaxhiu¹¹⁴, Hitchens' account of the record of Kissinger was based on detailed

¹¹¹ Consideration may also be given to Hitchens' documentary film on the life of Princess Diana, of the British Royal Family, called; *'Diana : The Mourning After'*, in which he present an view of Princess Diana, alternate to that with which the general public are familiar; based on information which was proven to have been deliberately suppressed by the media. Online Reference of full documentary film :

GodlessUK (2013). Christopher Hitchens - Diana: The Mourning After [1998] Full Version. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6TkVFvicUY>>. [Accessed 24 September 2013].

¹¹² Following the publication of the book, *"The Missionary Position"*, Hitchens made a documentary film of his work; called "Hell's Angel", which detailed his version of the life of Mother Teresa. Online Reference for full documentary film :

ArkanumFour (2012). Hells Angel (Mother Teresa) - Christopher Hitchens. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJG-lgmPvYA>>. [Accessed 20 January 2013].

¹¹³ *'God is not Great'*, p.148.

¹¹⁴ Hitchens admitted that he had pushed his comments to an extreme, by calling her a, *"fundamentalist and a fanatic and a fraud"*, and, *"a lying, thieving, Albanian dwarf"*. Excerpts from an Interview with Steve Kroft of American Television Programme, 60 Minutes. Online Reference :

research of official source material to construct a 'case' against Kissinger; calling for his prosecution as a 'war criminal'¹¹⁵. The book, which was later made into a documentary film, focused mainly on Kissinger's direct hand in the formulation and execution of American foreign policy in Vietnam, Cambodia, East Timor and Chile. Hitchens challenged Kissinger to a public debate or private discussion on the issues reviewed, which Kissinger declined¹¹⁶.

Hitchens was determined to present the public with his research and findings, which appear to reveal aspects of the disconnectivity between a person's life and the role that it plays in shaping public policy, which has a direct bearing on the lives of people. Whether one had to work with any of the books; *'The Missionary Position'*, or, *'The Trial of Henry Kissinger'*, or, *'The Triangulations of William Jefferson Clinton'*, it is evident that Hitchens reflected a strong compulsion to call to account people of influence who, according to Hitchens, had deliberately mislead the public and whose actions had brought harm to others.¹¹⁷ Having considered these publications and the evolution of the *Hitchens hermeneutics* reflected in these works, it seems reasonable to conclude that, whilst the subject of religion and God, which are brought under scrutiny in, *'God is Not Great'*, may have been the ultimate counterpart for Hitchens, his method of enquiry and his common motivation, was not dissimilar to that reflected in the other three publications referred to immediately above.

In summary, Christopher Hitchens' distaste for celebrity culture, particularly where he claimed that it was based on misrepresentation, found its progression throughout his published

CBSNewsOnline (2011). Christopher Hitchens, still outrageous. [Online]. Available from :

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OkAMOrnyy30>. [Accessed 28 May 2013]. [3.20 minutes].

¹¹⁵Hitchens is clear in his reference to Kissinger as a 'war criminal' and in his call for his prosecution as such.

Online Reference for full documentary film :

Capriluveda (2011). The Trials of Henry Kissinger. [online]. Available from:

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bFOhAAYfqk>>. [Accessed 15 April 2013]. [7.25 minutes].

¹¹⁶ Documentary Film, The Trials of Henry Kissinger. Online Reference :

Capriluveda (2011). The Trials of Henry Kissinger. [online]. Available from:

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bFOhAAYfqk>>. [Accessed 15 April 2013]. [6.40 minutes].

¹¹⁷ In both sets of documentary films on Henry Kissinger and Mother Teresa, as referenced above, and in the respective books on which the films were based, a recurrent theme conveyed by Hitchens is the direct hand of both Kissinger and Mother Teresa in the cause and/or perpetuation of the misery and suffering of others and the need to have them held accountable for their actions.

literature and public engagements in interviews and debates; culminating in his critique of religion and the idea of God. In responding to Steve Kroft's point regarding the people whom Hitchens chose to critique, he noted;

*"In a way it has to end with the belief in the divine. Yes, that is the origin of all dictatorship."*¹¹⁸

3.3.3 : The Portable Atheist - Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever. (2007)

This book does what it aims for; by being a set of 'Essential readings for the Nonbeliever'. The book is edited by Christopher Hitchens, who also pens the introduction (Pages 17-33). The text is comprised of contributions from, scientists, philosophers, academics and historical figures of prominence, from within the realms of deism and atheism, spanning from Lucretius, the Roman philosopher, to Spinoza, the Dutch philosopher, to biologist Charles Darwin; through to contemporary stalwarts of anti-theism, such as Bertrand Russell, Richard Dawkins and Victor Stenger. The purpose of the book could be summarised in Hitchens' closing lines to the Introduction (p.33);

"It is in the hope of strengthening and arming the resistance to the faith-based, and to faith itself, that this anthology of combat with humanity's oldest enemy is respectfully offered."

In the introduction, Hitchens paints his non-belief, and parts of his reasons therefore, with a broad and bold brush; urging the reader of this anthology on atheism to pursue the full works of the respective contributors (p.16). As one who was in the vanguard of the modern movement against theism and theocracy, it may be said of Hitchens that he had a strong hand in shifting the centre of gravity of this discourse and can take some credit for his own assertion:

¹¹⁸Excerpt from an Interview with Steve Kroft on Television Programme '60 Minutes'. Online Reference : CBSNewsOnline (2011). Christopher Hitchens, still outrageous. [Online]. Available from : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OkAMOrnyy30>. [Accessed 28 May 2013]. [7.30 minutes].

"A terrible thing has happened to religion. Except in the places where it can still enforce itself by fear superimposed on ignorance. It has become one opinion among many. It is forced to compete in the free market of ideas and, even when it strives to retain the old advantage of inculcating its teachings into children (for reasons that are too obvious to need underlining). It has to stand up in open debate and submit to free enquiry."

(2007, p.33)

The Portable Atheist marks an important contribution towards this end and this expressed view of Hitchens would have to underpin every aspect of this study if this enquiry had to meaningfully seek his responses to the theological construct of vicarious redemption. With the publications of *'The Portable Atheist'* and *'God is Not Great'*, the critique of religion had a new and formidable addition to its camp; 'Christopher Hitchens'.

3.4 : Hitchens - The Intellectual Street-Fighter¹¹⁹.

Christopher Hitchens is known to have been a widely read and widely travelled author and journalist, who always appeared comfortable engaging on any issue, being interviewed in front of a television camera, or behind a university podium, or engaging in stand-up comedy at festivals.¹²⁰ His extensive travels certainly had a bearing on his life and on his writings and the following points are noted in this regard.

¹¹⁹ 'Hitchens – The Intellectual Street-Fighter', is a description of Hitchens, gained from an article by John Broening of The Denver Post, published 3 March 2013. Online Reference :

Broening, J. (2013). Book Review: "Unhitched" posthumously hammers Christopher Hitchens. [Online]. The Denver Post, 3 March 2013. Available from: http://www.denverpost.com/books/ci_22691626/book-review-unhitched-posthumously-hammers-christopher-hitchens. [Accessed 15 September 2013].

¹²⁰ Besides the literature review covered in this project, this study is also based on a wide collection of film material which depicts the life and work of Christopher Hitchens; much of which engages with Hitchens himself, whilst many of the film recordings are with his close friends and colleagues. The reference list of recorded film material which is submitted as a part of the set of resources on which this study is based, illustrates the breath of his interests, travels and public and scholarly engagements.

- Hitchens travelled to all three 'Axis of Evil'¹²¹ countries; Iran, Iraq and North Korea. In the case of Iraq, Hitchens had direct close encounters with Kurdish separatists who did not enjoy the favour of the late Iraqi president Saddam Hussein. Witnessing the effects of the rule of President Saddam Hussein on the Kurds influenced the formation of Hitchens' views on totalitarian rule¹²². Further to Iraq, Hitchens claims to have experienced, first hand, life under a totalitarian dictatorship, through his visit to North Korea.¹²³
- Christopher Hitchens received a special invitation from the Vatican to offer evidence as to why he believed that the beatification of Miss Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu should not proceed, as nominated by Pope John Paul II; which invitation he honoured. In explaining this experience in the article, '*Mommie Dearest*', published in Slate Magazine, 20 October 2003, Hitchens notes that he had to take on the role of '*advocatus diaboli*' ("devil's advocate") to challenge the nomination; without a successful outcome in his favour.¹²⁴

¹²¹ It is noted that these so called 'Axis of Evil' countries, build from the broad assumptions initiated in George W. Bush's post-9/11 State of the Union Address, as referenced above, which initiated the current use of the term. Of significance is that Christopher Hitchens, by using this caption without qualification, added credence to the assumption or assessment that Iran, Iraq and North Korea are a part of an '*Axis of Evil*' in the world, to the implicit exclusion of other states which may be more suitably qualified for membership to this select club.

¹²² In his Article, published 16 October 2006 in The New Yorker, entitled, '*He Knew He was Right : How a former socialist became the Iraq war's fiercest defender*', Ian Parker gives an extensive account of Christopher Hitchens' opposition to the treatment which the Kurds of Iraq were subjected to by Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi Bath Party. Parker also traces the development of Hitchens close association with key members of the Bush Administration in Washington, particularly Hitchens' relationship with Paul Wolfowitz, who served as Deputy Secretary of Defence (2001-2005) and whom Ian Parker notes as being a "primary architect of the invasion of Iraq". Parker notes in his Article;

"As Wolfowitz knew, Hitchens was a longtime observer of the cruelty of Saddam Hussein, and had spoken publicly of his removal since 1998. He supported the cause of Kurdish independence, and he had been to Halabja and seen the injuries caused there by Iraqi chemical weapons; and he was friendly with dissident Iraqis in exile, including Ahmed Chalabi, of the Iraqi National Congress."

Online Reference :

Parker, I. (2006). Profiles: He Knew He Was Right - How a former socialist became the Iraq wars fiercest defender. 16 October 2006. The New Yorker [online]. Available from :
<http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/10/16/061016fa_fact_parker>. [Accessed 2 November 2013].

¹²³ Debate between Christopher Hitchens and his brother Peter Hitchens; during which Hitchens notes his visit to North Korea. Online Reference :

Ultra Noctem (2010). Hitchens vs God (god loses by the way). [Online]. Available from :
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7nIRJVmZ4K8>. [Accessed 10 May 2013]. [3.36 minutes].

¹²⁴ Hitchens (2007, p. 145), '*God is Not Great*'. For further reference, Hitchens' Article in Slate magazine, 20 October 2013, elaborates on this aspect. Online Reference :

- As extreme an indictment as his publications were on persons such as Miss Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu, President William J. Clinton and Ex-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, there is no record of his claims having been met with any serious legal challenge by any of these parties or their representatives.

3.5 : Hitchens on the Roots of Vicarious Redemption in Christianity. The Gospel Accounts and The 'Historical' Jesus Christ.

A key element, necessary for any understanding of Hitchens' theological transactions with the Christian faith and its' advocates, is that of the historicity of Jesus Christ, as the central figure of the doctrine of vicarious redemption. Therefore any analysis of the historical Jesus Christ, in this context, cannot be conducted outside of Hitchens' critique of the New Testament, itself. The following points represent a summary of Hitchens' position on this central issue.¹²⁵

- The correlation [Matthew 21:4]¹²⁶ between the New Testament Gospel recordings and the Old Testament foretelling of the advent of Jesus Christ, is viewed as being retrospectively conjured up accounts of the Gospel writers, aimed at vindicating the supposed prophetic texts, such as that of Zachariah 9: 9¹²⁷. Hitchens' overall position on both the Old Testament and New Testament is a premise from which to grasp his stand on the historical Jesus Christ.

*"Just like the Old Testament, the "New" one is also a work of crude carpentry, Hammered together long after its purported events, and full of improvised attempts to make things come out right."*¹²⁸

Hitchens, C.E. (2003). Mommie Dearest: The pope beatifies Mother Teresa, a fanatic, a fundamentalist, and a fraud. [Online]. Slate, 20 October 2003. Available from: http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/fighting_words/2003/10/mommie_dearest.html. [Accessed 18 July 2013].

¹²⁵ A summary of the key points highlighted by Hitchens, 'God is not Great', Chapter 8: 'The "New" Testament Exceeds the Evil of the "Old" One'.

¹²⁶ Matthew 21: Vs 4; "All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoke by the prophet,"

¹²⁷ Zachariah 9: Vs 9; "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."

¹²⁸ 'God is not Great', p.110.

- The Synoptic Gospel recordings, in Hitchens' view, cannot be regarded as being a historical account, because they are contradictory, inconsistent, one with another, and they are collectively unauthentic.¹²⁹ He uses the work of prominent New Testament scholar, Bart Erhmann to support his point (2007, p.122).¹³⁰ Hitchens discusses the financially successful motion picture, *'The Passion of the Christ'*¹³¹, produced by Mel Gibson, to illustrate the point that the interpretation, application and promotion of the contents of the biblical Gospels as 'eyewitness accounts' usually goes unchallenged and Hitchens notes that to refer to the Gospels as such is a *"patently fraudulent claim"*(p. 111).¹³²
- Hitchens rejects the biblical narrative of the virgin-birth of Jesus Christ as not having any credible standing and notes that the whole episode of the virgin birth arises from a convoluted mistranslation of the word *'almah'* which means *'a young woman'*, into the biblical account and subsequent Christian doctrine, to mean *'a virgin'*, who had no prior sexual encounter. Hitchens (2007, pp.115), *'God is Not Great'*, notes;

"The picture is even further altered when we know that the word translated as "virgin," namely almah, means only "a young woman." In any case parthenogenesis is not possible for human mammals, and even if this law were to be relaxed in just one case, it would not prove that the resulting infant had any divine power. Thus, and as usual, religion arouses suspicion by

¹²⁹ Whilst Hitchens may apply the work of a modern scholar like Bart Erhmann to elucidate his point, his stance shows strong signs of being rooted in that of Thomas Paine (1795 : pp.128-152) in, *'The Age of Reason'*, where Paine attempts to illustrate the inconsistencies inherent within the biblical Gospels.

¹³⁰*'God is not Great'*, p.122. Professor Bart Erhmann is incorrectly referred to as "Barton Erhmann".

¹³¹ The Film *'The Passion of The Christ'* which was released in 2004, was directed and co-produced by Mel Gibson. The film depicts the last day of the life of Jesus Christ, with flashbacks to his teachings and earlier encounters with the Disciples, culminating in his crucifixion and resurrection. Hitchens is strongly critical of the film (p.110.);

"In 2004, a soap-opera film about the death of Jesus was produced by an Australian fascist and ham actor named Mel Gibson. Mr Gibson adheres to a crackpot and schismatic Catholic sect consisting mainly of himself and of his more thuggish father, and has stated that it is a pity that his own dear wife is going to hell because she does not accept the correct sacraments." Hitchens goes on to note (p.111), that Mel Gibson defended his film, "as being based on reports of "eyewitness". At the time, I thought it extraordinary that a multimillion-dollar hit could be openly based on such a patently fraudulent claim, but nobody seemed to turn a hair."

¹³²*'God is Not Great'*, Page 111.

trying to prove too much."

In this regard, the significance of the collection of works published within Hitchens' (2007), *'The Portable Atheist'*, is a strong indication of the writers and thinkers who influenced his consciousness towards the religious. Of particular interest, on the matter of the virgin-birth account of Jesus Christ, is the contribution of Chapman Cohen (1868-1954)¹³³; who notes that virgin-birth accounts of deities are not unique to the Judeo-Christian account, but were a common feature of pre-Christian belief systems in many parts of the world.¹³⁴ The significance of Hitchens' point on the virgin-birth account, cannot be overstated; that even if it were to be conceded that the conception of Mary the mother of Jesus Christ, was as 'immaculate' (p.115)¹³⁵ as claimed, it will still not prove that Jesus Christ was 'God's Son', or that he was of any divine constitution.

¹³³ Cohen, C. (2007). Monism and Religion : An Old Story. In: C.E. Hitchens, (ed). *'The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever'*. Da Capo Press : Boston, MA., pp272-277.

¹³⁴ It is noted that Chapman Cohens' contributions on the subject of the virgin-birth account of the New Testament Gospels, and the common thread which he traces from earlier mythical belief systems through to the Gospel accounts, does impinge on any case made for the historicity of Jesus Christ. In this regard, also, the combined effect of Cohens' work, alongside H.L. Menckens', "*Memorial Service*", which Hitchens includes as a Chapter (20) in, *The Portable Atheist*, represents a notable body of influence on the position which Hitchens adopted on the historicity of the figure of Jesus Christ. The significance of the Cohen-Mencken influence is derived from the very nature of the subjects addressed within their particular works, which can be considered as being complimentary to one another. Where Cohen traces through the various virgin-birth accounts of deities through history, Mencken (1880-1956) traces through the various gods or various religious and mystical traditions through history, of whom Mencken notes;

"They were gods of the highest standing and dignity-gods of civilized peoples-worshipped and believed in by millions. All were theoretically omnipotent, omniscient, and immortal. and all are dead." Mencken, as cited in, *The Portable Atheist*, (p.230).

Mencken, H.L. (2007). Memorial Service. In: C.E. Hitchens, (ed). *'The Portable Atheist : Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever'*. Da Capo Press : Boston, MA.. pp.226-230.

¹³⁵ Hitchens refers specifically to the condition of parthenogenesis (*God is Not Great*, p.115), which refers, in essence, to the asexual formation of new life from an unfertilized egg; an outcome or event which, in human terms, will be considered as being miraculous. The Encyclopaedia Britannica definition of parthenogenesis, is, the *"Biological reproduction that involves development of a female (rarely a male) gamete (sex cell) without fertilization. It occurs commonly among lower plants and invertebrate animals, particularly rotifers, aphids, ants, wasps, and bees. An egg produced parthenogenetically may be either haploid (i.e., with one set of dissimilar chromosomes) or diploid (i.e., with a paired set of chromosomes)."*

Encyclopaedia Britannica (2013).

Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. [Online] Encyclopaedia Britannica (UK) : London. Available from: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/444810/parthenogenesis>. [Accessed 15 October 2013].

- According to Hitchens, the biblical Gospels cannot be regarded as being ‘literal truth’ and he notes that there could be grounds to regard them as being immoral and fraudulent (p.120).¹³⁶ The teachings and preachments of Jesus Christ are recorded from, *“hearsay upon hearsay, which helps explain their garbled and contradictory nature.”* (p.120)¹³⁷ In this regard, it is interesting to note the manner in which Hitchens mirrors the work of Thomas Paine, from whom he drew inspiration and who had a strong influence in shaping the Hitchens worldview on religion.¹³⁸
- Hitchens notes that the indictment which he has levelled against the Christian Gospels and their writers has never been disproven or explained, by any of the countless theologians and apologists of the faith. He notes that;

*“The contradictions and illiteracies of the New Testament have filled up many books by eminent scholars, and have never been explained by any Christian authority except in the feeblest terms of “metaphor” and “a Christ of faith.” This feebleness derives from the fact that until recently, Christians could simply burn or silence anybody who asked inconvenient questions. The Gospels are useful, however, in re-demonstrating the same point as their predecessor volumes, which is that religion is man-made.”*¹³⁹

¹³⁶ *God is not Great*, p.120.

¹³⁷ *God is not Great*, p.120.

¹³⁸ The point made by Thomas Paine (1795, p.4), in his work, *‘The Age of Reason’*, which work Hitchens regarded as having laid the foundations of modern biblical criticism, illustrates the equal stance of both Paine and Hitchens regarding the integrity of biblical texts;

“When also I am told that a woman, called the Virgin Mary, said, or gave out, that she was with child without any cohabitation with a man, and that her betrothed husband, Joseph, said that an angel told him so, I have a right to believe them or not; such a circumstance required a much stronger evidence than their bare word for it; but we have not even this, for neither Joseph nor Mary wrote any such matter themselves. It is only reported by others that they said so. It is hearsay upon hearsay, and I do not choose to rest my belief upon such evidence.”

¹³⁹ *God is Not Great*, p.115.

3.6. Vicarious Redemption : Key Elements of the Hitchens Critique. **Debate : Christopher Hitchens and Reverend Douglas Wilson.**

During his 2007-2008 book tour for the publication, *'God is not Great'*, Christopher Hitchens engaged with Reverend Douglas Wilson, author, theologian and pastor of Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho; with whom he went on to share many public debates¹⁴⁰, which were subsequently made into a filmed documentary called, *'Collision'*. Whilst there are many film recordings and written accounts by Hitchens on his position on vicarious redemption, the excerpt¹⁴¹ from *'Collision'*, captures the core of the *'Hitchens disbelief system'*. In making a case for why Christianity is hard to believe, Hitchens proposes a rejection of the following key doctrinal elements or building blocks of the Christian belief system. The following account is drawn from this film resource, with the location of the respective extracts within the debate being referenced by the time into the recording.

- Placing the advent of Christianity as part of a divinely ordained intervention in the history of humankind; through the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ, Hitchens argues that, to subscribe to the Christian belief system, one would have to hold as true that, for the estimated 100 000 years which humans are believed to have inhabited the planet, heaven watched human suffering with indifference for approximately 98 000 years, before intervening; in 'bronze-age Palestine'. The key point which Hitchens makes about this intervention is that it takes the form of *"condemning someone to a human sacrifice in the less literate parts of the Middle East"* (0.50 minutes); an occurrence which, he admonishes, *"cannot be believed by a thinking person."* (1.02 minutes).
- Hitchens' rejection of vicarious redemption, as the central teaching of Christianity, is predicated upon the absence of any basis on which to accept the divinely ordained

¹⁴⁰ Debate : Christopher Hitchens and Douglas Wilson. Online reference : ChristopherHitchslap (2011). Christopher Hitchens vs Douglas Wilson Debate at Westminster. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6UU9C-WmvM>>. [Accessed 13 January 2013].

¹⁴¹ Debate : Christopher Hitchens and Douglas Wilson. Online Reference : bdw5000 (2011). Why Christianity is Impossible to Believe. [online]. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-_74o2InNk>. [Accessed 3 January 2013].

intervention mentioned above. He views vicarious redemption as being ***the most immoral of all Christian teachings***, which he equates with '***scapegoating***' (1.25 minutes), which he points out, originated in the same desert area of the Middle East.¹⁴² Not unlike scapegoating, which represented the abandoning of a communities' sins onto an animal and whipping it out of the city walls into the wilderness; with vicarious redemption, the Christian belief system allows for sins to be cast upon the person of Jesus Christ, through whose sacrificial death redemption is thought to be gained (1.20 minutes). Hitchens makes the point that to believe the Christian offering of vicarious redemption, one would have to accept that vicarious redemption equates to the abolishing of one's responsibility; which he regards as an immoral premise.(1.25 minutes).

- The Christian ***commandment*** to love one's fellow human ['neighbour'], and particularly the call to love and fear the Christian deity or supreme being, given the sanction which will be earned by standing anywhere contrary to this call, is regarded by Hitchens as being contemptible '***compulsory love***'; for not to be in the required standing with such a supreme being will earn one the title of being a '***sinner***', a title requisite for the vicarious redemption on offer by this deity. One of Hitchens' central arguments is that the notion of vicarious redemption and the *command* to love pollutes the meaning of 'love'. He notes that this cannot be mentally, intellectually or morally healthy. (2.25 minutes).
- If there was a Supreme Being who could demand such allegiance, as would have to be believed within the Christian belief system, and who at the same time holds the threat of extreme sanction over any person for refusal to do so, would, according to Hitchens, bear the hallmarks of an eternal and unchanging "***dictatorship from which there is no appeal***" (2.42 minutes). This, in his summary, constitutes a "***totalitarian system***" (2.31

¹⁴² Leviticus 16:21-22, is cited as the text which captures the Old Testament idea of 'scapegoating'.

"²¹And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: ²²And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness."

minutes). A further feature of this totalitarian system is that it is in its nature to “*convict us of thought crime and condemn us to eternal punishment for actions we are condemned in advance to be taken*”. (2.40 minutes).

Hitchens’ concluding remarks on this section of the debate offers an unambiguous affirmation on where he stands with regard to the set of assertions recounted; “*It’s an excellent thing that there’s no reason to believe any of it to be true.*” (3.00 minutes)

Whilst it must be noted that the four key points described above are by no means an exhaustive offer of the constituent elements of Hitchens’ critique of Christianity and its principal doctrine of vicarious redemption, they represent the core matrix of his responses to this central aspect of the Christian belief system and offers a sufficient entry point through which to engage the terrain further. The exploration of the various debates and presentations, which follow, will work in more detail with Hitchens critique of vicarious redemption.

Since Christopher Hitchens was neither a trained Christian theologian, nor an academic in the discipline of religion, his contributions become significantly post-structural and less cluttered by the trappings of institutionalized academia and religion, to which he owed no debt of allegiance or obligation of conformity. Whilst his approach was often considered to be confrontational, as is apparent in many of his debates and his guest appearances on various television programmes¹⁴³, which may have been seen as offering his critics fair cause to marginalise the

¹⁴³ Four noteworthy cases in point, in this regard are:

- The BBC Intelligence² Debate : ‘*Is the Catholic Church a Force for Good in the World?*’. Online Reference : UKantitheist1 (2012). Stephen Fry and Christopher Hitchens The intelligence squared. [Online]. Available from : <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2wzsaZKiGo>>. [Accessed 13 November 2012].
- Christopher Hitchens interviewed on CNN by Anderson Cooper on the death of Christian evangelist Jerry Falwell. Online Reference: Tylerthepirate (2007). Christopher Hitchens on Jerry Falwell – The Anderson Cooper Show. [Online]. Available from : <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UlviufQ4APo>>. [Accessed 28 August 2013].
- The motion picture documentary on the life and work of Miss Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu – popularly known as Mother Teresa, called ‘*Hells Angel*’. Online Reference :

actual content of his arguments; to reject his contributions to the discourse, out of hand, based on him not being a trained theologian, or simply on account of a perceived understanding of his approach as being confrontational, may risk missing the *substance* of his arguments and his contributions, altogether.

Furthermore, to rule out his arguments, based on the assumption that they are simply crass or vulgar interpretations of holy Christian Scripture, would be disingenuous, at least, and a missed opportunity to reflect seriously and theologically upon the alternate cases on the subject of vicarious redemption. In this latter regard, Hitchens' work, *'God is not Great'* (pp.208-210), offers the following set of arguments as reinforcement to the case drawn from the debate with Reverend Douglas Wilson. In this section of his publication, Hitchens often refers to the subject matter as 'vicarious atonement' (p.209). During his debates and interviews, however, he always refers to the idea or doctrine as "vicarious redemption".¹⁴⁴ Having given serious consideration to the terms 'atonement' and 'redemption' in Chapter 2; it is also acknowledged that whether one is seeking to make right for a past wrong (atonement) or wishing to be 'bought back' from, and forgiven for, being in a perceived state of sin (redemption), the key *principle* being alluded to is not so dissimilar within the body of Hitchens' arguments, so as to, in any way, reduce the very import of such arguments.¹⁴⁵ The point made earlier in this regard, that the common thread which runs through both of these terms, when applied within Christian theology, is the common doctrinal reality that the individual does not and cannot attain 'atonement' or 'redemption' off their own doing, but only through belief in the life and death of the principal

ArkanumFour (2012). Hells Angel (Mother Teresa) - Christopher Hitchens. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJG-lgmPvYA>>. [Accessed 20 January 2013].

- Christopher Hitchens interviewed on FOX News on Mr Joseph Ratzinger [Pope Benedict]: Captioned *"Leader Of The Church Directly Responsible For Rape & Torture of Children!"*. Online Reference: Mehdi E (2010). Christopher Hitchens on FOX News. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1>>. [Accessed 20 February 2013].

¹⁴⁴ Debate: Christopher Hitchens and Douglas Wilson, *'Why Christianity is Impossible to Believe'*. Brief excerpt from the documentary, "Collision". Online Reference

bdw5000 (2011). Why Christianity is Impossible to Believe. [online]. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-_74o2lnNk>. [Accessed 3 January 2013]. [1.19 minutes].

¹⁴⁵ In search of a credible explanation as to why Hitchens uses the terms 'atonement' and 'redemption' interchangeably, it is noted that this study could not arrive at a definitive conclusion on this point. It is noted, however, that Hitchens' use of either term was followed by explanations which could be considered as having sufficiently conveyed his intended meaning.

mover, Jesus Christ; thereby pointing to the 'vicarious' nature at the core of terms. With extracts from his work '*God is not Great*', the expansion of Hitchens' arguments against vicarious redemption is supported by the following positions.

- Hitchens makes the point that human sacrifice, as an act of propitiation within a religious context was well established within the ancient world (p.208).¹⁴⁶ However, it is in the workings of Genesis 22: 1-12 that we find the thread of human sacrifice emerge within the Judeo-Christian belief system, which sets the theological stage for the defining doctrine of vicarious redemption. To be accepting of Christianity and to submit to the provisions thereto, one would have to accept the Genesis 22 : 1-12 account, recording God's instruction to Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice unto God and that Abraham chose to follow that instruction to completion. There is no room for a metaphorical interpretation or, to use a term often used by Hitchens himself, that there is no '*wiggle room*' on the matter. Furthermore, not to accept the recordings of Genesis 22: 1-12 as it is presented would open the way for an '*al la Carte*' approach to matters Christian and biblical.
- The significance of the Abraham-Isaac human sacrifice scenario is that, firstly, it is a central feature of all three monotheistic faiths [Judaism, Islam and Christianity], pointing to the significance and far reaching impact of the incident. Secondly, the hand of God is instrumental as the instruction-giver for the act of human sacrifice, as well as the same God being the praise-singer over the event, albeit via the angel, for Abraham's willingness to comply with such instruction¹⁴⁷. Thirdly, according to Hitchens, "*there is no softening the plain meaning of this frightful story*".¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶'*God is not Great*', p.208.

¹⁴⁷ In relation to the construct of vicarious redemption which we see introduced in the New Testament, it is significant to note the point of the whole Abraham-Isaac human sacrifice saga, in the first place. It had less to do with seeking redemption than it had to do with Abraham simply having to prove that he feared God. (Genesis 22:

- Not unlike this Old Testament account of Abraham and Isaac, which was supposedly meant to demonstrate the love of a father towards his God, the New Testament and everything built thereupon, until this day, is constructed upon *“a father demonstration love by subjecting a son to death by torture, but this time”*, according to Hitchens (2007, p.209)¹⁴⁹, *“the father is not trying to impress god. He is god, and he is trying to impress humans.”*
- In questioning the morality of the act of human sacrifice at the core of the doctrine of vicarious redemption, Hitchens notes the crux of this chain-of-blame which the Christian story-board draws him into and expounds that, had he been present at the crucifixion [human sacrifice], he would have been compelled to stop it, yet, he notes, *“in consequence of this murder, my own manifold sins are forgiven me, and I may hope to enjoy everlasting life”* (p.209).¹⁵⁰

Whilst Hitchens, in this section of the book, dealing with vicarious redemption, does not immediately offer the linkages, it may not be unreasonable to see within the divinely instructed human sacrifice of Isaac, the seeds of the totalitarian ‘celestial dictator’, whom Christopher Hitchens is on a literary and public crusade against. Given that the Abraham-Isaac story of human sacrifice is common to all three global monotheistic¹⁵¹ faiths, it may be a valid question to declare, on whether the instruction from the divine, in Genesis 22: 1-12, is the common pivot upon which the perceived totalitarian elements of all three belief systems, of Judaism, Islam and Christianity, may be found to have been built.

Vs 12). There may not be sufficient grounds to class this as an act of propitiation, as the act does not point to Abraham’s compliance with an instruction which is inspired by a need for atonement or any form of redemption.

¹⁴⁸‘God is not Great’, p.206.

¹⁴⁹‘God is not Great’, p.209.

¹⁵⁰‘God is not Great’, p.209.

¹⁵¹ To use the term ‘monotheistic’ in the context of the plurality of faiths, where the term ‘three monotheistic faiths’, could be regarded as an oxymoron, does illustrate the contradictory elements within the respective claims made by each system of faith, as to their respective unique and singular claims to possessing the truth, which has to sit alongside one another; with all making an equal claim.

To examine the implications of vicarious redemption and the origins thereof, Hitchens (pp.209-210) changes the frame of the discussion and calls for the assumption; that everything asserted about the Abraham-Isaac story and the life and death of Jesus Christ be held as being true. For a Christian to accept this premise, and according to Hitchens, it would have to follow, that;

- A Christian would have to accept responsibility for the torture and pain visited upon Jesus Christ at his crucifixion and death; notwithstanding one's absence from an act in which one had no part in wishing or executing (2007, p.209).
- The person would have to accept that the trauma of the crucifixion is a necessary compensation for an earlier disruption in the relationship between God and Adam, supposedly the first human, which saw the introduction of evil into the world; also an act in which no person, present-day or post-Adam had any hand in, yet, becomes heir to this legacy of sin; a situation of *collective punishment*. Hitchens (2007, p.209) notes that such is the notion of sin within the Christian theological framework, that it places the present-day Christian at one and in equal status with Adam; through having inherited such original sin through the semen of the male lineage originating in Adam.
- A Christian would have to accept that the event of the crucifixion was the outcome of a divinely ordained plan in which Jesus Christ *had to* die to complete the divine offer of redemption, and it marked the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy.
- A Christian would have to accept the endowment of free will, offered by the divine, with which to accept or reject the proposition of vicarious redemption. Exercising this free will would, in terms of Hitchens' (2007, p.211) understanding of the Christian belief system, effectively result in a choice between an eternal post-mortal life in whatever could be understood as being heaven, or the alternate, a life of eternal damnation and torture.

To accept this framework as mythological may go some way, for some, in mitigating what may be regarded as the implausibility of the whole proposition. However, it needs to be

acknowledged that this is not, and cannot, be the official position in the records of the Christian Church; as such a position would fundamentally deride the core substance on which this whole framework of Christian redemption rests.

In grappling with these controversies and the life and death of Jesus Christ, upon which the Christian 'promise' of vicarious redemption must be premised, Hitchens (2007, p.211) uses Jesus Christ's own apparently conflicted state in the Garden of Gethsemane, to offer his determination as to what should be the response of anybody posed with the question of whether or not to accept the Passion Story and everything theological that lead up to it.

Using biblical texts such as Matthew 26: 39¹⁵²;

"39And he [Jesus Christ] went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, o my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me : nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

Hitchens draws his summary of Jesus Christ's appeal to God and takes the liberty of framing it in the form of the question¹⁵³;

"Do I have to go through with this?" (2007, p.211)

Hitchens answers firmly that the response should *not* be made in the affirmative.¹⁵⁴ Going back to the idea and practice of 'scapegoating', he further explains his rejection of the basis of the proposition of vicarious redemption; that,

¹⁵² Which Jesus Christ restates in Verse 42 of the same chapter, with equal reference to be found in Luke 22: 42, also.

¹⁵³ Whilst a detailed critique of the publication, '*God is not Great*', will ensue, it is important to note that its' lack of detailed referencing, is regarded as being a significant shortcoming of the book. The critique of the book, '*God is Not Great*', on these aspects, will be aided by the responses of Mark D. Roberts, who published his detailed analysis of, '*God is not Great*'. Online Reference :

Roberts, M.D. (2007). Christopher Hitchens: My Response to god is not Great. 6 June 2007. Patheos [online]. [Accessed 20 August 2013]. Available from: <<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/series/god-is-not-great-by-christopher-hitchens-a-response/>>.

Mark Roberts is the author of, '*Can we Trust The Gospels : Investigating the Reliability of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John*'. (2007). Mark Roberts was a Harvard University scholar and completed his PhD in New Testament Studies and has taught at Fuller Theological Seminary and San Francisco Theological Seminary.

¹⁵⁴ Haldane, J.J. (1996). The Fine-Tuning Argument : Bayesian Considerations. In Smart, J.J.C. and Haldane, J.J., (ed.) (1996). *Atheism and Theism*. Blackwell : Oxford. Ch. 5.7. Haldane (p.212) describes Luke 22: 42, as Christ entering a plea to be excused before saying '*not my will, but thine, be done*'.

"We cannot, like fear-ridden peasants of antiquity, hope to load all our crimes onto a goat and then drive the hapless animal into the desert. Our everyday idiom is quite sound in regarding "scapegoating" with contempt. And religion is scapegoating writ large. I can pay your debt, my love, if you have been imprudent, and if I were a hero like Sidney Carton in A Tale of Two Cities I could even serve your term in prison or take your place on the scaffold. Greater love hath no man. But I cannot absolve you of your responsibilities. It would be immoral of me to offer, and immoral of you to accept."(2007, p.211) ¹⁵⁵

It may be useful to apply the analysis of Blaise Pascal's¹⁵⁶ "wager" to probe further into why Hitchens' position may hold some validity or not; which 'wager', in itself, may be regarded as a blunt instrument for this purpose. Firstly, Hitchens rules out Blaise Pascal's 'wager' to make sense of whatever is required to be believed within the Christian system of vicarious redemption and regards Pascal's theology in this context, as being *"not far short of sordid"*(2007, p.211). Smart, J.J.C. and Haldane, J.J. (ed.) (1996, pp.52-56), note, in the context of Pascal's embeddedness within Catholicism, that Pascal's wager is based on a simplistic assumption of there being only two options from which to choose; one of belief in the Roman Catholic version of the Christian faith and the alternate option to have no faith at all; with these opposing options carrying with them the accompanying consequences of heaven and hell, which were doctrinal realities of the Roman Catholic church at the time . Hitchens' summary of Pascal's wager, is sufficient to grasp the point that, if a person believes in God and there is a God, then that person wins. If, on the other hand, that person believes in God and there is no God, the net effect to the person is the same. In the context of the high stakes at play in this discourse, particularly given its significant impact on the doctrinal formations of the church, Roman Catholic or otherwise, Hitchens' characterisation of Pascal's wager as a *"cunning piece of bet-covering"* (2007, p.211) may be understandable.

¹⁵⁵'*God is not Great*', p.211.

¹⁵⁶ Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) was a French 17th Century mathematician and physicist.

Whilst Smart and Haldane's (1996, p.53) assessment of Pascal's wager may be less descriptive than Hitchens', it nonetheless points in the same direction;

"The argument of Pascal's Wager is an example of a pragmatic argument for belief. The argument is that belief is useful, not that it is true. Though Pascal's argument is flawed and in any case is stated in terms that do not appeal to the contemporary theological mind, similarly pragmatic arguments suggest themselves. If belief (in God or in some particular religious system in detail) makes us happier, why should we not try to inculcate it into ourselves, if necessary by non-rational means?"

The introduction by Hitchens of another mathematician Bertrand Russell to the debate (2007, p.211)¹⁵⁷, recounts Russell's responses to the hypothetical question as to what he will say when he dies and if confronted by God. Russell replied; *"I should say, Oh God, you did not give us enough evidence."*

Hitchens' hypothetical confrontation with God on the matter (2007, pp.222-212)¹⁵⁸ does reflect a significantly anthropomorphic tone. He records that his response to God will be as follows;

"Imponderable Sir, I presume from some if not all of your many reputations that you might prefer honest and convinced unbelief to the hypocritical and self-interested affection of faith or the smoking tributes of bloody altars. But I would not count on it."

3.7. : Critiques of the Works of Christopher Hitchens.

Having explored the key elements of *'God is not Great'*, that relate to vicarious redemption, it will be useful to consider the critiques of this publication and the broader work of Christopher Hitchens, and the effect of any such assessment of the contribution that his work continues to bring to the discourse. In addition to the key publication, *'God is Not Great'*, references will be made to other literary works of Hitchens including his debates and interviews. Given the

¹⁵⁷*'God is not Great'*, p.211.

¹⁵⁸*'God is not Great'*, pp.211-212.

mandate and scope of this study, the works and authors cited in this section, cannot be examined in exhaustive detail and as such, the engagement therewith will be directed at the key relevancies to the core aspects on this study; with the implicit recommendation that these authors and their works be pursued in their own right.

3.7.1 : A Critique by Mark Roberts.

As already indicated, the assessment of Mark Roberts (2007)¹⁵⁹ represents a significant response to the Hitchens publication, *'God is not Great'*, from which further discussions will be built. This summary of the critique by Roberts followed a Radio Debate he had held with Christopher Hitchens. In Mark Roberts, one is dealing with a Christian apologist and self-acknowledged Evangelical. A comprehensive response to the extensive critique offered by Mark Roberts falls outside of the scope of this study however, a consideration of the key aspects thereof will establish the essence of his critique.

- Roberts assertion of the possibility of the date of Jesus Christ's birth being misquoted in Hitchens' book (pp.59-60) and the name of Bart D. Erhman being misstated (pp.120, 142).
- The extent to which Hitchens (p.111) expresses disagreement between the Gospels; that they, *"cannot agree on anything of importance"*, may have, on the part of Hitchens, extended the point further than is necessary and Roberts criticism in this regard is noted.
- The following extract from Roberts' set of criticisms, within the Online Posting referenced, may indicate his overall standpoint;

"Virtually every scholar I've read, including the most sceptical, would agree that the Gospels are "in some sense literal truth." The proof is that virtually every

¹⁵⁹ A response by Dr Mark D. Roberts to Christopher Hitchens, *'God is not Great'*. Online Reference : Roberts, M.D. (2007). Christopher Hitchens: My Response to god is not Great. 6 June 2007. Patheos [online]. Available from: <<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/series/god-is-not-great-by-christopher-hitchens-a-response/>>. [Accessed 20 August 2013].

scholar who says anything about Jesus of Nazareth bases his or her history on the “facts” of the Gospels. So when a scholar states that Jesus was crucified under the authority of Pontius Pilate, this scholar takes at least that part of the Gospel account as literal truth.”

The extract above is Roberts’ response to Hitchens’ remarks (p.120), noted below, on whether the Gospels could be taken as the literal truth or not.

“Either the Gospels are in some sense literal truth, or the whole thing is essentially a fraud and perhaps an immoral one at that.”

With Roberts being a scholar embedded with the structures of Christian theology, it is not surprising that the “proof” from “virtually every scholar” is invoked alongside the “facts of the Gospels”, which places Roberts in the position of having accepted the factuality of the subject under enquiry.¹⁶⁰

- Regarding the incidents of resurrection in the New Testament, Hitchens notes the following (2007, p.143).

“This supposed frequency of resurrection [in the New Testament] can only undermine the uniqueness of the one by which mankind purchased forgiveness of sins.”

To which, Roberts’ responses are as follows.

“The other people raised from the dead were raised to ordinary life. We have every reason to believe that, after their coming back to life, they lived ordinary lives and died like everybody else. Jesus’ resurrection was in a unique category as the beginning of resurrection to life in the age to come.

¹⁶⁰ One of the challenges in dealing with any work of Christopher Hitchens is that the full meaning of a statement made by him may only find its full expression against the full storyboard of his collection of works. Perhaps of equal importance were his views on the Scriptural texts themselves, in relation to its interpretation. During his debate with Tony Blair, which is covered in greater detail later in the study, Hitchens notes that it is not the multiplicity of interpretations of Scriptural texts which are the initial problem, it is the texts themselves and that people believe in them, literally. Online Reference :
CSPANJUNKIEd0tORG (2010). Christopher Hitchens vs Tony Blair Debate: Is Religion A Force For Good In The World? [Online]. Available from : <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddsz9XBhrYA>>. [Accessed 15 June 2013]. [1hr.16.20 minutes].

Jesus's resurrection body was different from other bodies, as is seen from the Gospel accounts and 1 Corinthians 15. None of this proves that Jesus actually rose from the dead, of course, or that His resurrection purchased forgiveness of sins (which, by the way, was more about His death than resurrection). But it does show that Hitchens simply does not understand what the writers of the New Testament believed about the resurrection of Jesus."¹⁶¹

Whilst it is acknowledged that the story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ has its particularity, however, taking the liberty, as Roberts does, to add extensions such as *'the beginning of resurrection to life in the age to come'*, as quoted above, points only to the special hermeneutic of institutionalized theology which the religious, within the academia, or without, license themselves to propagate. Robert's statement that, *'None of this proves that Jesus actually rose from the dead'*, takes the whole discourse back to the starting post.¹⁶²

Although all of the brief engagement with the responses of Mark Roberts may not be aimed at the core subject matter of vicarious redemption, it does bring into focus the need to be on guard as to the validity of the arguments put forward by Christopher Hitchens and the methods employed towards this end. On the other hand, it is noted that one of the key foci of this study is to examine the responses from within the school of Christian apologetics, to the work of

¹⁶¹ A response by Dr Mark D. Roberts to Christopher Hitchens, *'God is not Great'*. Online Reference: Roberts, M.D. (2007). Christopher Hitchens: My Response to god is not Great. 6 June 2007. Patheos [online]. [Accessed 20 August 2013]. Available from: <<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/series/god-is-not-great-by-christopher-hitchens-a-response/>>.

¹⁶² Without wishing to draw out the responses to Mark Roberts' critique any further than is necessary, it is worth noting his position on theologians such as Augustine of Hippo. Roberts adds into parenthesis, his view of St. Augustine, to Hitchens' (2007 : p. 64) comments on St Augustine.

"Augustine [one of the theologians most highly regarded by Christians] was a self-centred fantasist and an earth-centred ignoramus."

This points, firstly, to the school of thought to which Roberts subscribes and secondly, perhaps he is amiss in labelling, as 'ridicule', Hitchens' characterizations of figures such as St. Augustine. Furthermore, to understand this vitriol which Hitchens unapologetically offered unto many, would require an understanding of the full context of Hitchens' total body of work which stood up against the cause of faith-based religion. In this regard, the likes of Augustine of Hippo and John Calvin, both 'highly regarded' theologians within Christian apologetics, were not viewed as candidates worthy enough to escape criticism; on the contrary, they were the key architects of the theological framework of vicarious redemption, which is at the core of Hitchens' critique of the Christian faith.

Christopher Hitchens and that of the other key advocates within the New Atheist movement, such as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Daniel Dennett, in particular. The position adopted by Roberts is not dissimilar to that taken by Alister McGrath and William Lane Craig, as will become evident through this study, particularly through the analysis of the debates between Christopher Hitchens and these prominent Christian theologians.

3.7.2: A Critique by Conor Cunningham.

From the interest aroused by the publication, *'God is Not Great'*, it is evident that the critique of Hitchens' contrarian approach and the manner in which he engages with those from across the religious spectrum, can make for a study all of its own. Whilst there is no shortage of critics from which to choose, to attempt to counterbalance and interrogate Hitchens' arguments, the case of Conor Cunningham and Terry Eagleton stands out for special attention; for two reasons; firstly, for their status as established and respected academics and, secondly, for the nature of their arguments. Cunningham¹⁶³ is a Lecturer in Theology at University of Nottingham, England and author of, *'Darwin's Pious Idea: Why the Ultra-Darwinists and Creationists Both Get it Wrong'*, which was published in 2010. Terry Eagleton is Professor of Literature at Lancaster University, England and author of, *'Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate'*, published in 2009.

Cunningham (2010, pp.302-306) converses with Eagleton (2009), to reflect their combined critique of the key figures of the New Atheist School, Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris and Daniel Dennett. Whilst it falls outside of the scope of this study to undertake a detailed assessment of these works, it is sufficient to note their opposition to the arguments raised by Hitchens and grasp a glimpse of their critique. On the issue of the place of evidentialism and verification within religious criticism, Cunningham (2010, p. 304) invokes the

¹⁶³ Cunningham also wrote and presented the BBC2 Television Documentary (2010), *Did Darwin Kill God?*
Online Reference: [Roses of Time \(2013\). Did Darwin Kill God? \(BBC\). \[online\]. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9x3JJILFmU4>.](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9x3JJILFmU4) [Accessed 3 September 2013].

work of Hungarian scientist and philosopher, Michael Polanyi¹⁶⁴, to make an unconvincing case against anybody seeking an evidence-based argument and goes quote-mining, not unlike Eagleton, through Hitchens', *'God is Not Great'*, to take the following point out of its context,

"Thanks to the telescope and the microscope, it no longer offers an explanation of anything important."

Hitchens (2007, p.282), *'God is Not Great'*.

Cunningham (2010, p.304) goes on to describe Hitchens' position in this extract, as follows,

"It would be hard to construct a more idiotic sentence, at least without an amazing amount of concerted effort."

Whilst it may not be uncommon for opposing arguments to be fragmented, and selectively appropriated to fit a particular case being made, it would have served the cause of academic rigor had Cunningham afforded his readers the opportunity of an explanation of the context of Hitchens' statement. What immediately precedes and follows the extract from, *'God is Not Great'*, (p.282), quoted by Cunningham, will illustrate the point being made. Hitchens notes,

"Religion has run out of justifications. Thanks to the telescope and the microscope, it no longer offers an explanation of anything important. Where once it used to be able, by its total command of a worldview, to prevent the emergence of rivals, it can now only impede and retard – or try to turn back – the measurable advances that we have made."

Of further importance than just the immediate context of this extract, is the broader context which Hitchens calls into consideration; that of the very title of the chapter, *"The Need for a New Enlightenment"*, in, *'God is Not Great'*, (pp.277-286), from which the extract is taken. Through his misuse of Hitchens' point on the advances of scientific enquiry, Cunningham

¹⁶⁴ Cunningham (2010, p.302), quotes from Polanyi (1958, p.279), *'Personal Knowledge : Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy'*,

"God cannot be observed; any more than truth or beauty can be observed. He exists in the sense that He is to be worshipped and obeyed, but not otherwise; not as a fact – any more than truth, beauty, or justice exists as facts. All these, like God, are things which can be apprehended only in serving them."

indicates his alignment with that segment of Christian apologetics which needlessly offer convoluted theories on arguments which are patently clear to understand, if read within their intended contexts. A critical viewing of the BBC2 Documentary, '*Did Darwin Kill God?*', which Cunningham wrote and presented, elaborates on his views regarding the points alluded to.¹⁶⁵

3.7.3 : A Critique by Terry Eagleton.

Where Cunningham appears to operate in the shallow non-critical-end of the discourse, Eagleton attempts to delve deeper into the mind of Hitchens, with a greater degree of disdain for his perspectives than that reflected by Cunningham. However, getting to the substance, or lack thereof, of Eagleton's assessment of Hitchens', is the task at hand. There is no doubt, however, that Eagleton is strongly opposed to the anti-theist stance of Hitchens and the New Atheist project as a whole; a position embodied in two of his more popular responses to the campaign spearheaded by Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Daniel Dennett. The first being Eagleton's book review called, '*Lunging, Flailing, Mispunching*' (2006), a review of Richard Dawkin's book, '*The God Delusion*'. The book review was published in The London Review of Books, dated 19 October 2006.¹⁶⁶ The set of lectures presented by Terry Eagleton at Yale University in April 2008 and later compiled into his book, '*Reason, Faith and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate*' (2009), represents his wider assault on the New Atheist movement, and Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, in particular, whom he refers to in the collective as "Ditchkins" throughout his book, in a manner which could be construed as being derogatory.

¹⁶⁵ For further insights into Conor Cunningham's work, Digital Journalist, Bart B. Van Bockstaele offers a detailed critique of Cunningham and the BBC2 Documentary, '*Did Darwin Kill God?*' Online Reference : Van Bockstaele (2010). Op-Ed: Conor Cunningham's Has Darwin Killed God. 26 January 2010. Digital Journal [online]. [Accessed 6 June 2013]. Available from: <<http://digitaljournal.com/article/286445>>.

¹⁶⁶ Eagleton, T. (1996). Lunging, Flailing, Mispunching. *The London Review of Books*. **28**, Issue 20, pp.32-34. Available from: <<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n20/terry-eagleton/lunging-flailing-mispunching>>. Accessed: 2 February 2014.

The very subject under review, between the key advocates within the New Atheist movement, on the one hand and Eagleton on the other, has, quite expectedly, given rise to a very charged debate on issues of God, faith and religion. In addition to these two works themselves, the wide range of responses to the critique offered by Eagleton in these publications will assist the process of coming to terms with the substance of Eagleton's critique. The real question at the heart of this section of this study is whether or not Eagleton gets to the core of the argument and the actual case presented by Christopher Hitchens and the New Atheist movement and whether his critique thereof is credible and sustainable. In an effort to understand both sides of the debate, within the context of the key focus areas of this study, it will be necessary to restate the earlier declaration that the position adopted by Christopher Hitchens on the post 9/11 invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, is not a primary focus area of this study.

However, it needs to be said that, whilst Eagleton (2009, p.125) could quite validly, from his standpoint, regard Hitchens' support for the invasion of Iraq, post 9/11, as an outrage against reason, the question remains as to whether Eagleton makes any serious and credible counter-arguments to the key claims made by Hitchens against faith-based religion; which, for the Christian faith and for Hitchens, has vicarious redemption as its doctrinal centre-piece. A closer examination of the key themes of the two key works of Eagleton referenced above will serve to capture the nature of his critique of Hitchens. In addition to these two works, this area of the study was aided by three sets of responses to, *'Reason, Faith and Revolution'*. The first is that of Thomas Leddy, who is Professor of Philosophy at San Jose State University, USA, which was posted on the Aesthetics Today Blogspot on 13 November 2013.¹⁶⁷ The second response to Eagleton's book is that of Paul Z. Myers (Ph.D)¹⁶⁸, who is Associate Professor of Biology at University of Oregon, USA; in his detailed critique entitled, *'The Eagleton Delusion'*.¹⁶⁹ The third

¹⁶⁷ Leddy, T.W. (2013). Aesthetic Atheism and Terry Eagleton's Reason Faith, and Revolution. 13 November 2013. Aesthetics Today [online]. Available from: <<http://aestheticstoday.blogspot.com/2013/11/aesthetic-atheism-and-terry-eagleton.html>>. [Accessed 5 January 2014].

¹⁶⁸ Paul Myers received the American Humanist Association's Humanist of the Year Award in 2009 and was awarded the International Humanist of the Year Award in 2011 by the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU).

¹⁶⁹ Myers, P.Z. (2009). The Eagleton Delusion. 5 May 2009. scienceblogs [online]. Available from: <<http://scienceblogs.com/pharyngula/2009/05/05/the-eagleton-delusion/>>. [Accessed 11 November 2013].

critique of Eagleton under consideration is in the form of a Book Review of, '*Reason, Faith and Revolution*', published in the Financial Times of London, dated 25 May 2009, by British author Stephen Cave (Ph.D.), who was awarded his Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Cambridge in 2001.¹⁷⁰ Stephen Cave also served as a Diplomat in the British Government.

An analysis of the book review by Eagleton, '*Lunging, Flailing, Mispunching*', although not a direct critique of Christopher Hitchens but of Richard Dawkins, does serve this study as an expose' of Terry Eagleton's understanding and position on faith-based belief systems and on Christianity in particular. The following key points can be drawn from his review.

Eagleton's opening salvo on Dawkins and "*other card-carrying rationalists*", as being "*the least well-equipped to understand what they castigate*", is a recurring theme throughout the review and indeed his book, '*Reason, Faith, and Revolution*'. The review ends with a reference to Dawkins as being '*theologically illiterate*'; a position which had to have been derived by some understanding on the part of Eagleton as to what constitutes a sound and credible theological proposition, of which Dawkins is said to be illiterate. A key point made by Eagleton in his opening paragraph is that the "*vulgar caricatures of religious faith*" offered by Dawkins and his ilk, result from this theological illiteracy. To counterbalance this critique by Eagleton, his review would have been well served by offering some reasonable account of his understanding as to exactly what are the "*toughest case*" and the "*most persuasive*" theological propositions within the Judeo-Christian belief system which he considers absent from Dawkins' critique.

The best possible path to understanding Eagleton's theological literacy on the Judeo-Christian belief system and the meaning he draws therefrom, is laid out in his utterances. The following extracts and observations from the review will serve to illustrate the point.

¹⁷⁰ Cave, S. (2009). Reason, Faith and Revolution: Review. Financial Times [online]. Available from: <<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/7a9f76fa-465d-11de-803f-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2uYGmwduB>>. [Accessed 10 November 2013].

The two obvious problems with a statement such as, *“For mainstream Christianity, reason, argument and honest doubt have always played an integral role in belief”*, is, firstly, that the point begs for clarity as to who or what is mainstream Christianity at the start of the 21st Century and secondly, in the absence of any further enunciation of the point, the degree of prevalence of reason, argument and doubt within Christendom, through the ages, will have to remain an assumption on Eagleton’s part.

According to Eagleton, Dawkins sees God as a *“cosmic manufacturer”*, but for Christians God is seen, *“at least, in the form of a reviled and murdered political criminal.”* A key question which overhangs the reading of this review is whether such views, as stated by Eagleton, are indeed that which are central within Christianity, or whether they are positions which sit well with Eagleton’s brand of Christianity.

The following statement is possibly one of the strongest and most perplexing pronouncements made by Eagleton in this book review and within the God Debate. He notes;

“For Judeo-Christianity, God is not a person in the sense that Al Gore arguably is. Nor is he a principle, an entity, or ‘existent’: in one sense of that word it would be perfectly coherent for religious types to claim that God does not in fact exist. He is, rather, the condition of possibility of any entity whatsoever, including ourselves. He is the answer to why there is something rather than nothing. “

The point made by Eagleton is important in itself and as the foundation for what he lays out in his subsequent paragraphs; on his understanding of whom or what God is. As opposed to Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, Eagleton does see the need to resolve the question as to why there is something rather than nothing; in God’s favour. Also significant to this analysis is that, even if there are doubts in the mind of the reader as to whether or not these positions were that of Eagleton himself, it is clear that he chooses to take on the role of the spokesperson for the Judeo-Christian faith. Towards this end, he reaffirms the introduction of the figure of God as the answer to the question as to why there is something rather than

nothing; based on nothing else but his interpretation of the Judeo-Christian faith. It may be necessary to note, if only as a reminder, that Terry Eagleton is a literary critic and an academic within the field of English Literature and Cultural Theory, and not a theologian. Whilst this does not preclude Eagleton or any other non-theologian from pronouncements on the God Debate, the extent to which Eagleton claims to know the mind of God and God's motives, does make for interesting reading. As what appears to be more like an apologist for the Christian faith, or as a 'closet-believer', to Eagleton;

"He [God] is what sustains all things in being by his love; and this would still be the case even if the universe had no beginning."

"God might well have come to regret his handiwork some aeons ago."

"God is an artist who did it for the sheer love or hell of it, not a scientist at work on a magnificently rational design that will impress his research grant body no end."

"Because the universe is God's, it shares in his life, which is the life of freedom. This is why it works all by itself"

"God is transcendent of us (which is another way of saying that he did not have to bring us about), he is free of any neurotic need for us and wants simply to be allowed to love us."

"the person of Jesus, who reveals the Father as friend and lover rather than judge"

"The Christian faith holds that those who are able to look on the crucifixion and live, to accept that the traumatic truth of human history is a tortured body, might just have a chance of new life – but only by virtue of an unimaginable transformation in our currently dire condition. This is known as the resurrection."

"The central doctrine of Christianity, then, is not that God is a bastard. It is, in the words of the late Dominican theologian Herbert McCabe, that if you don't love you're dead, and if you do, they'll kill you. Here, then, is your pie in the sky and opium of the people."

These extracts from, *'Lunging, Flailing, Mispunching'*, demonstrate Eagleton's apparent understanding of the mind and workings of the God of the Judeo-Christian faith. This, to

Eagleton, is what makes up the “*richest, most enduring form of popular culture in human history*”. Eagleton goes on to indicate that, “*The mainstream theology I have just outlined may well not be true; but anyone who holds it is in my view to be respected.*” This statement, if it is to make any sense at all, does raise the question as to why Eagleton is so objectionable to Dawkins, with all the attendant vitriol, if he is comfortable with respecting someone who is anchored in a belief which may be untrue. As an unrelenting critic of Hitchens and Dawkins, as is the case in this book review, it is important to this study to understand the positions to which Eagleton holds.

Whilst the scope of this study does not allow for a detailed analysis of Eagleton’s book, ‘*Reason, Faith and Revolution*’, an understanding of its salient points will serve to set the context from which to make further sense of his critique of Christopher Hitchens and the New Atheist movement. Towards this end, the responses of Stephen Cave, Paul Z. Myers and Thomas Leddy are significant contributions.¹⁷¹

At the outset, something needs to be said of Eagleton’s creation of the composite character which he calls “Ditchkins”, in combined reference to Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. Besides the derogatory manner in which this character is persistently referred to throughout the book, any serious and credible response to the works of Dawkins and Hitchens would recognise that although there was much on which they agreed, they were very different in their approaches to theism. Myers (2009) summarises Eagleton’s use of the collective, “Ditchkins”, as follows.

Ditchkins is a straw man, a dummy he [Eagleton] can flog without fear of reply, and without worry that someone might actually find that his description of Ditchkins views is a caricature, because Ditchkins doesn’t exist. It’s a bit disconcerting. There is a fine literary tradition in having a Simplicio foil to bounce ideas off of in a rhetorical exercise, but this one goes off the rails quickly. We’ll have a section of the essay in which Eagleton is discussing some idea by Dawkins, for instance, and then suddenly he’s telling us that

¹⁷¹ It is noted that the Articles by Thomas Leddy, Paul Myers and Stephen Cave are recorded on electronic Websites and Blogspots, without any specific page references.

“Ditchkins thinks...” or “Ditchkins believes...” or “Ditchkins says...” — it’s rather creepy and more than a little cowardly. After all, Dawkins might be able to speak up and say that no, he doesn’t think that...but Ditchkins never will. Ditchkins exists only to absorb abuse. “

It is significant to note that Eagleton’s set of lectures from which the book was compiled and throughout which the character of “Ditchkins” took on a life of its own, was to an audience at Yale University. Meyers asserts that Eagleton makes no ground in offering any answers of substance on the crucial *questions* of the God Debate; leaving an audience, even of the Yale type, carrying the proverbial empty sack. In noting his view that Eagleton is oblivious to the actual critique of the Christian faith by Atheists, Myers (2009) notes the following questions which Eagleton leaves unanswered.

“We all know that religion inspires great towering erections of byzantine logic, and all kinds of twisted rationalizations for just about anything, from the torture-murder of a Jewish rabble-rouser on a Roman cross to his manifestation in the brown marks on a piece of pita bread. We are also aware that all the ambiguities and contradictions in the stories do a wonderful job of spawning weird associations in the minds of literary theorists, sending them into raptures of babblement. But so what? We are addressing the premises. What is the evidence for the existence of any god? What is the source for your information about the nature of this god, as well as all the specifics about what he wants right now? Why have the prophets and priests of your god, who apparently have a communications line to an omniscient being, done such a poor job of describing the world and how it works? If god’s will is the fundamental arbiter of moral behavior, how do we determine god’s will? Why is it that when the defenders of this god-centric view sit down to write books that should answer these kinds of questions, they always, without fail, write such vapid tripe?”

With regard to these fundamental questions and as to whether Eagleton also falls into that category of Christian apologists who can but only presuppose what they assert others cannot disprove, Thomas Leddy (2013) makes the following observation.

"When he describes to us what orthodox Christians believe, he does so in his own voice and frankly it sounds like he himself is talking here. For instance he says that God created us in his own image, that he himself is pure liberty, and is also the source for atheism as well as faith. (p. 17) Which would be true, if there were a God (i.e. the Christian God he describes)! but which otherwise begs all the philosophical questions."

On the aspect of Eagleton's detailed knowledge of the mind of God and his claims to understanding what 'mainstream Christianity' is about, Leddy notes the following about his engagement with, *'Reason, Faith and Revolution'*,

"The oddest experience I have reading Eagleton is how often he seems to know (seems to think he knows!) exactly what God is or is not."

The provocative manner in which Eagleton frames and advocates his brand of Liberation Theology, with Jesus as the supposed social revolutionary at the forefront of the challenge to the prevailing economic order, demonstrates Eagleton's preparedness to build this into his armoury in his apparent crusade against Capitalism. Thomas Leddy (2013) notes the following point in response.

"Sometimes Eagleton reads as someone who simply believes that to be a good Christian is to be a good leftist: for example "You shall know him [God] for who he is when you see the hungry being filled with good things and the rich being sent empty away." (18) I confess some sympathy for this vision of distributive justice, but do not see why it has to be connected with some sort of belief in God or Jesus. Is anything more being said than that it would be satisfying to see some of the wealth of the rich transferred to the hungry?"

The only further point necessary on this aspect is that the idea or principle of distributive justice is universal and is one that is not and cannot be predicated upon any notion of faith-based religion and as to who God is or is not. The same applies to any notion of political love, or just the idea of love, itself.

'Reason, Faith and Revolution', is summarised by Stephen Cave (2009) as follows;

"His [Eagleton] main contention is one he has aired publicly for some time: that with their critique of religion, "Ditchkins" are taking pot shots at a straw man; and that they are doing so from the swampy ground of their own unwarranted faith in reason and the march of progress. Eagleton's criticisms, however, mostly shoot wide..... Eagleton's attempts to put Ditchkins right on the real nature of God produce nothing better than the kind of mystical piffle that that pair are so good at demolishing."

Having considered the two sets of works by Eagleton, alongside a set of critiques thereto, two key aspects emerged, which are of direct significance to this study. It is evident that the full breath of Hitchen's work has not been considered by Eagleton. Christopher Hitchens' critique of religion and the Christian faith did not start and stop with his book, *'God is not Great'*; as this study aims to set out. Neither was his case against faith-based religion confined to the Christian faith. Arguments like Eagleton's (2009, pp.133-135) attempt to minimise the advances of science by raising the atomic explosion in Hiroshima and the possibility of a future nuclear apocalypse, and castigating Dawkins and Hitchens, in the process, for their call for scientific enquiry to replace faith-based allegiances to sacred religious texts, could be said to constitute an argument misplaced and without consideration of the actual case made by Hitchens against Christianity and its doctrinal foundations. It is evident that these two works, *'Lunging, Flailing, Mispunching'* and *'Reason, Faith and Revolution'*, which presents Terry Eagleton at his *'most persuasive'*, do not represent a credible and sustainable critique of the body of work of Christopher Hitchens, or Richard Dawkins, for that matter. A summary of Eagleton and his case against the New Atheist movement could be best left in the hands of Stephan Cave, who concludes his assessment of Eagleton's, *'Reason, Faith and Revolution'*, as follows.

“This is a bold and stylish book, guaranteed to provoke – in the best possible way – anyone who might read it. Eagleton is a gifted cultural critic, drawing his insights from the worlds he knows best – those of fiction and ideology. It is, however, in these categories that his views on God belong.”

3.7.4 : A Critique by John Haught.

The work of Professor John Haught¹⁷² (2008), *‘God and The New Atheism’*, represents a significant contribution to the discourse on Christopher Hitchens’ understanding of and responses to the Christian faith. However, what starts off as a promising critique of Hitchens, as well as the other two parts of the trinity of New Atheism, Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, descends into the standard set of responses from the wing of Christian Apologetics (2008, p. 100). It is in this latter sense, and by the sheer absence of a significant critique of the key arguments posed by Hitchens, and a set of responding arguments of his own, that Haught’s work takes on some significance. Indeed, it is the **absence** of a meaningful contribution by Haught that his work is significant. For Haught (2008, p.100), alongside the likes of Cunningham and Eagleton, to write off the arguments posed by Hitchens, based on their view that Hitchens’ reading of the Christian Scriptures is too literal and without the requisite theological analysis, may make for a type of protectionism of the belief system to which they are so heavily indebted and compromised, without, however, addressing the gravity of the issues at stake, as posed by Hitchens. In this latter regard, further comments on Haught’s work will need to sit closer to aspects related to vicarious redemption. Haught (2008, p.100) calls for an interpretation of everything in the Bible,

“in the light of its dominant themes of hope, liberation, incarnation, and God’s self-emptying love. As soon as we let these main motifs out of sight we end up reading passages in literalist isolation”.

¹⁷² John Haught was Professor in The Department of Theology at Georgetown University (1970-2005).

Haught explains that not to understand the God of Liberation as a defining feature of the Abrahamic tradition, would be to miss the context of The Old Testament and he claims that Hitchens is not mindful of this and Haught (2008, p.100), goes on to offer the reader a lesson in Biblical interpretation. There would be no need to ‘read between the lines’ to grasp the fundamental differences in positions between the likes of Haught, on one hand and Hitchens, on the other. The need to convey the import of this point necessitates the length of the full extract below, from Haught’s publication.

“One of the great benefits of taking a good college-level course in biblical literature, or of being part of a Bible study group informed by up-to-date scholarship, is that one can learn to read biblical texts in such a way that a major theme, say that of liberation, remains transparent in the background even while we are reading passages that may seem morally offensive when taken in isolation. For example, Hitchens cannot get over the story of God’s command to Abraham to murder his son. “There is no softening the plain meaning of this frightful story.” He moralizes (206). But it is Hitchens’s plain reading of everything in the Bible that leads him and his fellow literalists to ignore the leitmotif of unconditional faith in a liberating God that underlies the story of Abraham and Isaac, as well as many other biblical narratives.”

Haught (2008, p.100)

Using this extract, the key aspects which emerge from Haught’s critique of Hitchens are:

- The extract reflects Haught’s attempt to make sense of the Abraham-Isaac event, by pointing to a particular type of biblical interpretation.
- It is evident from even a cursory understanding of the broader body of work of Christopher Hitchens, that he is not unmindful of the overarching ‘*unconditional faith in a liberating God*’ to which Haught refers. It is indeed the very rejection of such ‘*unconditional faith*’ which is central to the work of Hitchens.
- The extract brings into focus the lengths to which Christian apologetics is prepared to extend itself, in mitigation of an act which may only “*seem morally offensive*” and which may, implicitly, be understood otherwise if, understood within Haught’s frame of interpretation.

2.7.5 : A Critique by Christopher Hedges.

The work of Pulitzer Prize winning Author and Journalist, Christopher Hedges, particularly his 2008 publication, *'I Don't Believe in Atheists'*, is an important contribution to the body of critique of the work of Christopher Hitchens. However, the worldview undergirding the responses of Hedges, is different from that of Roberts, Haught, Eagleton and Cunningham, and provides a basis for a more careful reflection and interpretation of the work of Hitchens and the other key figures within the school of New Atheism. Whilst the guidance offered by Hedges, on the interpretation of the work of proponents of New Atheism, should be considered, they do come shaped by his worldview, which, itself, was influenced by his many years as a journalist in the Middle East; having had first-hand accounts of the conflicts in that region, particularly in the last 20 years. In this regard it is important to note, however, that Hedges is not of the same ilk, either, as those of the Christian apologetics¹⁷³ wing, such as William Lane Craig, Alister McGrath and Douglas Wilson. Some of the keys considerations covered in, Hedges (2008), *'I Don't Believe in Atheists'*, are;

- Hedges equates the application of 'pseudo-science' (pp.67-68), by both Christian fundamentals and the New Atheists, in their efforts to legitimize their arguments; to which he responds as follows.

"But what they sell are myths, new forms of faith and the self-delusion that these fantasies are possible." (p.67)

- Hedges (2008, p.87) continues his equating of the Christian 'right' with the New Atheists in their disregard for the destruction and pillaging of democracy currently under way in America and offers the following reason for this condition and directly brings into question the moral standing of the New Atheist project.

¹⁷³ Guidance on the interpretation of the term or category of 'Christian Apologetics' is drawn from the work of theologian, Bart D. Erhman (2011, p. 4), from his work, *'Forged : Writing in The Name of God – Why The Bibles Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are.'*; where Erhman notes,

"The term "apologetics" comes from the Greek word apologia which does not mean "apology" in the sense of saying you're sorry for something; it means, instead, to make a "reasonable defence" of the faith. Christian Apologetics is devoted to showing that not only faith in Christ is reasonable, but that the Christian message is demonstrably true"

“Because they are locked in a non-reality-based belief system in which things are seen as getting better when in fact they are getting worse. They can be morally and politically irresponsible because they are bedazzled by magic, miracles and utopian dreams.” (p.87)

- In the chapter, ‘The New Fundamentalists’,(pp.80-83), Hedges launches a scathing attack on the New Atheists; implying that they are acting behind their alibi of philosophy, in being uncritical of, and locked in a conspiracy of silence against, ‘*the perfect crime*’ of totalitarian capitalism and its effects on the world’s dispossessed. (2008, p.82)
- Hedges (2008, p.185) does well to caution against any proposition which appears to advocate absolutism, without recognizing the imperfections and the fragility of the human condition and the rightful place of these limitations in the formation of moral and ethical codes.
- One of Hedges’ most important arguments (2008, p.88), in his critique of the New Atheists, and particularly Hitchens in this regard, is the reluctance of Hitchens, Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins to satisfactorily factor in the political dimensions of resistance into their arguments, particularly from within segments of the Middle East, in preference for viewing the root causes of such resistance largely through the lens of religious fundamentalism.¹⁷⁴ This point brings into sharp focus the ambiguity of Hitchens fervent opposition to totalitarianism and empire, whilst being in support of the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan by American and NATO forces, as referred to in detail earlier in this study.

The case advanced by Hedges, even with the vitriol deployed within his arguments against Hitchens and other New Atheists, is important for this discourse, because it describes the two worldviews in tension. However, in the interest of a fair and equitable enquiry of these

¹⁷⁴ Christopher Hedges has been uncompromising in his stand against a simplistic cause-and-effect deduction between religion and what is viewed as religiously inspired violence; a critique levelled against Hitchens, Harris and Dawkins. His debate with Sam Harris: *Truthdig Debate – Religion, Politics and The End of The World*, covers this point adequately. Online Reference : Christopher Hitchens (2011). Debate Chris Hedges vs Sam Harris Religion, Politics FULL. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prWFkt9-HT0>>. [Accessed 11 May 2013].

important issues, it could be argued that the work of Hedges, at least as per his 2008 publication; *'I Don't Believe in Atheists'*, does not represent a balanced critique of any fair sample from the body of Hitchens' responses to Christendom. It is evident that Hedges' interpretations on the pursuit of empire, particularly on the part of the United States of America and his admirable personal¹⁷⁵ stand for the protection of constitutionally enshrined human rights and freedoms, has influenced an overextended and needless assault on New Atheism, without a serious account being postulated on the actual case against Christendom and its doctrines, as advocated by Hitchens. It is noted, though, that Christopher Hedges work (2008), *'American Fascists: The Christian Right and The War on America'*¹⁷⁶, is an important contribution to understanding the role of the Christian faith within American and global politics. Nonetheless, as a theologian¹⁷⁷ who is not formally engaged with an academic institution, as well as, being a respected journalist and author, with the *street-credentials* to challenge the likes of Christopher Hitchens, the contribution by Christopher Hedges to this discourse is a valuable one. His debate¹⁷⁸ with Christopher Hitchens, held at Berkeley University, California on 24 May 2007, is particularly enlightening on these issues. Furthermore, it reflects the tempering voice which Hedges has brought to this discourse, drawn largely from his life 'in the trenches' as a foreign correspondent and as a professional Journalist, which background, in many respects, was not dissimilar to that of Hitchens. The decision to broaden the scope of this study to include the likes of Hedges was based on the need to embrace the shift in the gravity of the

¹⁷⁵ The Legal Case (2013) : Hedges Vs Obama, registers Christopher Hedges and others, including Noam Chomsky, as plaintiffs against President Obama and the United States Government. Christopher Hedges has led the challenge against President Obama's signing of the National Defence Authorisation Act, Section 1021 (B)(2), which, according to Hedges and others, is an infringement of the rights of free journalism and the public's right to information, as well as being an unconstitutional threat to the personal freedoms and safety of journalists. Extensive coverage of the proceedings of the Case can be viewed on www.truthdog.com, or directly at, Online Reference :

Hedges, C. (2013). Chris Hedges: The NDAA and the Death of the Democratic State. 11 February 2013. Truthdig [online]. [Accessed 19 June 2013]. Available from: <http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_ndaa_and_the_death_of_the_democratic_state_20130211>.

¹⁷⁶ For further insights into this publication, Christopher Hedges presentation on this book has proved useful. Online Reference:

The Film Archive (2013). What does the Christian Right Want? Chris Hedges on American Fascists. (2007). [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bNEqAU7S2w>>. [Accessed 25 August 2013].

¹⁷⁷ Christopher Hedges holds a Masters in Divinity Degree from Harvard University.

¹⁷⁸ Debate: Christopher Hitchens and Christopher Hedges at Berkeley University. Online Reference : Christopher Hitchens (2012). Christopher Hitchens Vs Chris Hedges FULL plus FISH. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNL6KrLnnCs>>. [Accessed 20 January 2013].

discourse to within the 'public square', whilst holding onto every academic rigour to shape and maintain the integrity of this study.

3.8 : Hitchens and The Socratic Method.

The journey towards the discovery of new knowledge and the truth, or seeking the resolution to a problem, may often be more important, as an enlightening experience, itself, than the answers themselves. As opposed to the option of relying on the 'received' wisdom of the 'revelation' found in Holy Scripture(s), Hitchens advocates the search for the truth as a lived reality, one with another. Sam Schulman (2007)¹⁷⁹, in his Article critiquing the book '*God is not Great*', noted the following, which summarises the point just alluded to.

"What, then, does Hitchens wish to put in place of religion? He calls for a new enlightenment, and proposes that we realize its promise by imitating the Socratic method of rational thinking."

The power of the dialectic approach, to seeking the truth from within two or more contrasting or opposing options, in dialogue with one another, is viewed by Hitchens (2007, pp.255-256) as the more noble and enlightening experience, than the dictation and "revealed" wisdom of sacred texts. Christopher Hitchens embraced the Socratic Method¹⁸⁰, which embodies the points detailed above, as being more than just a learnership or pedagogic model, but a stand in itself against the propagation of religion; on the basis that the method, itself, will yield the results of reasoned outcomes, as opposed to the unquestioned or credulous adoption of received or revealed wisdom, a point which Hitchens also highlights in his account of the Socratic Method in his responses to the Reddit 10 Questions put to him.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ The Article was published in the online magazine, Commentary. Online Reference : Schulman, S. (2007). God Is Not Great by Christopher Hitchens Commentary Magazine. 1 June 2007. Commentary [online]. [Accessed 20 June 2003]. Available from: <<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/god-is-not-great-by-christopher-hitchens/>>.

¹⁸⁰ *God is Not Great*, p.256.

¹⁸¹ Reddit is the San Francisco based online news and social website. The film recording of Hitchens responses to the Reddit 10 Questions; Online Reference :

Elizabeth Garrett (1998)¹⁸² of The Chicago Law School, in an Article entitled, '*The Socratic Method*', explains the application and benefits of this model of knowledge formation.

"Socratic discourse requires participants to articulate, develop and defend positions that may at first be imperfectly defined intuitions.....A further objective is to inculcate in students the habit of rigorous and critical analysis of the arguments that they hear, as well as the practice of addressing and revising their own ideas and approaches in light of new information or different reasoning."

The idea of participants in dialogue, holding opposing views, and aimed at seeking the truth, through reasoned argument and through the identification and dispensing of contradictions and inaccuracies, is upheld by Hitchens as a more authentic path towards establish any moral framework by which human affairs should be regulated.

The debates entered into by Hitchens with persons from the Christian faith, may not have always fallen strictly within the parameters of the Socratic Method, as it often was a platform for two different viewpoints to be argued. This was not necessarily with the aim of entering into discourse in pursuit of finding the truth, but merely to position opposing predispositions on a subject. Having said that, and given the critical role of these debates, as a deconstruction mechanism to get to Hitchens' critique of vicarious redemption, it may be worth further consideration, as to whether or not the format of the debates, in this case, did not reflect elements which supported, either a new religious consciousness in the minds of the participants, particularly the members of the audience, around the subject, or a complete abandonment of the Christian idea of redemption, altogether. Whilst Hitchens did not reflect an overt predisposition to 'proselytize' for atheism, as there was no belief system advocated, to

Metousiosis (2009). Christopher Hitchens. [online]. Available from:

<<http://metousiosis.com/2013/03/27/christopher-hitchens-ama/>>. [Accessed 11 February 2013]. [29.20 minutes].

¹⁸² Although the Article is written within the context of a Law School, it does capture the essence of The Socratic Method. At the time of publication Elizabeth Garret was Assistant Professor of Law at The University of Chicago Law School. Online Reference:

Garrett, E. (1998). The Socratic Method. (1998). University of Chicago The Law School [online]. Available from: <http://www.law.uchicago.edu/socrates/soc_article.html>. [Accessed 9 August 2013].

which to convert people, the desire to shift thinking away from the dictates of supposedly divinely inspired Scriptural texts, towards a *new enlightenment paradigm* (2007, pp.277-283)¹⁸³, was ever present. The inherent limitation of the debate format, which simply pits two opposing perspectives against one another, is recognized. In this regard the comments of David Couzens Hoy (2004, p.228)¹⁸⁴ is useful;

"Perspectives fall short of objectivity and complete truth because they involve only a partial picture of social reality."

It could be argued that these debates did reflect a serious interrogation of the issues with which the participants were tasked, in a manner that often went beyond just arguments of two different perspectives on a subject. However, it is significant to recognise that, with regard to the classical Christian proposition on redemption, Hitchens did not have a particular offering or proposition which he was promoting or that he was arguing *for*. On the other hand, his counterparts in the debates were arguing for the establishment and reinforcement of the case *for* Christian redemption in the minds of the participants and members of the audience. In the case of Hitchens' counterparts, the fact that most of them, perhaps with the exception of ex British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Christopher Hedges, were career Christians, with their lives and careers well invested in the religio-industrial complex of Christianity, an aspect which cannot be ruled out as a contributing factor as to how their religious consciousness, *perspectives and interests* were shaped and argued.¹⁸⁵ With regard to the debates to be examined, the role of interests, whether they are objective interests or self-interest, is a critical variable in determining the outcomes of a particular interaction. Whilst it is not the purpose of this study to determine the extent to which the key parties to the debates seek their own self-interests or not, it is an important consideration to be borne in mind through analysis of the debates. Towards this end, Hoy (2004, p.223), expands on the differentiation between what represents an objective interest, as opposed to self-interest;

"An objective interest means, among other things, a course of action which is in fact in

¹⁸³'*God is Not Great*', pp.277-283.

¹⁸⁴ David Couzens Hoy (2004, p.288), *Critical Resistance from Poststructuralism to Post-Critique*.

¹⁸⁵ In this regard, the work of Sean Fairclough (2012), *'The Attack of The Theocrats'*, is a significant contribution to this discourse,

my interests but which I do not currently recognize as such."

If the examination of the encounters between Christopher Hitchens and his Christian debating counterparts are to make a meaningful contribution to this study, such examination will need to filter through these learnings from the Socratic Method; to establish their contributions to the discourse and to new knowledge, even if the debates themselves do not strictly fit what is traditionally understood to be the Socratic method.

3.9 : The Principle of Okham's Razor.

It will be important and necessary to understand Hitchens' alignment with the principle of William of Ockham (1287-1347), an English Franciscan friar and philosopher, on what is now popularly referred to as Okham's Razor (or Occam's Razor). Smart, J.J.C. (1994, p.20), notes Okham's Razor as, *"the principle that entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity"*, and expands further on this principle (p.186), *"that mysteries should not be multiplied beyond necessity"*. Put plainly, the simplest answer is usually the correct one; thus, Ockham's razor cuts through an issue or problem and eliminates unnecessary elements. Hitchens (2007, p.70)¹⁸⁶ draws on Okham's principles and offers his interpretation of Ockham's razor and notes of William of Ockham;

"He devised a "principle of economy," popularly known as "Okham's razor," which relied for its effect on disposing of unnecessary assumptions and accepting the first sufficient explanation or cause. "Do not multiply entities beyond necessity." This principle extends itself. "Everything which is explained through positing something different from the act of understanding" he wrote, "can be explained without positing such a distinct thing."

Given the strong controversies already raised by, *'God is not Great'*, since its publication, it may very well be that there will be a long line of critics to follow the likes of Mark Roberts and John

¹⁸⁶*'God is not Great', Page 70.*

Haught, as already considered. However, to wish to critique Hitchens' work and to not understand his application of the principles of Ockham's Razor there within, may run the risk of erroneously marginalising his contributions as being too vulgar for any academic enterprise. His contribution to the cause to stop the theological treadmill, from churning out volume after volume of interpretations, which are largely faith-based, on subject matters which are effectively unknowable, may have been inspired by the following extract (2007, p.68)¹⁸⁷;

"In our new semi-secular and mediocre condition, even the religious will speak with embarrassment of the time when theologians would dispute over futile propositions with fanatical intensity: measuring the length of angels' wings, for example, or debating how many such mythical creatures could dance on the head of a pin."

In dealing with the controversial circumstances which supported the beatification of Mother Teresa¹⁸⁸, Hitchens summarized his understanding of Okham's Razor as follows;

"Once again the razor of Okham is clean and decisive. When two explanations are offered, one must discard the one that explains the least, or explains nothing at all, or raises more questions than it answers."(p.148)¹⁸⁹

Hitchens' alignment with the principles of Ockham's Razor need not be taken to indicate a disposition towards reductionism. Whilst certain of his works, particularly within debates and presentations may indicate a tendency towards redacting sacred texts and selected and relevant publications, Hitchens' arguments do not reflect a simple assimilation of the parts of an issue. According to his close friend, Martin Amis, his arguments generally reflected wit and

¹⁸⁷'God is not Great', p.68.

¹⁸⁸ Hitchens (2007, p.145), 'God is Not Great'. For further reference, Hitchens' Article in Slate magazine, 20 October 2003, elaborates on this aspect. Online Reference :
Hitchens, C.E. (2003). Mommie Dearest : The pope beatifies Mother Teresa, a fanatic, a fundamentalist, and a fraud. [Online]. Slate, 20 October 2003. Available from :
http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/fighting_words/2003/10/mommie_dearest.html. [Accessed 18 July 2013].

¹⁸⁹'God is Not Great', p. 148.

insight which pointed to deeper, yet obvious realisations, on the part of the listener or reader.¹⁹⁰ Amis notes,

"In his speech, it is the terse witticism that we remember; in his prose, what we thrill to is his magisterial expansiveness...The extracts that follow aren't jokes or jibes. They are more like crystallizations — insights that lead the reader to a recurring questions: If this is so obviously true, and it is, why did we have to wait for Christopher to point it out to us?"

Guided by these comments, within the context of the discussion on 'Ockhams' Razor, the view held throughout this study is that the academic objective of this undertaking will be best served by considering Hitchens comments on specific areas of the Christian faith within his total critique of religion and the Christian belief system.

¹⁹⁰ The quotation by Martin Amis is drawn from an Article, '*A Tribute to Christopher Hitchens : How to write like a wiseguy.*', published 16 December 2011, by Roy Peter Clark of The Poynter Intitute, an international strategy centre specialising in Journalism Studies. Online reference :

Clark, R.P. (2011). A Tribute to Christopher Hitchens : How to write like a wiseguy. 16 December 2011. Poynter [online. Available from: <<http://www.poynter.org/how-tos/newsgathering-storytelling/writing-tools/156452/a-tribute-to-christopher-hitchens-how-to-write-like-a-wise-guy/>>. [Accessed 10 October 2013]. In this Article, Parker note his assessment of Hitchens, as follows.

"I've been reading a lot of Christopher Hitchens lately — and not just in anticipation of his death. As a writer and a public scholar, Hitchens scared me. I tried to imagine what would happen if I had the opportunity to debate him on some issue of politics and language, and I always came out of the exchange battered and bloody. The quickness of his wit, his intellectual range, his livid mean streak — all these I found discouraging, a writer both envious and cowed by the brilliance of another."

3.10 : Hitchens' Razor.

Building upon Richardson's (1969, p.236), summarised understanding of Okham's Razor as ;

"simplicity is the ideal of logical thinking";

the 'razor', then, could be viewed as the instrument of philosophical analysis, which allows for the selection of that argument or hypothesis which makes the least number of assumptions and offers the most adequate explanation, based on the best evidence available.¹⁹¹ Understanding the principle of 'Hitchens Razor' is pivotal to understanding his position within his various debates with Christian apologists and his overall stance on religion. In his commentary on Douglas Wilson's disposition to assume the contents of the Bible as being true, Hitchens notes¹⁹²;

"faith is the willingness to assume what you have to prove." (0.10 minutes)

He expands on this thought, further on in the discussion;

"we don't assert as true what we've just been asked to prove." (1.25 minutes)

Adding to this cluster of thoughts is the related phrase which has been popularly identified as a Christopher Hitchens (2007, p.150) 'signature' phrase;

*"What can be asserted without evidence can be dismissed without evidence."*¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ This understanding of Ockham's Razor is aided by the Merriam Webster Dictionary definition of 'Okhams Razor';

"a scientific and philosophic rule that entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily which is interpreted as requiring that the simplest of competing theories be preferred to the more complex or that explanations of unknown phenomena be sought first in terms of known quantities."

Online reference:

Merriam-Webster Dictionary, (2013). [Online]. Available from : <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/occam's%20razor>. [Accessed 30 October 2013].

¹⁹² Debate: Christopher Hitchens and Douglas Wilson.

Online Reference :

10sodot (2010). Christopher Hitchens on Critical Thinking. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrMyCyZx1zY>>. [Accessed 5 July 2013]. [0.10 minutes – 1.25 minutes]. Hitchens' comments [0.10 minutes] and [1.25 minutes].

¹⁹³ One of the earliest references found of Hitchens' use of this idea was in his responses to the beatification of Miss Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu (Mother Teresa), in an Article entitled, 'Mommie Dearest', published on 20 October 2003 in Slate Magazine. Online Reference :

Hitchens, C.E. (2003). Mommie Dearest : The pope beatifies Mother Teresa, a fanatic, a fundamentalist, and a fraud. [Online]. Slate, 20 October 2003. Available from :

Of a similar strand, Richard Dawkins made the following comment as to who carries the burden of proof in making a claim within the context of faith-based religion;

*"The onus is on you to say why. The onus is not on the rest of us to say why not."*¹⁹⁴

The importance of the points made by Hitchens and Dawkins will be amplified through the analysis of the debates considered in this study; with particular reference to the encounter between, Hitchens and William Lane Craig. Hitchens employs his 'razor' principle to place Craig within the category of pre-suppositionists; that of taking the position of assuming to be true, that which one is tasked to prove *is* true. It could, therefore, be understood from these pronouncements by Hitchens and Dawkins, that, it is the person making a claim who carries the burden of proof and should s/he not satisfy the requirement to prove the claim, then, the person contesting the claim should not be brought under any obligation to prove what could then be considered to be an unfounded claim.

http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/fighting_words/2003/10/mommie_dearest.html. [Accessed 18 July 2013].

¹⁹⁴ An excerpt from the presentation of Richard Dawkins', *Militant Atheism*, on www.Ted.com. Online Reference: Ted. (2007). Richard Dawkins - Militant Atheism. [online]. Available from: <http://www.ted.com/talks/richard_dawkins_on_militant_atheism.html>. [Accessed 5 July 2013].

Chapter Four

The Debates and Presentations.

Having considered the key work of Christopher Hitchens, as it relates to the subject of vicarious redemption, as well as critiques of his work, it will be imperative to consider the outcome of the set of debates and interviews which resulted from the, *'God is not Great'*, book tour, mainly through The United States of America, but as well as other parts of the world, including Australia, Canada and England. The collection of Films references, listed within this study, of these debates and interviews, are considered a sufficient and fair representation of the substance of the arguments posited by Hitchens on religion and the Christian faith, generally, and the Christian doctrine of vicarious redemption, in particular. Whilst much of what is recorded within this set of source material reaffirms the positions articulated within the book, it is the supplementary material and film recordings, relating to the core subject of vicarious redemption, which finds further expression and elaboration within these resources. Given the very nature of the material, the key interviews and debates will be considered individually, with further reference being made to other such recordings, as may be necessary.

Prior to a detailed consideration of the debates and interviews, it is once again necessary to point out that Christopher Hitchens was not a formally trained theologian, whilst most of his debating counterparts were well established career theologians of Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Whilst all of the debates, interviews and presentations cover important elements of the Hitchens' hermeneutic, there are those that cover aspects of his epistemological formation; that is, to attempt to answer the question as to what does, or does not constitute the foundational aspects the body of knowledge which informs the decisions and positions which he holds so dearly to. The first discussion with Tony Jones¹⁹⁵ and the debate with Frank

¹⁹⁵ Tony Jones is an Australian journalist and broadcaster with ABC – Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Turek¹⁹⁶ are particularly enlightening in this regard, prior to engaging with the subject matter of vicarious redemption specifically within the remaining debates selected for this analysis.

4.1. : Presentation and Interview - Christopher Hitchens

Title: *'Religion Poisons Everything'*.

Participant: Christopher Hitchens

Facilitator: Tony Jones – Journalist and Broadcaster ABC TV.

Date: 3 October 2009

Place: Sydney Opera House, Australia.

Reference: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwiHkM126bk> [Accessed 4 January 2013]

This recording offers insights into the overarching paradigm within which Christopher Hitchens formulates and carries through his critique of the Christian belief system; as such it provides the context for the deconstruction and interpretation of his arguments, thereby making it a necessary and integral part of this study. In this latter regard, this particular presentation argues for an interrogation of 'the plan', (18.51 minutes) within which the Christian belief system is framed and constructed; the very same plan which underpins the doctrine of vicarious redemption.

The first major question of the presentation, strikes at the core of the Christian journey from creation-to-redemption. After describing the natural wonders of the universe and the possibility of the Solar System self-destructing, Hitchens poses the question; (19.02 Minutes),

*"Is this part of a plan? If so, whose plan is it?....So, if you think that all this is going on in these gigantic fields of gravity and light, with you in mind, then you really do have a self-centeredness problem."*¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Frank Turek is an author on Christian theology.

¹⁹⁷ This point could very well have applied to the proposition put forward by Jim Denison regarding a divine plan, in the debate Hitchens has with four Christian Apologists, which will be covered in this study. Online Reference : Timohy Havener (2011). Is there an afterlife (FULL DEBATE). [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbzd6ZbCowY>>. [Accessed 13 January 2013].

This point does call into questioning a fundamental element of the Christian faith, that, everything on earth falls under this 'plan' of God, the divine architect and author of this plan; irrespective of whether one is a creationist or an adherent of the 'intelligent design' school. It has to be acknowledged that for a person desirous of a life within Christianity, to get off the starting block, she/he would have to accept this 'plan' as a foundational reality of their belief. Hitchens goes on to describe his often repeated account of the history of the human species over the last 100, 000 years during which primates, or humans, have been known to inhabit the planet.¹⁹⁸ He explains that during the 100,000 years of human existence, which was characterised by , diseases, war, rape, the enslavement of people, malnutrition and more ethereal interpretations of events of the natural order, such as eclipses and earthquakes, as well as cults of sacrifices to ward off such events; and summarises (22.07minutes) that,

“you have to believe this if you believe in monotheism; for the first 97 000 - 98 000 of this [years], heaven watches with indifference.” He elaborates, “3000 years ago at the most, its decided, no, we got to intervene now. You have to believe it. You have to believe it.”

Hitchens goes on to stress the point that to believe in Christianity one has to believe something of this divinely crafted 'plan' for intervention in human affairs. In this context it is taken as understood that he is referring to the story of the incarnation of Jesus Christ and his part in the divine 'plan'. A further significant point brought into building his case against any such divine 'plan', is the manner, place and peoples which constitute the revelation of this 'plan'. He notes that all three monotheistic faiths *reveal* themselves in the same region of Palestine¹⁹⁹; where literacy levels, according to Hitchens, were less than ideal, when compared to, say, the Chinese, who could read and write. (23.10 minutes).

¹⁹⁸ In support of his argument, Hitchens points to the work of Professor Richard Dawkins and Professor Francis Collins, a key figure in co-ordinating the Human Genome Project and notes that the approximation in such timing, 100 000 years, should not detract from the point which he is making.

¹⁹⁹ Which region [Palestine] Hitchens, within the same context, refers to as “barbaric and illiterate parts of the Middle East”. Online Reference :

Ultra Noctem (2010). Hitchens vs God (god loses by the way). [Online]. Available from : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7nIRJmZ4K8>. [Accessed 10 May 2013]. [9.32 minutes].

A further important question posed by Hitchens in this section of the presentation is that, if this was the 'plan', was it made by someone who cares for us, (25.04 minutes), upon which Hitchens builds the further question that if it were so, how does one start to explain that this 'plan' allowed for the extinction of 99 per cent of all life which once inhabited the earth? Once again, it is useful to note that, for the purpose of this study, understanding the fit of vicarious redemption into this 'plan' has to be predicated upon some understanding of the 'plan' and the 'planner'. Hitchens' attempt to unravel and assist this process by expanding upon the point of those species now gone extinct and notes that if such extinction was allowed as a part of this 'plan', then;

"It only restates the original problem, that the planner must be either very capricious, really toying with his creation, and or very clumsy, very tinkering and fantastically wasteful,.....,or very cruel, and very callous, just perhaps very indifferent, or some combination of all the above. And so there's no good saying that he moves in mysterious ways, or that he has purposes that are opaque to us." (25.04 minutes)

Whilst the point about the species gone extinct may appear to have little significance for our subject matter of vicarious redemption, the arguments raised by Hitchens does bring into question the makings and integrity of this overarching plan, from creation-to-redemption, as per the Christian belief system.²⁰⁰ Perhaps the summary on the point, as offered by Hitchens [38.20 minutes] during his debate with Reverend Al Sharpton may serve better;

"We cannot know there was a creator, whether of ourselves or of our cosmos. You may wish to assume one, but that's the best you can do. The evidence is all, that the cosmos evolved and the evidence that there was a single mind purposeful creator of it is nil."

²⁰⁰ Hitchens' explanations, during his debate with William Lane Craig, on how close the human species came to extinction itself, will further illustrate the point.
Online Reference : Wade Davis (2011). Christopher Hitchens vs William Lane Craig - Does God Exist Debate. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FofDChISILU>>. [Accessed 10 January 2013]. [39.40 minutes].

4.2. Debate Title 1: 'What Best Explains Reality – Theism or Atheism'.

Participants: Christopher Hitchens and Frank Turek²⁰¹

Facilitator: James Taylor.

Date: 9 September 2008

Place: The College of New Jersey.

Reference: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDCDTaKfzXU> [Accessed 29 April 2013]

"Jesus said this, the greatest love a person can show is to die for his friends. So while Christopher's attitude may be, there is no God and I hate him, God's attitude is, there is a Christopher Hitchens and I love him; in fact I died for him."

Frank Turek.

Turek's quote was his concluding remarks to the debate. (2hrs.05.30minutes). The set of debates reviewed in this section of the study convey Christopher Hitchens' stance on the position articulated by Turek. It is significant to note that this statement by Turek followed on his account of an American soldier who had died in military service in the Iraq 'War' (May 2003-December 2012), in an act of valour which saved the lives of his colleagues. In this regard, Turek poses the question; *"Is sacrifice immoral?"* (2hrs.05.15 minutes). The point of engaging with these debates is not to answer the debate question or to take any position on them, but to examine the debates within the mandate and framework of this study, with particular emphasis on how Hitchens responds to propositions and arguments put to him. This debate is particularly interesting, in examining how Hitchens uses his arguments regarding the historicity of Jesus Christ within the Christian narrative on redemption, to test the claims of logical deduction.

Turek has an attempt at the historicity of Jesus Christ; an aspect, without which there would be nothing to logically prove or deduce. Whereas Turek claims to know the mind of God, with the use of the phrase, *"Christ's central purpose was not to come to make bad people good, he came to make dead people live"*, (1hr.49.00 minutes), the purpose of this section of the study is less

²⁰¹ Frank Turek is an American Christian apologist and author.

ambitious, and is aimed at understanding the 'mind' of Hitchens, with regard to vicarious redemption and the Christian belief system. The following key arguments and statements by Hitchens assist in this endeavour.

- That which he does not believe in are; Santa Clause, the tooth fairy, astrology, that prayers are answered, miracles, and a supernatural dimension; all of which he categorises as “man-made fables” (26.50 minutes). Furthermore, he notes that he does not need a title, even that of being referred to as an ‘atheist’, to define him as somebody who simply does not believe in something supernatural.
- Hitchens claims that there is sufficient knowledge within the study of the sciences (Laws) to conclude that the universe operates without the *assumption* of a ‘prime-mover’. (27.55 minutes). His summary on this point is captured as follows;
“There is no way you can take a step from the laws of physics, the observable creation of the cosmos, that leads you to the belief that there is an intervening personal God; who does answer prayers, who does watch over you, who does notice what you are up to, who does mind what you do, who you sleep with and in what position, what you eat and on what days of the week, what propitiations and sacrifices you will make, what commandments you will observe.”
(28.40 minutes).
- Hitchens invokes the works of David Hume (31.40 minutes) alongside his understanding of humans as “*pattern seeking mammals*”, to answer the question as to “*why we have religion in the first place*”. More importantly for this study; Hitchens takes aim at the question as to; what does it take to move from scientific argument to a belief in anything which cannot be supported by evidence and which is essentially *unknowable* (28.15 minutes)? In the case of the Christian redemption account; how do we get to the redemptive capacity of the cross? Hitchens asserts that for anyone who chooses to take up the Christian value proposition of vicarious redemption, it

would, out of biblical and doctrinal necessity, have to be a path to the *cross*, via the account of the ‘Incarnation’ of the historical Jesus Christ, through the ‘immaculate conception’, to the promise of redemption at the cross of Calvary.

“Indeed, if you want to be a Christian, it’s an article of their faith; we were all present at Calvary, we all drove in the nails, the Jews particularly so. And we all have to expiate this guilt for a crime that may or may not have been committed, but if it was, it was committed before we were born. What is this? It’s not physics. It’s not biology. It’s not science. It’s faith!” (31.30 minutes)

- Hitchens aims to debunk any attempt at regarding a faith-based claim as logical deduction. [29.20 minutes] By noting that, even if it had to be conceded that there was the historical figure of Jesus Christ, who had a mother who was a virgin, it would not prove that he was the son of God, or that his teachings were not erroneous.

Directing his key point to Turek, Hitchens urges;

“Why don’t you fly under your true flag, Sir? Why don’t you say, these things must be believed as articles of faith? Don’t try to derive it from science. “ (31.45 Minutes)

“The religious would be much better to leave evidence alone, where they don’t excel, and to concentrate on faith where at least they can claim some kind of monopoly.” (39.15 Minutes).

4.3. : Debate Title 2: ‘Poison or Cure? : Religious Belief in the Modern World’.

Participants: Christopher Hitchens and Alister McGrath, Professor of Historical Theology – Oxford University.

Moderator: Michael Cromartie , Vice President – Ethics and Public Policy Centre.

Date: 11 October 2007

Place: Berkley Centre for Religion, Peace and World Affairs – Georgetown University.

Reference: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKdZT7r2-RY> [Accessed 28 May 2013].

Of particular importance for this study is that this debate and Hitchens' articulation of his part therein, allows for a closer examination of the unique *Hitchens-hermeneutic* which was core to his arguments. This debate is of further significance for two key reasons. Firstly, because the immediate challenge which Hitchens presents to Professor McGrath (07.12minutes) is the need to declare whether he really believes that there was a virgin birth, and whether he believes in a Genesis creation, and whether he really believes in bodily resurrection; or whether he considers all of the foregoing to be purely metaphorical. Hitchens emphasises that he considers it fair to expect such a declaration to be forthcoming from Professor McGrath. Secondly, Hitchens, very early in the proceedings (10.25minutes), firmly declares his position on vicarious redemption; first through a question put to the audience and then through his responses thereto.

Question presented by Hitchens,

"Is it moral, again, I can only do Christianity this evening, is it moral to believe that your sins, yours and mine, Ladies and Gentlemen, Brothers and Sisters, can be forgiven by the punishment of another person? Is it ethical to believe that?"

Response from Hitchens,

"I would submit that the doctrine of vicarious redemption by human sacrifice is utterly immoral."

Of direct significance to the core of this study, is Hitchens' reference (11.20minutes) to the historical association with 'scapegoating' and asserts his view that 'scapegoating' and, implicitly, vicarious redemption, is *"a positively immoral doctrine that abolishes the concept of personal responsibility on which all ethics and all morality must depend."* The significance of this point is that it underpins Hitchens' broader hypothesis that *"religion poisons everything"*; which he regards as being more than a catchy subtitle to the book, *'God is not Great'*, but a reality to be challenged. Hitchens, during a separate debate²⁰² with Frank Turek from the one discussed

²⁰² Extract from Debate with Frank Turek at Virginia Commonwealth University. Online reference : rationalstabs (2013). Hitchens delivers one of his best hammer blows to cocky audience member. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJ2LehsA1dk>>. [Accessed 5 June 2013].

above, details his reasoning in arriving at his position that, *“religion poisons everything”*, during which he responds to an audience member, with the following points;

- *“The eschatological element that is inseparable from Christianity; if you don’t believe that there is going to be an apocalypse, that there is going to be an end, a separation of the sheep and the goats, a condemnation, a final one; then you’re not really a believer. ”* (2.30 minutes). Hitchens refers (3.24 minutes) to this ‘eschatological element’ as the *“final solution”* and a *“cult of death”* (4.03 minutes).
- Hitchens asserts that religion ruins the good relations between peoples and nations. (4.23 minutes).
- Hitchens summarises his point (4.42 minutes);
“So, when I say, as a subtitle of my book, that ‘religion poisons everything’, I am not doing what publishers like and coming up with a provocative subtitle, I mean to say it infects us in our most basic integrity. It says we can’t be moral without big brother, without totalitarian permission; it means we can’t be good to one another, we can’t think without this. We must also be afraid and we must also be forced to love someone whom we fear, the essence of sadomasochism, the essence of abjection, the essence of the master and slave relationship.”

Hitchens rejects any doctrine which *implicates* him as a guilty participant in the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ at Calvary and which *“confirms the original filthy sin”* (12.01 minutes) in which he was conceived; the sin of Adam and Genesis. It is this manner in which the Christian faith implicates him in acts such as Calvary and the biblical idea of the origins of sin which sets the basis for the ‘totalitarianism’ which he finds inherent in the Christian faith; which, he says, has him *“born under a celestial dictatorship which I could not have had any hand in choosing”* (12.22 minutes). A key aspect of the totalitarianism embodied within the Christian belief system, according to Hitchens (12.55 minutes), is that it is not confined to the life here and now, but continues into the eternity of the ‘afterlife’. Whilst not unmindful of the various

competing interpretations and theological responses put forward over the centuries on these subjects, for Hitchens, this is a key doctrinal strand of the Christian belief system.²⁰³

In summarising his position on vicarious redemption and the alternate offering or consequence of eternal damnation, Hitchens (13.22 minutes) reminds the gathering that the Old Testament does not hold such promise of eternal damnation as the New Testament does, and that;

“only till, when gentle Jesus, meek and mild, makes his appearance are those who won’t accept the message, told that they must depart into everlasting fire. Is this morality? Is this ethics? I submit, not only is it not, not only does it come with the false promise of vicarious redemption, but, it is the origin of the totalitarian principle which has been such a burden and shame to our species for so long. I further think that it undermines us in our most essential integrity. It dissolves our obligation to live and witness in truth.”

With Professor McGrath, whose views could be regarded as being of the school of Christian Apologetics²⁰⁴, which, is purposed to defend the Christian faith from opposition.²⁰⁵ His

²⁰³ Hitchens, although himself disinclined to any notion of a celestial reward in heaven, would have been interested to learn of Cardinal George Pell’s responses to a question put to him on Australian TV Show, *Q and A*. Cardinal Pell was asked by the Moderator; “Is it possible for an atheist to go to heaven?”; to which Cardinal Pell answered; “Certainly. Certainly.” The significance of this point derives from, both, the substance of the discussions, as well as the existent wide degree of latitude within doctrinal and biblical interpretations, which allowed Cardinal Pell to open the gates of heaven to atheists; which, implicitly, sets aside the system of redemption within Christianity; in favour of one based simply on ‘works’. Debate on *Q and A* dated 10 April 2012, between Richard Dawkins and Cardinal George Pell. Online Reference :

tubester4567 (2012). Richard Dawkins vs Cardinal George Pell on Q. [online]. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tD1QHO_AVZA>. [Accessed 11 May 2013]. [41.50 minutes].

²⁰⁴ With the understanding of what constitutes Christian Apologetics, as described by Bart Erhmann, earlier in this study, still being applicable at this point.

²⁰⁵ The significance of the stance of Christian Apologetics within this debate cannot be overstated, in that it does point to one of the convictions which inspired this study in the first place; that the body of source material which underpins and supports this academic discourse, may be found to tilt strongly in favour of the school of Christian Apologetics, in sheer volume rather than substance. The pronouncements of academics such as Colin Gunton may serve to prove the point. Gunton (1988, p.176), in his work, *‘The Actuality of Atonement : A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition’*, notes;

“If the settlement which created Christendom introduced contradictions, we have the Enlightenment to thank for their revelation. Modernism is the ideology which lives from exposure of these contradictions. Its tragedy, and ours, is that it lives from little else: indeed, its contradictions are deeper and more deadly than those of Christendom largely because of its demonic human self-confidence and lack of a doctrine of sin.”

It is critically important to note, for the purpose of this study, that as at the time of publication of his work, Colin Gunton was Professor of Christian Doctrine at King’s College, University of London; who went on to make his contribution to the academic discourse, as follows (1988, p.177),

responses to the points made by Hitchens are reduced, by him to ***differences in interpretations*** of what biblical Scripture actually means. Whilst a clear and direct response is not forthcoming on Hitchens' challenge as to whether McGrath views on certain biblical accounts, such as the virgin birth, the Genesis creation account and bodily resurrection, have literal or metaphorical significance to him, the position held by Professor McGrath in this regard may become apparent through his responses on the central issue of vicarious redemption.

The question put to Professor McGrath (1hr.11.25 minutes), by the Moderator, on behalf of a member of the audience is,

Moderator : *"For Professor McGrath, here's a question. I would like to hear you expound on Mr Hitchens' claim that the idea of a vicarious sacrifice is immoral or unethical. What is Christianity's explanation of this?"*

McGrath : *"Certainly, well the phrase 'vicarious sacrifice' isn't actually a biblical phrase, it's a phrase that's used by some writers to refer to a particular interpretation of a biblical teaching and the key idea in the New Testament is that in some way the death of Christ, again violence done to Christ, not violence done by Christ, is seen as having a transformative potential for human beings and this transformative potential is articulated using a range of models some of which are drawn from the Old Testament. For example there's the analogy drawn with animal sacrifice and that is seen as in some way as establishing a link between Christ's death and the bringing of a possibility of purity to someone. That is one of the images used. Others include, for example, the whole idea of healing, the idea of being set in the right relationship with God; there's a wide range of these."*

At which point (1hr.12.40 minutes), McGrath is pressed by Hitchens,
"Which of them is yours? I would really like to know".

"The programme for this chapter, then, is to think about the church in the hope of finding a way of showing how the metaphors may return to life in a concrete community of language and life. To begin with the church is not to deny an interest in the world around. It is rather to base an enquiry in the place where the atoning grace of God is acknowledged and lived, however inadequate."

McGrath: (1hr.12.39 minutes),

"I'll tell you right now....For me, the death of Christ on the cross means that something that I could never gain for myself, has been done for me and offered to me. In other words it is something that by myself as a human being, I could never hope to achieve, is achieved on my behalf and offered to me and I am asked; will you accept what has been done for you? In other words, it is about the possibility of transformation being offered to me but not being imposed upon me and for me that is about a God who offers, but does not demand that I respond to him in this way, and I find that a very good summary of what the Christian faith is trying to say about a God who offers but does not impose."

Hitchens: *"Not imposed? Did you really say, not imposed?"*

It could be argued that McGrath is correct on his point that 'vicarious sacrifice', as per the question, is not a biblical construct; not that Hitchens' adopted the position that it was, either. However, it may not be sufficient to reduce the impact and import of the construct, as does McGrath (1hr.38.05 minutes), to the phrase, *"that all of us are interpreters"* of biblical teachings and that the term 'vicarious sacrifice', *"isn't actually a biblical phrase, it's a phrase that's used by some writers to refer to a particular interpretation of a biblical teaching"*. (1hr.11.40 minutes). This is a central and pivotal doctrinal aspect of the Christian belief system which may require more significant treatment than that offered by McGrath. Whilst Hitchens did respond to McGrath's point on the proposition of redemption being offered, as opposed to being imposed, Hitchens or the moderator would have served the debate well by challenging McGrath for a clearer explanation as to what the essence and mechanisms of the 'transformative potential' actually was, which he referred to, as well as the Old Testament association between animal sacrifice and the 'vicarious sacrifice' of the New Testament. Hitchens concluding remarks on this aspect of the debate demonstrates his position on Professor McGrath's responses and the offer of Christian redemption. Hitchens notes the following (1hr.14.00 minutes),

- The offer of redemption within Christianity is not optional. The rejection of the offer of redemption, which derives from the *'torture to death of a human being'*, Hitchens notes (1hr.14.10), will result in the reward of a place in *'hell'*, as has been preached within the Church for centuries.
- Hitchens suggests that the proposition of vicarious redemption has poisoned whole societies and is *not* voluntary. According to Hitchens; *"I don't think it is optional any more than Abraham saying to his Son, 'do you want to come for a long and gloomy walk?'"* (1hr.16.40 minutes).
- The Christian Church is not in agreement on what constitutes the doctrine of redemption.
- Hitchens explicitly refers to McGrath's responses as *'white noise'* which knows no end.
- Hitchens notes that millions of people all over the world celebrate this sadomasochism, every year, as proof that God loved humankind so much that he will kill his own child to prove so.
- McGrath is challenged by Hitchens on a comment he [McGrath] made, regarding redemption within Christianity, during an interview with Richard Dawkins²⁰⁶. The Richard Dawkins – Alister McGrath Debate is very significant as the issues raised by Dawkins and, particularly, the responses from McGrath, offer interesting insights into current understandings of the construct of redemption within Christian theology.

²⁰⁶ The debate between Richard Dawkins and Alister McGrath was recorded at the Oxford Literary Festival in May 2007. Online Reference:
 Ciaran Mac Uistin (2012). *Richard Dawkins Debates Alister McGrath*. [online]. Available from:
 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LGm0iWPC80>>. [Accessed 21 February 2013]. [41.12 minutes].
 The excerpt which Hitchens refers to is from this Dawkins-McGrath interview at 41.12 Minutes into the interview; McGrath, in reference to God's intervention in the world, notes that God knows "what it is like to lose a son". This interview is also significant for this study, in that it also examines the responses of McGrath, who is respected within the fraternity of Christian theologians, on the issue of redemption. McGrath also notes in this interview (28.50 minutes), that it is his belief that there is something wrong with human life; so much so, that we cannot attend to our transformation on our own and that we need to have it done for us. His summary of the motivation behind this redemption is that God yearns for us to return to him, with the removal of sin which stands in his way. The positions expounded by McGrath, which Hitchens refers to, in the Dawkins-McGrath Debate, are exactly the positions which Hitchens repudiates.

- Even if the story of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ were true, Hitchens notes that God does not *“lose a Son, He lends one”*, and notes that this is self-evident in the narrative of the biblical account of the crucifixion and the resurrection, itself.
- God does not offer us His Son, because no one has demanded it.
- There is no problem identified in the human species that demands a human sacrifice.
- Hitchens poses the fundamental question; *“For what ill is this a cure?”* (1hr.17.44 minutes).
- Hitchens (1hr.18.05 minutes) summarises his responses on the Christian proposition of redemption, as follows;

“I don’t want it. I don’t need it. I don’t feel better for it.....Don’t want torture! Don’t want human sacrifice! Don’t want authoritarian blood lettings; smoking temples and altars, [and] incantations of priests!.....[I]Can’t think of a single thing it will make better.”
- The essence of McGrath’s concluding remarks (1hr.38.40 minutes);

*“It’s a matter of faith.”*²⁰⁷

The significance of this debate will now be apparent; having struck at the core of the subject matter of vicarious redemption, between Hitchens, and a widely published academic and theologian, in Professor Alister McGrath.

²⁰⁷ Alister McGrath offers a critique of Richard Dawkins’ work, *‘The God Delusion’*, in his 2007 publication, *‘Dawkins’ God: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life’*. In this critique, McGrath clearly demonstrates the position typical of Christian apologetics, on the vexed debate between faith and reason. To know what Hitchens is up against with McGrath, it is important to note the best that McGrath can deliver. In response to Dawkins’ critique of the historian Tertullian (160-225), McGrath (2007, p. 101) notes that Dawkins incorrectly read Tertullian on the aspect of reason and rationality and McGrath summarises his responses as follows;

“The bottom line is that there are no limits to what may be “investigated and understood by reason.” [Quoting Tertullian] The same God who created humanity with the capacity to reason expects that reason to be used in the exploration and representation of the world. And that’s where the vast majority of Christian theologians stand today.”

This *pre-suppositionist* stand demonstrated by McGrath is a resurgent theme throughout Hitchens’ debates with the Christian theologians engaged within this study.

4.4. : Debate Title 3 : ‘Is religion a Force for Good in the World?’ **The Munk Debates : In Association with The BBC and Intelligence².**

Christopher Hitchens and Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Moderator: Rudyard Griffiths.

Date: 26 November 2010²⁰⁸

Place: Toronto, Canada.

Reference: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddsz9XBhrYA> [Accessed 15 June 2013]

The Hitchens-Blair debate stands out as significant recording of Christopher Hitchens as the unique polemicist that he was respected for being. Having worked through the subject matter of vicarious redemption in some detail in the Hitchens-McGrath debate, the Hitchens-Blair debate does offer further insights into that which motivated Hitchens to adopt the positions which he did and the fervour with which he argued for them. Hitchens [7.40 minutes] quotes from the *Apologia* of Cardinal Newman²⁰⁹, to pronounce his foundational arguments, by reflecting off his rejection of the preachments of Cardinal Newman;

“Here’s my proposition. What we have here, and picked from no mean source, is a distillation of precisely what is twisted and immoral in the faith mentality. It’s essential fanaticism, its consideration of the human being as raw material and its fantasy of purity. Once you assume a creator had a plan, it makes us objects in a cruel experiment whereby we are created sick and commanded to be well. I will repeat that, created sick and then ordered to be well, and over us to supervise this is installed a celestial dictatorship. A kind of divine North Korea; greedy, exigent, I would say. More than exigent, greedy for uncritical praise from dawn till dusk and swift to punish the original sins with which it so tenderly gifted us in the very first place. However, let no one say there’s no cure. Salvation is offered; redemption, indeed, is promised at the low price of the surrender of your critical faculties.” (7.40 minutes)

²⁰⁸ The debate was held almost a year before Christopher Hitchens died and at the time of this debate it was confirmed that he was suffering from stage-4 cancer of the oesophagus, to which he succumbed on 15 December 2011.

²⁰⁹ Hitchens notes that the process which led up to the beatification of Cardinal Newman (John Henry Newman 1801-1890), as announced by Pope Benedict XVI on 19 September 2010, was at the behest of Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Once again, Hitchens leaves the members of the audience in no doubt as to his position on the Christian redemption plan; start to finish. Clearly, Hitchens does not see in this theological plan or this set of doctrinal elements of the Christian faith, the ‘transformational purpose’ of the faith, of which McGrath spoke so fervently. It is evident that the foundational elements of Hitchens’ case against redemption, is rooted in his rejection of the doctrine of ‘original sin’. The significance of this extract is that the *organic material*, of sin and human sacrifice comprising the proposition of vicarious redemption, is fundamentally and diametrically opposed to the counter-proposition to be argued for by Hitchens; which prepares the way for the makings of the new Enlightenment; which was Hitchens’ clarion call.²¹⁰

4.5. : Debate Title 4: ‘Does the God of Christianity Exist and What Difference Does it Make?’

Christopher Hitchens and

- William Lane Craig: Philosopher of Religion and Theologian²¹¹.
- Douglas Wilson: Pastor and Senior Fellow in Theology at New Saints Andrews College.
- Lee Strobel: Pastor, Journalist and Author of Books on Christianity.
- Jim Denison: Theologian and Pastor.

Moderator: Stan Guthrie: Editor of Christianity Today Magazine.

Date: 1 March 2009.

Place: Christian Book Expo. – Dallas, Texas.

Reference: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2j3VU1T8ALU> [Accessed 15 June 2013]

²¹⁰ ‘*God is not Great*’, Page 283.

²¹¹ It is noted, with respect, that Dr Craig and his colleagues from the side of Christian Apologetics operate strongly on the inside of the institutional church-academia framework. Whilst one may be tempted to argue that Hitchens does likewise, within the fraternity of Atheism, it is held that there is a difference. In the case of this debate, all four of Hitchens’ counterparts are career theologians and church leaders; to which Hitchens and his ilk have, clearly, become an ‘occupational hazard’. Dr Craig is Research Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University in California, USA.

Besides the very idea of Christopher Hitchens going into debate with 4 Christian theologians, the debate offers further additions to the body of the 'Hitchens-hermeneutic', particularly on the Christian doctrines of 'original sin' and redemption. During the debate a question is put to him by a member of the audience, requiring of Hitchens to offer his explanation for his view that, according to Christian doctrine, we are created sick and commanded to be well; a point commented on earlier, from the Hitchens-Blair debate. His responses (1hr.25.51 minutes) does present further material through which to understand the reasons why Hitchens adopts the positions which he does.

"If you are postulating that everyone is made in the image of God, and that for some reason is the insistent claim of Christianity. How they know what God looks like, by analogy from us, always seemed to be very mysterious. But that we are made originally sinful, is certainly part of the Christian dogma, is it not? So you are born in sin".....(1hr.26.15 minutes) Hitchens' last comment draws an attempted correction from Dr Craig, with the retort that, "it is not"; implying that it was only such since Adam and Eve.

Hitchens continues,

"Yes, until Adam and Eve, of course. I was forgetting. Sinful since the talking-snake episode, yeh. Not able to say, nobody born innocent again. Owing; in other words, born in debt. Born heavily in debt may be another way of putting it, and asked to pay it off. Made to pay it off! That does seem to me to be, like most totalitarianism, not systematic, as we often say of tyranny, but precisely the contrary; capricious, capricious, playful, unsystematic, lucid, toying with people. I don't like it. You can like it if you like, I don't."

In trying to get Hitchens to see their side of the argument, Denison (1hr.27.03 minutes) offers his theological account of the creation-to-redemption project of Christianity. His responses are significant for two reasons. Firstly, for the similarities between his argument and that of McGrath, as detailed above and, secondly, for the manner in which he 'spins' his interpretations, into being "*the evidence before us*". Denison's responses;

*"I'd like to propose an alternative way of seeing that. What if God is a father? What if as a Father he creates children. He knows that his children are going to have freedom because he's chosen them to have that freedom so they might be able to relate to him. He knows that they're going to misuse that freedom. He knows that they're going to experience pain. He knows that they are going to go through great suffering. But he also hopes and knows and believes that they will experience times of great joy and privilege and he, at the end of the day wants a relationship with them. Wants them to have a relationship with him and creates them knowing they will have freedom, they will misuse that freedom, but, at the end of the day, the good will outweigh the evil because they will have an eternal relationship. That's how the Bible pictures God's relationship with us. That's the kind of father and child relationship that Jesus taught us to pray, and that I think is a better way to see the evidence as it is before us."*²¹²

Given the depth to which Denison would appear to know the mind of God on these matters, one cannot but share Hitchens' plea (1hr.28.11 minutes) to Denison,

"Does he [God] care about the sufferings of his other creation and does he think they have to earn their passage this way? I just wonder, since you know what he wants. I so seldom meet anyone who can actually inform me of God's will, I don't want to miss the chance."

If there was any doubt as to the theological challenge that Hitchens was up against, from within Christian Apologetics, this debate, and particularly the positions put forward by William Craig and Jim Denison, cleared that up. The layering of metaphor upon metaphor, as was just evident in Denison's case, and the metamorphosis of such metaphor into 'evidence', in an instant, and simply on his say-so, points to the caution with which such pronouncements should be measured, as being sound theological propositions.

²¹² Denison earned a Ph.D. in Philosophy of Religion from South Western Baptist Theological Seminary and teaches Ph.D. Seminars at Dallas Baptist University, which also awarded him a Doctor of Divinity Degree. Information extracted from the Denison Forum: On Truth and Culture. Available from : www.denisonforum.org. [Accessed 22 July 2013].

4.6. : Debate Title 5 : ‘Does God Exist?’

Christopher Hitchens and William Lane Craig – Research Professor of Philosophy at Biola University.

Moderator: Craig Hazen – Director M.A. Christian Apologetics, Biola University.

Date: 4 April 2009

Place: Biola University – California, USA²¹³.

Reference: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FofDChSILU> [Accessed 10 January 2013]

This debate has been included for review in this study, more to consider certain elements of the case against Hitchens’ arguments; in this instance, as presented by William Craig. Notwithstanding the broad title of the debate, and without devaluing the context of the discussions, this analysis will focus on the core of William Craig’s arguments and Hitchens’ responses. The relevance of this exercise can be found in two essential reasons. Firstly, the learning to be derived from what constitutes Craig’s arguments, and secondly, to consider how this discussion may or may not reveal the erosion, or strengthening, of the *theological superstructure* within which vicarious redemption is a key element.

Throughout the debate, Craig goes through a series of arguments to support his position that God exists. For the purpose of this study, three such arguments will be considered (24.00 – 33.10 minutes). There is no mistaking Craig’s position on the ‘historical’ figure of Jesus Christ (27.40 minutes) and his resurrection. Craig notes,

“Jesus of Nazareth was a remarkable individual. Historians have reached something of a consensus that the historical Jesus came on the scene with an unprecedented sense of divine authority; the authority to stand and speak in God’s place. He claimed that in himself the kingdom of God had come and as visible demonstration of this fact he carried out a ministry of miracle working and exorcisms. But the supreme confirmation of his claim was his resurrection from dead. If Jesus did rise from the dead, then it would

²¹³ With the Venue being Biola University and with the Moderator and Hitchens’ counterpart being academics at this institution; these factors and the motto of Biola University may point the direction in which the debate could be headed; Motto : “Above All Give Glory To God”.

seem that we have a divine miracle on our hands and thus evidence for the existence of God."

Craig goes on to draw out the *evidential elements* of his arguments and stresses that there are *"three established facts"* put forward by *"the majority of New Testament historians today, which are best explained by the resurrection of Jesus"*.

1. *"Fact number 1. On the Sunday after his crucifixion, Jesus' tomb was discovered empty by a group of his woman followers. According to Jacob Kremer²¹⁴, an Austrian specialist, by far most scholars hold firmly to the reliability of the biblical statements about the empty tomb."²¹⁵*
2. *"Fact number 2. On separate occasions, different individuals and groups experienced appearances of Jesus alive after his death. According to the prominent New Testament critic Ludermann²¹⁶ it may be taken as historically certain that the disciples had experiences after Jesus' death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ."²¹⁷ These appearances were witnessed not only by believers, but also by unbelievers, sceptics and even enemies."*
3. *"Fact number 3. The original disciples suddenly came to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, despite having every predisposition to the contrary."*

Craig goes on to summarise (30.35 Minutes); *"that there is no plausible naturalist explanation of these facts and therefore it seems to me that the Christian is amply justified in believing that Jesus rose from the dead and was who he claimed to be, but that entails that God exists"*.

²¹⁴ Jacob Kremer (1924-2010) was a Roman Catholic priest and Professor of New Testament Studies at the Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Vienna.

²¹⁵ An interesting further debate has emerged on this point, between Craig and South African, Ferdie Mulder; author of the book, *Opgestaan* (Resurrection), in which Mulder purportedly claims that Kremer retracted on his position regarding a literal interpretation of the resurrection and the biblical account of the empty tomb. This assertion by Mulder and the responses from Craig can be viewed on William Lane Craig's official Website : "Reasonable Faith". Online Reference :

Craig, W.L. (2013). Reasonable Faith [online]. Available from: <<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/jacob-kremer-on-jesus-empty-tomb>>. [Accessed 11 June 2013].

²¹⁶ Inaudible as to exactly who Craig is referring to.

²¹⁷ The work of Gary Habermas is viewed by Christian apologists such as William Lane Craig and Ravi Zacharias, as being at the forefront of academic scholarship on the historicity of Jesus Christ, and particularly the event of his resurrection from the dead. For further reference, the website of Gary Habermas, holds directions to his published bibliography and presentations. Online Reference: www.garyhabermas.com.

The points above demonstrate the arguments which Hitchens and the broader anti-theist campaign is up against. However, prior to considering Hitchens' responses to the arguments raised by Craig, it will be necessary to note the following related points.

- Craig uses the Bible, itself, to prove the 'truths' or 'facts' within it.
- Craig claims that belief in the resurrection is not just faith-based, but based on evidence.
- Craig's responses to whether God exists or not is cast within a monotheistic framework and is confined to proving the existence only of the God of Christianity.
- It follows from the previous point that the belief systems of other faith groups, and their Gods there-within, do not fall within Craig's divinely inspired creation-to-redemption equation.
- The theological superstructure articulated by Craig, through his 'factual' account of the life, death and resurrection of the historical Jesus, has humans at the centre of this plan²¹⁸, without mention of all other species, present and extinct, of this planet, earth.²¹⁹
- The persons, whose works are cited by Craig, in support of his arguments, are clergymen and Christian theologians, themselves.

²¹⁸ The plan with, as Hitchens puts it [50.55 minutes], "the finger of God" in it.

²¹⁹ Perhaps further summary on the point of a divinely inspired plan, could be drawn from an entirely different source; that being the body of work developed by public personalities such as Bill Maher and George Carlin (Deceased); who are also regarded as 'stand-up comedians'. Bill Maher wrote and featured in the motion picture, *Religulous* [2008], however, it's his recorded material entitled, '*Religion Does No Harm*,' which may bear some contribution to a clearer understanding of the divinely inspired plan covered this far. Online Reference :

Mavaddat Javid (2010). *Religion Does No Harm*, Bill Maher reflects. [online]. Available from:

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyHhAoxTXKI>>. [Accessed 6 February 2013].

Whilst the work of George Carlin, particularly his recorded presentation, '*Religion is Bullshit*', may be considered unacademic and unworthy of citation in this study, it does capture the challenges presented by any notion of a divinely ordained plan; albeit with much linguistic colour. Online Reference :

Orin Noco (2012). *George Carlin Religion is bullshit*. [online]. Available from:

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjVLKR6g7U>>. [Accessed 7 January 2013].

Also within this category of resources, the works of Sam Kinison, Richard Pryor (Deceased), Bill Hicks (Deceased), Dave Allen (Deceased), Eddie Izzard, Ricky Gervais, Lewis Black and Julia Sweeney, may also be considered. It is submitted that these public figures are respected artists and critics in their own fields, and their contributions to the critique of the Christian faith and its doctrinal foundations stands firmly within the framework of this discourse. Also of significance within the context of this study, is the fact that the works, including recorded film material, of all of these critics are freely available to the public through online New Media platforms.

- Craig's arguments are directed at supporting the literal and historic reality, and not the theological reality, of the biblical accounts of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this study in engaging with William Craig on these positions is brought to further relevance through Hitchens' responses. Hitchens was able to see straight through Craig's attempt to, not just move from a position of assumption towards one of evidence, but to claim a fact-based evidential position.

Hitchens uses his association with Douglas Wilson²²⁰ to illustrate that category of Christian apologist who claims that there is no reason to have to prove God's workings in the cosmos; God just has to be *experienced* in the 'here and now'. Hitchens describes this category of Christian apologists as "pre-suppositionist"; as is the case with Douglas Wilson who bases his belief on the assumed 'truths' of Christianity, which are assumed to be *already* proven.

For those such as William Craig, who base their arguments on the acts or events of the biblical account which they support with 'evidence', which they regard as being factual, Hitchens categorises as being "evidentialists". Bearing in mind the context of the debate and the summary offered above of Craig's position, Hitchens makes the following assessment. (35.30 minutes).

"I want to start by saying that this distinction [between pre-suppositionists and evidentialist], which strikes me as being very charming, and second as false; or perhaps as a distinction without a difference. Well, why do I say charming? Because I think it's rather sweet that people of faith also think that they also have to have some evidence and I think it's progress of a kind. After all, if we had been having this debate in the mid 19th century, Professor Craig or his equivalent would have known little or probably nothing about the laws of physics and biology. Maybe even less than I know now which is to say quite a lot, in its way. And he would have grounded himself on faith, on

²²⁰ Douglas Wilson is the Pastor from Idaho, America who joined Christopher Hitchens in a series of debates during his book tour after publishing, '*God is not Great*'. The set of debates were made into a documentary film called '*Collision*'.

Scripture, on revelation, on the prospect of salvation, on the means of grace, and the hope of glory.”

The whole point of exploring this interaction between Hitchens and Craig, is, firstly, to demonstrate, both, the calibre and content of the critique levelled against Hitchens, and secondly, to apply this body of critique in assisting with formulating some understanding as to what constitutes Hitchens’ position on such doctrinal pillars of the Christian faith, as is vicarious redemption.

In the light of Hitchens-Craig debate a hypothetical question could be posed as to what would be the theological outlook if the ‘evidence’ presented by Craig were factual. In this regard, an alternate understanding, that of Richard Dawkins, does appear to distil the idea of divine intervention in human history in a different way. Dawkins notes,

“The fundamental idea of New Testament Christianity, which is that Jesus is the son of God who is redeeming humanity from original sin; the idea that we are born in sin and the only way we can be redeemed from sin is through the death of Jesus. That’s a horrible idea. It’s a horrible idea that God, this paragon of wisdom and knowledge [and] power couldn’t think of a better way to forgive us our sins than to come down to earth in his alto-ego as his son and have himself hideously tortured and executed.”²²¹

In summary of this point and perhaps of the debates as a whole, Hitchens (41.54 minutes) refers to the work of Victor Stenger²²², the author of the book; ‘*God, The failed Hypothesis*’, to clarify his argument.

“It was said tonight and Dr Craig has said, in print, that Atheists say they can prove the non-existence of God. This in fact, very slight but crucially, misrepresents what we’ve always said. There’s nothing new about the New Atheists, it’s just that we’re recent.

²²¹ Extract from Televised Debate on 10 April 2012, between Richard Dawkins and Cardinal George Pell on Australian Television Programme : Q&A. Online Reference: tubester4567 (2012). Richard Dawkins vs Cardinal George Pell on Q. [online]. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tD1QHO_AVZA>. [Accessed 11 May 2013]. [3.00 minutes].

²²² Victor Stenger is an American Particle Physicist and author.

Dr Stinger, a great scientist has written a book called, [God] The Failed Hypothesis, [in] which he thinks that science can license the claim that there definitely is no God, but, he's unique in that and very bold and courageous. Here's what we argue. We argue, quite simply that there's no plausible or convincing reason, certainly no evidential one, to believe that there is such an entity, and that all observable phenomena, including the cosmological one, to which I am coming, are explicable without the hypothesis. You don't need the assumption."

4.7. : Summary of The Hitchens Debates.

Prior to attempting a summary of the content of the debates and the effectiveness thereof in advancing critical thinking and the formation of new knowledge on the subjects addressed, something must be said of the new opportunities which this format of academic and public discourse opens up for new and credible scholarship. The doors to new resources from scholars are now wide open for more engaging research, beyond the historical confines of literature in written format. To engage with the participants in debates, through recorded film material, has been a source of inspiration and strength throughout this study. Furthermore, to witness the respect which the debating parties afforded one another, despite their radically opposing viewpoints, served as a pointer to the continued place of this format in future academic discourse.

With regard to the debates between Christopher Hitchens and his counterparts from within Christian Theology, the proverbial fork in the road, or main points of departure, were characterised by the substance of ***faith*** as the bedrock upon which the Christian belief system rests and the preparedness of the participants to accept the Christian proposition on this basis or reject it because of this premise. The transcripts of the extracts from the debates, as recorded within this study, attest to this reality, in the case of all of the theologians examined within this set of debates. That Christopher Hitchens held no allegiance to this *faith-position*

has been shown beyond any doubt. On two of the central aspects within the debates with Christian Theologians, that of the historicity of Jesus Christ, including the claims to his virgin birth and resurrection from the dead, as well as the meaning and purpose of the plan of redemption within the Christian belief system it cannot be concluded that the Christian Theologians have made a convincing case for their cause.

On the third important aspect within the set of debates examined, the question of whether or not the Christian belief system, with its offering of vicarious redemption, can serve humankind as a source code on morality, was brought under sharp focus. Framed alternately, as within the Munk Debate between Hitchens and Tony Blair; *'Is Religion a Force for Good in the World'*. The Aurea Foundation, under whose auspices the Munk Debates²²³ are administered, on 26 November 2010, published the pre and post-debate survey results²²⁴ of the audience's (2700 persons) responses on the question on the official website of The Munk Debates; which results read as follows.

To the Resolution : Religion is a force for good in the world,

	Pre-Debate Results	Post-Debate Results
Pros [The Blair Proposition]	25%	32%
Cons [The Hitchens Proposition]	55%	68%
Undecided	20%	Nil

Of equal interest to the results of the Hitchens-Blair debate, is the set of set of pre and post-debate survey results of The BBC Intelligence² Debate²²⁵ held on 19 October 2009, at Central

²²³ The Munk Debates were established by Canadian mining businessman Peter Munk.

²²⁴ The Results of the Debate between Christopher Hitchens and Tony Blair, held on 26 November 2010.

Online reference:

Munk Debates [online]. (2013). Available from: <<http://www.munkdebates.com/debates/religion>>. [Accessed 15 October 2013].

²²⁵ The Intelligence² Debate: Motion – *'The Catholic Church is a Force for Good in the World?'* Online reference : UKantitheist1 (2012). Stephen Fry and Christopher Hitchens The intelligence squared. [Online]. Available from : <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2wzsaZKiGo>>. [Accessed 13 November 2012]. Debate Results at [1hr.03.02 minutes]

Hall, London, with Moderator Zeinab Bedawi of the British Broadcasting Corporation. The Parties in the debate were;

- Archbishop Onaiyekan (of Abuja, Nigeria) and Ann Widdecombe (Former British Parliamentarian for the Conservative Party), who argued for the Motion, and
- Stephen Fry (Author, Actor and Television Presenter) and Christopher Hitchens, who argued against the Motion

To the Motion : The Catholic Church is a force for good in the world,

	Pre-Debate Results	Post-Debate Results	
For the Motion (Number)	678	268	[-410]
Against the Motion (Number)	1102	1876	[+774]
Undecided (Number)	346	Nil recorded	

Whilst the results recorded in these debates cannot be regarded as being definitive outcomes on the Resolution/Motion of the debates, for the purposes of this study, it may not be unreasonable to conclude that, not unlike the outcome of the debates between Hitchens and the set of Christian Theologians, as examined within this study, the case advocated for the Church and the Christian belief system being a repository or bearer of a moral code for humankind, was, on the whole, unconvincing.

Chapter Five

The Alternate Proposition to Vicarious Redemption.

5.1. : Christopher Hitchens - The Alternate Proposition to Vicarious Redemption.

Having examined the construct and doctrine of vicarious redemption; its locus within the superstructure of the body of Christian theology, the place of sin and 'original sin' in the redemption equation, the debates on the biography of Jesus Christ, and the Christian value proposition of redemption; this study will now work beyond just an analysis of Hitchens' critique of vicarious redemption, towards establishing an understanding of his alternate proposition, from that offered by vicarious redemption within the Christian belief system.

The Hitchens' alternative is the very antithesis of the Christian idea of vicarious redemption, as embedded within a faith-based belief system, therefore, this Chapter of the study will engage in further understandings of the purpose of vicarious redemption. At the core of this effort is the question posed by Christopher Hitchens; as to what ill is there in the human condition for which vicarious redemption is the remedy?²²⁶ In this analysis of Hitchens' alternate proposition, an examination of the makings of a moral code is strategic in constructing an understanding of the inner workings of the Christian proposition of redemption. Any consideration of Hitchens' stance in this regard, brings into focus the core question around what informs the formation of a moral code which governs human life and interaction. What then is the suggested relationship being alluded to between the formulations of such moral codes, on the one hand and Hitchens' critique of vicarious redemption, on the other?

The subject of morals and ethics within the Christian belief system, according to Hitchens, bears out the inner contradictions of the Christian redemption plan, as well as demonstrates that it is

²²⁶ As the question was posed to Professor Alister McGrath in his debate with Hitchens.

Online Reference :

Charles Ewing Smith (2013). Christopher Hitchens Vs Alister McGrath- Georgetown University. [Online]. Available from : <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKdZT7r2-RY>>. [Accessed 28 May 2013]. [1hr.17.44 minutes].

counterintuitive to the very goal of a moral code. In this regard, his responses (1hr.27.10 minutes) in his debate with Dr McGrath, elucidates his position on the morality, or otherwise, which is inherent in the Christian belief system.²²⁷ Hitchens, in speaking of the interconnectedness of the biblical New Testament to the Old Testament, notes that Christians inherit the wicked and immoral doctrine,

“which is ‘original sin’ in Adam and the expiation by the sacrifice of children, human sacrifice of children, than which, I don’t think, any morally normal person could think of anything more repulsive. So, that it is, I am afraid, innate, that there is to be cruelty, and violence and fanaticism in the religion and that the responsibility is not expiable.”

Central to this enquiry is the question of the necessity, or otherwise, of a divine *law-giver*. In juxtaposition with the proposition of vicarious redemption, one of the dilemmas which will be brought under scrutiny in this section of the study is that which is attributed and framed by Russian author, Fyodor Dostoyevsky,

*“If there is no God, everything is permitted.”*²²⁸

Without being drawn into the controversy regarding the origins of the idea being that of Dostoyevsky’s or not, the point being aimed at is sufficiently clear to work from. In this regard, the contribution by Professor Elizabeth Anderson²²⁹ to the book, *‘The Portable Atheist : Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever’* (2007), together with the Article cited by Slavoj Zizek (2012,), *‘If there is a God, then anything is permitted’*, will be considered in dialogue with

²²⁷Hitchens in his debate with Professor Alister McGrath. Online Reference :

Charles Ewing Smith (2013). Christopher Hitchens Vs Alister McGrath- Georgetown University. [Online]. Available from : <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKdZT7r2-RY>>. [Accessed 28 May 2013]. [1hr.27.10 minutes].

²²⁸ The origins of this idea which is attributed to Dostoyevsky, arising from his novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, is examined by philosopher, Slavoj Zizek, in his Article, *‘If there is a God, then anything is permitted’*.

Online Reference :

Zizek, S. (2012). If there is a God, then anything is permitted. 17 April 2012. ABC Religion and Ethics [online].

[Accessed 14 May 2013]. Available from: <<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2012/04/17/3478816.htm>>.

Christopher Hitchens (2007, p.230) in, *‘God is Not Great’*, identifies the point made by Dostoyevsky, through the character Smerdyakov, in *The Brothers Karamazov*;

“if there is no God there is no morality”.

²²⁹ Elizabeth Anderson is Professor of Philosophy and Woman’s Studies at University of Michigan. The Article, *‘If God Is Dead, Is Everything Permitted?’*, was first published in, Anthony, L., (ed) (2007), *‘Philosophers without Gods: Mediations on Atheism and the Secular Life’*. Oxford University Press. pp. 215-230. Republished in Christopher Hitchens, C.E., (2007), (ed), *‘The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever’*; Chapter 39 : *‘If God is Dead, Is Everything Permitted?’*.

Hitchens' set of propositions which stands as a counterpoint to vicarious redemption and any divinely ordained set of precepts. The key aspects of Hitchens' contribution to this area of the study, will be drawn mainly from his recorded 2009-Interview²³⁰ with Jian Ghomeshi, the host of Radio Show 'Q' on the Canadian Broadcasting Services.

Firstly, a set of preliminary considerations on Hitchens' rebuttal of the Christian case for vicarious redemption as a moral precept is necessary to set the groundwork for this section of the study.

- Notwithstanding Hitchens' reading (*'God is not Great'*, 2007, p.111) of the paucity of verifiable historical information regarding the historicity of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Gospel accounts, as well as through the arguments put forward by Christian theologians in support thereof, Hitchens premised that, even if everything claimed as historical fact about the life and death of Jesus Christ were true, it would still not negate what he viewed as being, essentially, an immoral proposition in vicarious redemption, as recorded during his debate with Professor McGrath, as detailed above. Viewed literally or metaphorically, the acts which underpin the doctrine of vicarious redemption, as well as the doctrine itself, are regarded by Hitchens as being immoral. Considered alternatively, if only the significance and metaphor had to be lifted from the biblical account of the life and death of Jesus Christ²³¹, that, according to Hitchens, would not make the idea of vicarious redemption any less immoral.
- Hitchens' notes²³² that the subtitle to the book, *'God is Not Great': How Religion Poisons everything*, is not just a catchy subtitle suggested by his publishers, but a

²³⁰ Interview: Christopher Hitchens and Jian Ghomeshi of Canadian Broadcasting Services CBC Radio Show Q, September 2009. Online Reference:

Q with Jian Ghomeshi (2009). Christopher Hitchens in Studio Q. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeWpTjmtgXQ>>. [Accessed 2 May 2013].

²³¹ As articulated by Alister McGrath in the Dawkins-McGrath Debate discussed above, where McGrath sees the significance and meaning of these events in the life of Jesus Christ as being important to his **personal** understanding of redemption. Online Reference:

Ciaran Mac Uistin (2012). Richard Dawkins Debates Alister McGrath. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LGm0iWPC80>>. [Accessed 21 February 2013]. [26.45 minutes].

²³² Extract from Debate : Christopher Hitchens and Frank Turek. Online Reference: rationalstabs (2013). Hitchens delivers one of his best hammer blows to cocky audience member. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJ2LehsA1dk>>. [Accessed 5 June 2013]. [4.50 minutes].

position to which he strongly held. He viewed religion as something which, “*infected us in our most basic integrity*”; resulting in a condition which imposes *its* version of what is right and what is not, premised on the assumption that there is nothing innate in the human condition to guide that judgment²³³.

- If love was the substance at the core of the Christian belief system and its doctrinal formations, and if love was the medium through which to interpret the offer of vicarious redemption²³⁴; Hitchens saw vicarious redemption as a mandatory offer, at the centre of which was the command of *compulsory love*²³⁵ which mitigated against any good element of the idea of love itself.
- The idea that virtue and morality should be monopolised by faith based religion, is rejected by Hitchens. The following important points made by Hitchens highlights his view on the contrasting positions and claims held by Christians, on the one hand and non-believers, on the other, with regard to the question of moral behaviour.

*“The burden of proof, in any case, is not on our team, if you will. We don’t say disbelief in God will make you a better person, or make you more moral. We are arguing against those who say that a belief in an unprovable supernatural will make you more moral. Now that we know is not true. That we know is not true.”*²³⁶

²³³ This was one of the dominant themes through the debate between Christopher Hitchens and Reverend Al Sharpton, during which Hitchens raises the case of the biblical character of the Good Samaritan, not having been a Christian; highlighting his point that, if one had to consider this account in the Bible itself, plainly, then, doing what is morally right cannot be predicated upon a divinely ordained set of precepts on what is wrong and what is right.

Online Reference :

ChristopherHitchslap (2011). Christopher Hitchens Debates Al Sharpton - New York Public. [Online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPYxA8dYLBV>>. [Accessed 23 February 2013].

²³⁴ As proposed by Bushnell (1866, p.12), ‘ *The Vicarious Sacrifice*’,

“Such a God in Love, must be such a Saviour in suffering – He could not well be other or less.....He was in an agony, exceeding sorrowful even unto death. By that sign it was that God’s love broke into the world, and Christianity was born.”

²³⁵ Biblical texts such as Exodus 20 : Vs 1-6 and Matthew 22 : 37-40 could be cited to further understand Hitchens’ arguments on this aspect. In this regard, Hitchen’s presentation at the Royal Ontario Museum on 2 June 2009, which is discussed in detail later on in this study, holds further reference. Hitchens notes during his presentation, “The idea of a mandatory compulsory love has always struck me as a sickly one”. Online Reference : ChristopherHitchslap (2011). Christopher Hitchens The Three New Commandments. [online]. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUr_JKFckE4>. [Accessed 23 February 2013]. [33.12 minutes].

²³⁶ Hitchens responses during his debate with Reverend Al Sharpton, highlights this point.

Online Reference :

To hit a theological nerve of the discourse, the options just mentioned place into question the central proposition of Christendom, that the road to redemption, is *only* ‘*via Calvary*’. The opposing position to this case, as advocated by Hitchens, is that Christianity has no basis to claim the moral high ground on the subject, to the contrary; the case for vicarious redemption is immoral, which, according to Hitchens,

*“does not deserve the attention of civilized or thoughtful people.”*²³⁷.

A further vital point which emerges from the Hitchens – Dembski debate is that made by Hitchens (3.50 minutes)²³⁸, after he notes his decision to decline the ‘offer’ of vicarious redemption; stating that it is, *“not an offer. You refuse it on pain of death.”* This latter point, in Hitchens’ view, undermines any code of morality to which the Christian doctrine of vicarious redemption and the Christian belief system may lay claim to.

To consider the positions of Zizek and Anderson further; on first glance, the title of Zizek’s paper might appear to be a misprint, but it is; *‘If there is a God, then anything is permitted’*; a position in contrast to the Dostoyevsky idea mentioned. The crossroads from which this section of the study proceeds pits the options as follow:

- Firstly, that the presence and intervention of a divine law-giver is the source of all moral values which determines the difference between what is a right action and what is not.

ChristopherHitchslap (2011). Christopher Hitchens Debates Al Sharpton - New York Public. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPYxA8dYLBW>>. [Accessed 23 February 2013]. [1hr.20.00 minutes].

²³⁷ Extract entitled: *‘Christopher Hitchens – Vicarious Redemption’*. During his debate with William Dembski, American philosopher and theologian, in November 2010 at the Prestonwood Christian Academy Biblical Worldview Institute in, Plano, Texas, Hitchens’ deploys, probably, his most scathing rejection of the doctrine of vicarious redemption. This excerpt from the debate is one of the most important resources of this study and makes for compulsory viewing to grasp the full import of Hitchens’ contributions to this discourse; with particular reference to his stance on the doctrine of vicarious redemption [0.56 minutes]. Online Reference :

dantheist (2011). Christopher Hitchens - Vicarious Redemption. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=By9JJSVzITw>>. [Accessed 25 February 2013].

²³⁸ Online Reference :

dantheist (2011). Christopher Hitchens - Vicarious Redemption. [Online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=By9JJSVzITw>>. [Accessed 25 February 2013]. [3.50 minutes].

- Secondly, that the presence and intervention of a deity is not a necessary assumption for the establishment of a moral code.

To get to terms with the title (*'If God Is Dead, Is Everything Permitted?'*) of her Chapter (39) in the book, *'The Portable Atheist'*, Anderson (2007, p.486), restates the question in an alternate format.

"A better interpretation of the claim that religion is necessary for morality is that there wouldn't be a difference between right and wrong if God did not make it so."

Anderson goes on to note that, William Lane Craig, one of Hitchens' debating counterparts holds to this claim. The important implication which emerges from Anderson discussion of this point is that this claim has to work from the basis that human solidarity, one with one another, even if based on what Anderson refers to as a system of *reciprocal claim making* (p.502), is incapable of establishing any model of differentiating between a right and wrong action.

In pronouncing her views on the moral status of the God of Christian Scripture, Anderson (2007, p.488) undertakes a detailed examination of both the Old Testament and New Testament accounts. However, it will be necessary to understand the place of Scripture, itself, within Anderson's arguments. Anderson notes (2007, p.488);

"The core evidence for theism, then, is Scripture. What if we accept Scripture as offering evidence of a God who has a moral character and plans for human beings, who intervenes in history and tells us how to live? What conclusions should we draw from Scripture about God's moral character and about how we ought to behave? Let us begin with the position of the fundamentalist, of one who takes scripture with the utmost seriousness, as the inerrant source of knowledge about God and morality. If we accept biblical inerrancy, I'll argue, we must conclude that much of which we take to be morally evil is in fact morally permissible and even required."

To support this position, Anderson proceeds to cite the usual set of Scriptures which instruct, enforce, reward and celebrate actions which are anything but moral. (2007, p.488-489). To

answer the question of how are we to view the morality of a God who intervenes in human history and from whom we are to take instructions on how to live; Anderson appeals for a re-reading of; Genesis chapter 6, on genocide and ecocide through the flooding of the earth, Exodus 20: 3-5, on the collective punishment of children for the indiscretions of their parents in worshipping any other God but that of the Israelites, the various injunctions from the God of the Old Testament to undertake ethnic cleansing (Exodus 34:11-14)²³⁹, and genocide (Numbers 21:2-3), slavery (Leviticus 25:44-46), and the instruction to put to death those who are seen to work on the Sabbath (Exodus 35:2)²⁴⁰, to mention but a few of the cases pointed out by Anderson.

After having considered the morality of the Old Testament law-giver, Elizabeth Anderson through her Chapter²⁴¹, *"If God Is Dead, Is Everything Permitted?"* presents the theological link between Hitchens' critique of vicarious redemption and the alternate path which he proposes. Anderson (p.492) notes;

"And what are we to make of the thought that Jesus died for our sins (Rom. 5:8-9, 15-18; 1 John 2:2; Rev. 1:5)? This core religious teaching of Christianity takes Jesus to be a scapegoat for humanity. The practice of scapegoating contradicts the whole moral principle of personal responsibility. It also contradicts any moral idea of God. If God is merciful and loving, why doesn't He forgive humanity for its sins straightaway, rather than demanding His 150 pounds of flesh, in the form of His own son? How could any

²³⁹ Whilst the attempts at constructing some justification for such 'sacred violence' have not gone unnoticed, it remains outside the scope of this study to pursue this aspect further.

²⁴⁰ In this regard, the commentary found in the Dakes Annotated Reference Bible (1992: p.102), containing the Old and New Testaments of the Authorised or King James Version Text, is a very interesting reflection of the commentators' knowledge of the *mind of God* on the subject of this particular text (Exodus 35 : 2). The commentary reads as follows;

"Before beginning the work of the tabernacle Moses reminded Israel of the 6 days and a sabbath, and warned again of the death penalty for breaking the law. The sabbath was to be observed even in the making of the tabernacle. This seems a small thing to be penalized with death, but God wanted to impress upon Israel the absolute necessity of perfect obedience."

Besides the point of as to how the commentator had come into such special knowledge of the mind of the divine, given the extent of the expressed commentary, the restatement of the reward for disobedience as is accounted for in the holy Scripture itself, does appear to vindicate the point being made by Anderson, and implicitly, by Hitchens also, on the moral status of the God of the Bible.

²⁴¹ Cited in Hitchens, (ed) (2007, p.492), *The Portable Atheist*.

loving father do that to his son?"

The importance of Romans 5: 8-9, in this context, requires citation;

"⁸But God commandeth his love towards us, in that, while we were sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him."

With regard to the moral principle of personal responsibility and the question of the necessity of a divine dispenser of moral precepts, Hitchens is of one voice with Anderson. Hitchens (2007, p.96), in *'God is Not Great'*, notes,

*"Thus, though I dislike to differ with such a great man, Voltaire was simply ludicrous when he said that if god did not exist it would be necessary to invent him. The human invention of god is the problem to begin with."*²⁴²

This point does lead the enquiry to the Hitchens – Ghomeshi interview.

5.2. : Interview : Christopher Hitchens.

Interviewer : Jian Ghomeshi of Canadian Broadcasting Corporation CBC Radio Show Q.

Dated : 21 September 2009

Subject : The Ten Commandments.

Reference : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeWpTjmtgXQ> [Accessed 2 May 2013]

The decision to undertake an analysis of this particular interview is influenced by the points advanced by Hitchens in support of his position that humanity's innate predisposition and efforts at constructing for itself a set of meaningful moral codes, is retarded by the doctrine of vicarious redemption, and that any progress towards this end is best achieved by abandoning the trappings of such doctrines and any apparently divinely ordained set of codes in this regard, of which the Ten Commandments of the biblical Old Testament is the dominant example.

²⁴² Voltaire (1694-1778) was a French author and philosopher from the period of the Enlightenment.

During his interview with Ghomeshi, Hitchens offers the following set of substantiations for his rejection of Christian Scriptures, as a code of morality, with particular reference to the Ten Commandments.

- Hitchens, at the outset (1.33 minutes), declares that he is an Anti-Theist, rather than an Atheist. On this point, he goes further than just stating that, not only is there no reason for believing that there is a deity, but that all the arguments for the existence of a deity have long since been disproven by scientists and philosophers.
- He notes (2.26 minutes) that as much as there may be those who wish there to be a '*celestial dictator*'; an unchanging, undying, all-supervising, all-knowing father figure who kept one under surveillance, before one is born, after birth and after one is dead; this is something that he could not wish upon himself.
- Hitchens indicates (3.05 minutes) that the supernatural is a man-made delusion and that he has no desire for the idea of an after-life, or a place of eternal bliss where such an after-life is eternally lived out, as an *inducement* for a life in service of a celestial dictator.
- Knowing of Hitchens' longstanding campaign against religion, Ghomeshi (3.35 Minutes) asks of Hitchens that, if he cannot accept the dictates of instruments such as the Ten Commandments, why not just leave it alone. In response, Hitchens asserts that the most potent and effective pursuit of power in the world today, has within it the claim that it has God on its side and that whatever is done, is done in God's name; as has been the case for hundreds of years. Hitchens' key points, in this regard, are two-fold. Firstly, that those in religious authority want power and property, not in the after-life, but in the here and now. Secondly, that the claim to act as God's appointed on earth

has been the basis for the establishment of dictatorships throughout history and that some of the worst dictatorships existent today are theocratic ones.²⁴³

- Hitchens indicates (5.14 minutes), that he has no respect for the Ten Commandments (Exodus, Chapter 20) and points out that the first Commandment refers to a polytheistic environment in which the God of the Judaic and Christian monotheistic traditions, pronounces that he is a 'jealous' God who must be the preferred option amongst the range of deities from which to choose.
- Hitchens takes particular issue with the tenth Commandment, which he notes, reflects a God who stands in judgment against even, '*thought crime*'; which he regards as the beginning of the totalitarian idea.
- Hitchens invokes the 'Golden Rule' (6.50 minutes), which he notes, dates back to the period of pre-monotheism and pre-Christianity and cites the writings of Confucius²⁴⁴, as one such exponent of the Rule; in explaining a central premise of his rebuttal against the Christian case for a code for morality, and implicitly, the case for vicarious redemption, which he regarded as, not just being amoral, but immoral.

"If we didn't have an instinct for solidarity and common interest and care for one another, life would be impossible. The idea that we wouldn't know this without a supernatural authority, however, is a grovelling slavish idea, as if we need permission to know what is innate to us. Religion actually takes its morality from us, not the other way around."

²⁴³ The work of Sean Fairclough, in both his book, '*The Attack of The Theocrats*', (2012), and his Public Lecture : "*Beware the Religio-Industrial Complex*", offers a noteworthy case for the internal dynamics of dictatorship within the industry of the Mega churches, themselves, which is on the rise in America and internationally.

Online Reference :

JamesRandiFoundation (2012). Sean Fairclough - "Beware the Religio-Industrial Complex" - TAM 2012. [online]. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wm4q8Ff_rul>. [Accessed 6 February 2013].

In a related manner, the work of Bretthauer (2001, pp.203-225) offers interesting insights into the workings of the Televangelism industry, in his chapter, '*Televangelism : Local and Global Dimensions*.'

²⁴⁴ Confucius (551 BCE. – 479 BCE.), was a Chinese philosopher and teacher. Hitchens explains his understanding of the Golden Rule as being, in essence, 'don't do to another person which you will find repulsive if done to yourself'.

- Ghomeshi points out (8.40 minutes), that one would be hard pressed to find a religious person who would not admit that there were wicked acts perpetrated '*in the name of religion*'. Hitchens sees the need to correct this statement and notes that such evil deeds are often not only committed '*in the name of religion*', which he regards as a '*get out clause*', but notes that such acts are committed because these acts are explicitly '*a part of the religion*' and that one needs only to look at their Scriptural texts to establish this. He uses the religious practice of 'genital mutilation' and the case of the Old Testament account of Abraham's attempted slaughter of his son Isaac, to illustrate his point. (9.00 minutes).²⁴⁵

"The most celebrated action of the Abrahamic is the willingness of someone to gut and murder his own son because he thinks it will please god."

Whilst resisting the inclination to simply write off Hitchens' points, as being sheer rhetoric, it is noted that the very extremity of the language applied is an indicator of where Hitchens stands on these matters, as well as his disinclination to 'tone-down' on his language usage for the sake of being polite. It is noted that what Hitchens may describe in the religious practice of circumcision as being 'genital mutilation', may be viewed by others as a perfectly acceptable cultural and religious practice.

- The quotation from Hitchens, immediately above on the matter of Abraham and Isaac, opens up the opportunity for an equivalent reinterpretation of the *event* of vicarious redemption, the crucifixion, and the Passion Story, which led up to the event of the crucifixion. The point of this reinterpretation is, firstly, to draw out Hitchens' critique of these two celebrated and foundational acts of the biblical Old Testament and New Testament, and secondly, to attempt to understand the intrinsic morality of these actions, or lack thereof. In the 'event' of vicarious redemption, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, is the celebrated act from the New Testament, without which the foundations of

²⁴⁵ In, '*God is Not Great*', pp.188-192, Hitchens offers further modern day instances of campaigns, less than moral, which were prosecuted under the banner of the Christian faith. Together with his first-hand account, in 2005, of the atrocities of the Lords Resistance Army in Northern Uganda, as well as his recounting of the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, Hitchens illustrates the hand of committed Christians in these campaigns; including Joseph Kony, the leader of the Lords Resistant Army, as well as the Catholic clergy from Rwanda.

the Christian faith would need to be sought elsewhere. The following accompanying extract from *'God is not Great'* (p.209) settles the point being made by Hitchens on this celebrated act of the New Testament.

"However, the idea of a vicarious atonement, of the sort that so much troubled even C.S. Lewis, is a further refinement of the ancient superstition. Once again we have a father demonstrating love by subjecting his son to death by torture, but this time the father is not trying to impress god. He is god, and he is trying to impress humans."

- Hitchens notes (9.50 minutes) that to assume that the Jewish people knew nothing of morality, which they were to have learnt only at the foot of the biblical destination of Mount Sinai, would be an insult to them. He goes further to caution that it is dangerous to take the position that any moral code can only be had as a result of it being handed down by an unanswerable totalitarian dictator; who commands obedience to the set of rules handed down and, in return for the requested compliance thereto, offers the territory and property of other peoples, through divinely sanctioned murder and torture. This, according to Hitchens, is an *inducement*, not a disposition towards any code of morality. On a stance similar to that of Hitchens, Albert Einstein²⁴⁶ noted the following,

"I am convinced that a vivid consciousness of the primary importance of moral principles for the betterment and ennoblement of life does not need the idea of a law-giver, especially a law-giver who works on the basis of reward and punishment."

- The point raised by Hitchens with Ghomeshi (11.30 minutes), regarding the debate between British Philosopher and author Alfred J. Ayer and Catholic Bishop Christopher Butler, which Hitchens also makes reference to in his book, *'God is Not Great'*. (p.185)

²⁴⁶ Cited in Hitchens, (ed). (2007: p.244), *'The Portable Atheist'*, extracted from a published letter, 'Albert Einstein in a letter to M.Berkowitz', October 25, 1950; Einstein Archive 59-215; from Alice Calaprice,(ed) (2000), *'The Expandable Quotable Einstein'*. Princeton University Press : Princeton : New Jersey. Ch. 28.

adds to Hitchens' case. During the debate, Ayer noted that he saw no reason at all for the existence of God, to which Butler is said to have replied, "Then, I cannot see why you do not lead a life of unbridled immorality". Built into Butler's responses are the two-fold assumption; firstly, that morals are derived from divine instruction and, secondly, that atheists are devoid of any moral values; or expressed alternatively, *'if there is no God, everything is permitted'*. Ayer's response was unambiguous, *"I must say that I think that is a perfectly monstrous insinuation."*²⁴⁷ The important point which Hitchens raises in his book and in the discussion with Ghomeshi, is the implication for Butler of his own statement, which he would have had to have consciously believed to have said it as he did. To extend the thought, then, Butler would have to also believe that if he were not an adherent to the doctrines and precepts of the Catholic Church, then he, himself, would also be operating without any moral compass, committing acts of evil and wickedness.

- The question of Christians acting out good works, on account of their Christian faith, does not escape the discussion. Hitchens notes (14.00 minutes) that people do good deeds for one another, because of who *they are* and that doing such deeds does not negate the fact, according to Hitchens, that their *"faith is still nonsense"*.
- The following points of summary offered by Hitchens in the Interview captures his stance on the issue of the formulation of a moral code by which to live, in relation to the propositions from the Judeo-Christian religious complex, towards the same end. Firstly,

"We can live a moral life without religion and the most successful societies are those that separate the church and the state by law and enforce it by their constitutions. These are the happiest, most prosperous and most democratic countries and we have to stop taking this for granted and be willing to defend it against the endless attempts by theocrats of different stripes to take that away from us. On this line, we will take a stand. We will fight." (19.44 minutes)

²⁴⁷ As Hitchens gives account of in, *'God is not Great'* (2007, p.186).

Secondly,

“Again, I’ll end on the question I’ve always emphasised. If people think that religion is morality, they have to account for the immoral things that religion demands that people do. It’s not in the name of, it’s in the word of god himself. These are commandments and instructions. These are warrants for genocide, rape, slavery, infant mutilation and worse. By working out what the negation of those would be, how humans can emancipate themselves from the evil propaganda of a man-made god, then you could probably guess what my contrary recommendations would be.

[21.48 minutes]

Hitchens ended the interview with Jian Ghomeshi without elaborating further on his contrary recommendations.

The Hitchens-Ghomeshi interview was a curtain-raiser to Hitchens’ main presentation at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto Canada on 2 June 2009 and he chose not to disclose his ‘punch-lines’ during the interview with Ghomeshi. Hitchens’ presentation²⁴⁸ in Ontario is particularly significant to this study. As is illustrated in the extract below, from this presentation, his critique of the Christian Scriptures, themselves, underpins his rejection of Christianity, together with any of its resultant doctrines, and claims of being the bearer of any moral code of instruction. This full presentation stands out as being one of the more clinical of Hitchens’ deconstructions of the Christian Scriptures on the subject of morality and doctrine and makes for an interesting re-reading of The Ten Commandments, as well as alternate interpretations of the Scriptures as they may relate to the promotion of a type of moral code. It will suffice to record Hitchens’ summary (33.40 minutes) of his arguments, in this regard; which

²⁴⁸ Hitchens presentation on The Ten Commandments on 2 June 2009 at The Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada. Online Reference : ChristopherHitchslap (2011). Christopher Hitchens The Three New Commandments. [online]. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUr_JKFckE4>. [Accessed 23 February 2013]. [33.40 minutes].

also holds his key arguments which he stopped short of pronouncing during the Ghomeshi Interview:

“But one might argue in searching for a new code, that at the very least, we might enact some stern prohibitions. It’s not just our modern sensibilities I think, or our consciousness of the fragility of our survival as a species that might incline us now, if we were drawing up a code, to forbid slavery, to condemn genocide, the rape and torture of children, and the disfoliation of the natural order of the world. I hope that these might be considered, in Benjamin Franklin’s great words, contributed to Thomas Jefferson’s great preamble, ‘self evident’. Unfortunately though, we can’t do this by amending this book, because, slavery, genocide and the rape and torture of children are not merely not denounced in the first five books of the Old Testament, they are rather very enthusiastically recommended. So, if we search for ways of doing the right thing, we’re consulting the wrong book, and we’re looking for morality in all the wrong places. “

The further points made by Hitchens²⁴⁹ in this regard, which were fundamental to his advocating for the abandonment of the idea of a divinely ordained set of moral precepts and the Christian promise of vicarious redemption, were;

- The very nature of vicarious redemption, as indicated by Anderson (2007, p.492), also, disqualifies it from classification as a moral deed or doctrine, of any sort.²⁵⁰
- The position which has humans engage with one another to discover their own moral bearings, is a more meaningful path, than to seek such an end from the questionable authority of the God of the sacred texts on which the proclamation of the Christian faith

²⁴⁹ These points are drawn from Hitchens’ key works, ‘*God is Not Great*’ (2007) and ‘*The Portable Atheist*’ (2007) and the interview held with Jian Ghomeshi (2009).

²⁵⁰ Hitchens (2007, p.209), ‘*God is not Great*’;

“Ask yourself the following, how moral is the following? I am told of a human sacrifice that took place two thousand years ago, without my wishing it and in circumstances so ghastly that, had I been present and in possession of any influence, I would have been duty-bound to try and stop it. In consequence of this murder, my own manifold sins are forgiven me, and I may hope to enjoy everlasting life.”

and the proposition of vicarious redemption rests. In this regard, the point made by Mark Twain ²⁵¹, does offer an interesting perspective;

“We hear much about His patience and forbearance and long-suffering; we hear nothing about our own, which much exceeds it. We hear much about His mercy and kindness and goodness-in words-the words of His Book and of His pulpit-and the meek multitude is content with this evidence, such as it is, seeking no further: but whoso searcheth after a concrete sample of it will in time acquire fatigue. There being no instances of it. For what are gilded as mercies are not in any recorded case more than common justices, and due-due without thanks or compliment. To rescue without personal risk a cripple from a burning house is not a mercy, it is a mere commonplace duty. Anybody would do it that could.”

- The reality of **mutual benevolence**, based on innate human solidarity is a cause more worthy of examination and pursuit, than the ‘poison chalice’²⁵² of religion and vicarious redemption.

Whilst it does not fall within the scope of this study to enter into a detailed examination of the idea of mutual benevolence put forward by Hitchens, it is sufficient to recognise the value of the idea within the broader understanding of human solidarity, as proposed by Hitchens, as the alternate ‘moral software’ through which humanity decodes the moral fabric of its existence, as opposed to the received authority from any supposed divine authority.

Having worked through the key element of Hitchens’ stance on the ‘source-coding’, or the moral properties, which informs the ability of humans to tell the difference between a moral right and wrong, it will be evident that Hitchens’ critique of the Christian faith and its doctrine of vicarious redemption, on the one hand, cannot be read and understood apart from his

²⁵¹ Twain, M. (2007, p.186). Thoughts of Man. In: C.E. Hitchens, (ed). The Portable Atheist : Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever. Da Capo Press: Boston, MA.. pp.185-187.

²⁵² Extract from the Debate : Christopher Hitchens and William Dembski, held on 23 November 2010, at Prestonwood Baptist Church, Plano Texas. Online Reference : Hitchens1 (2012). Hitchens25 - religion is the poison chalice. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-CSKPgvzic>>. [Accessed 28 May 2013]. [2.20 minutes].

arguments against any code of morality which derives its instructions from sacred texts and a divine authority, on the other. His critique of the Christian idea of vicarious redemption can only find its full meaning in understanding his position on the redundancy of the Christian case for a code of moral principles. In summary, Hitchens' position on the biblical account of Abraham's decision to murder his own son, was that the act on the part of Abraham is deemed to be less than moral, and he ascribed a similar negative assessment to the very account of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the resultant doctrine of vicarious redemption. He also critiqued the attempt on the part of the Church and Christian theologians, at justifying the Christian faith as the moral standard bearer; a position which he found unsustainable. He further argued that the combined Christian teachings on the necessity of human sacrifice, as a required path to redemption, are counterintuitive to the very idea of a moral code, itself.

A final consideration in this section of the study is a brief exploration of a possible correlation between the doctrine of vicarious redemption and the idea embodied within the title of Zizek's article, *'If there is a God, then anything is permitted'*. At the root of this question is the desire to establish whether the doctrine of vicarious redemption is more than just a treatment for acts committed and whether, by itself, it engenders a syndrome of actions less than moral, from which a practicing Christian can lay claim to the retrospective remedy found within faith-based confessionals, forgiveness and redemption. The comments of Steven Weinberg, which Hitchens frequently cites in his debates and interviews, may better illustrate the point of redemption as an empowering agent of a possible culture of amorality and immorality, rooted within the Christian belief system, itself.

*"With or without religion, you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion."*²⁵³

²⁵³Hitchens (2007), *'God is Not Great'*, dedicates a whole chapter (13) entitled, 'Does Religion Make People Behave Better?', to this subject. The statement is attributed to Steven Weinberg, taken from his comments during an Interview on 20 April 1999 with a New York Times reporter on Weinberg's, then, much anticipated debate with physicist and Anglican priest John Polkinghorne. The Online Reference in this regard is drawn from the blog of Douglas O. Linder, who is Professor of Law at University of Missouri – Kansas City. Online Reference : Linder, D.O. (2005). Steven Weinberg on the Conflict Between Religion and Science. 2005. Law2.umkc [online]. [Accessed 15 October 2013]. Available from: <<http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/conlaw/weinberg.html>>.

5.3. : A Summary of Christopher Hitchens' Perspectives on Vicarious Redemption - An Analysis within a Post-Structural Paradigm.

The two key challenges brought to bear upon any effort to summarise Christopher Hitchens' stance on the width and depth of the Christian belief system in general and the doctrine of vicarious redemption, in particular, are; firstly, the task of having to appropriately draw from the sheer volume of direct source material available from Hitchens himself and, secondly, maintaining the value of the complex multidisciplinary approach which he applies to his analysis of, and contributions to, the subject. In this regard, the ever-present risk of losing critical elements of his arguments from within this multidisciplinary matrix, of written literature and valuable online / New Media resources, in the form of his articles²⁵⁴ and recorded film material, necessitated a wide-angled approach to this study; to meaningfully capture, both, his contributions to this discourse, as well as the possible demerits of his arguments.

There can be no critique of the contributions of Hitchens on the subject of vicarious redemption, outside of the broader canvas of his critique on religion, generally, and of Christianity in particular. This should also include his articulate use of the subject of morality to pry open the doctrine of vicarious redemption for further scrutiny. That with his strong critique of vicarious redemption, Christopher Hitchens has struck at the very foundations of the Christian faith; of that there can be no doubt. The pursuit of credible academic enquiry, in terms of the subject of vicarious redemption, may sometimes be subordinated to the interests of preserving the established order of the church and any faith-based academic enterprise. The *theological significance* of Hitchens contributions to this subject and the discourse raises question as to whether his arguments are credible, sustainable and, to an extent future-proof. From a post-structuralist perspective, Christopher Hitchens has left an indelible mark on the narrative of Christian redemption and he has left the discourse richer, for the following reasons.

²⁵⁴ In this regard, Hitchens' regular web-based articles in 'Slate' and 'Vanity Fair', are particularly useful, in attempting to understanding Hitchens, the person and the professional. Online References : www.slate.com and www.vanityfair.com

- Hitchens' critique of the Christian belief system has undone the 'helix' of its doctrinal formation and has isolated *faith* as the key element which sustains the doctrine. The significance of this reality, and more than Hitchens just being labelled the consummate iconoclast, his critique has called into question the theological superstructure of a divinely ordained plan; from creation, to the 'fall' into sin, to the redemption of humankind, to the promise of an afterlife; within which plan, vicarious redemption has its central place. Beyond just the bringing to new life, knowledge previously *subjugated* by the established order, of church, State and the academia; it is the manner in which Hitchens drew from various disciplines to form a set of coherent arguments, that will remain his contribution and legacy to the discourse. In many respects, Hitchens' skill in this regard, has served to disentangle, critique and expose the *theological insider-trading* and *theological mystery-making*, on the part of Christian apologists, evident in so many of the Hitchens engagements assessed during this study. It may be valid to assert that the propensity, on the part of Christian apologists, to launder and recycle beliefs and doctrines which, themselves, are theologically unsound, may be short-lived; and it will be to the credit of Hitchens that he has postulated a shift from authority 'on-high' to knowledge 'on-line'.
- Hitchens strong anti-totalitarian stand ran parallel to his disposition and acute ability to question 'received authority' and any 'revealed wisdom' dispensed by such authority, which 'wisdom', in the case of the church, could take the shape of its doctrines, handed down from one age to another.²⁵⁵ The following extract highlights Hitchens' point in this regard.

"The offer of certainty, the offer of complete security, the offer of an impermeable faith that can't give way, is an offer of something not worth having. I want to live my life taking the risk all the time, that I don't know anything like

²⁵⁵ Extract from the Debate : Christopher Hitchens and William Dembski, held on 23 November 2010, at Prestonwood Baptist Church, Plano Texas. Online Reference : Hitchenslap1 (2012). Hitchenslap25 - religion is the poison chalice. [online]. Available from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-CSKPgvzic>>. [Accessed 28 May 2013]. [1.20 minutes].

enough yet, that I haven't understood enough, that I can't know enough, that I'm always hungrily operating on the margins of a potentially great harvest of future knowledge and wisdom. I wouldn't have it any other way and I'd urge you to look at those who tell you, those people who tell you, at your age, that you're dead till you believe as they do. What a terrible thing to be telling to children. And that you can only live (audience applause), and that you can only live by accepting an absolute authority. Don't think of that as a gift, think of it, think of it as a poison chalice. Push it aside, however, tempting it is. Take the risk of thinking for yourself. Much more happiness, truth, beauty and wisdom will come to you that way."

- The significance of Hitchens' multifaceted constructive engagement strategy with the subject matter under review, cannot be overstated, as a post-structural force which has shifted the centre of gravity of this discourse, by placing his work firmly within the public sphere, in the form of the written word and through debates and presentations published in 'the public square' of instantly accessible New Media.
- Where the socio-political milieu of the 1960s provided the impetus for the challenging of structures²⁵⁶, which underpinned the advent of post-structuralism, Hitchens correctly anticipated the ground-breaking changes to come within the area of communications technology and New Media, as the new platforms through which his case and that of the New Atheist school will take further hold on a broader readership base and audience. In this sense, and as much as he demonstrated his preparedness to engage with any academic or public figure, his total campaign was broad-based, making his work accessible to the public.
- The fact that Hitchens was a strong public figure and not a classical academic is also significant. His critique of the Christian faith and its doctrines were not just directed at

²⁵⁶ As detailed in Chapter 1 on Post-structuralism.

the populace, they were a response and a challenge *from* within the laity, *from* the populace, *from* the *popular front for the emancipation from religion*²⁵⁷; thereby breaking through the hold of institutionalized power over this discourse, to introduce a non-hierarchical, non-linear and popular dimension to the discourse. Christopher Hitchens played a significant part in furthering the objective, which could be said to have had its origins in the life and works of Thomas Paine; that the architecture of knowledge²⁵⁸ and power within the discourse be reset. Where the doctrine of vicarious redemption and its Scriptural supports were previously considered sacrosanct, the subject was now wide open for public scrutiny and engagement; outside of the confines of established structures and defined lines of religious authority.

- As vociferous as Hitchens' critique of vicarious redemption may have been at times, his works reflect a missed opportunity to respond to a key theme within the doctrine of vicarious redemption, that of "being brought under the **ownership** of an divine being"; a fuller expression of the idea of being 'redeemed' or being 'bought back' by the redeeming act of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. Whilst his views of vicarious redemption being an immoral doctrine and totalitarian are well articulated, he did fall short of castigating the idea of being *owned* by a divine being. The idea of having to surrender one's total being and life, as opposed to just one's faculty of reason, over to a divine authority, would have added a significant deterrent and disincentive to anybody contemplating such surrender to faith and god.
- With the doctrine of vicarious redemption being at the heart of Christendom, and given that Hitchens' critique of both the doctrine and the Christian belief system could be regarded as being an adequate assault on the theological superstructure of the Christian faith, his cause may have been further advanced by also responding more adequately to the burgeoning international *industry* of Church which trades in vicarious redemption as its key commodity; a franchise network whose growth, particularly in the market

²⁵⁷ The temptation to append an acronym to this notion or category will be avoided.

²⁵⁸ To append an idea from Michel Foucault, as discussed earlier in this study at Chapter 1.

segment of Independent Christian Churches and that of the Mega-Church, appears to have no end in sight.²⁵⁹ Whilst it is known that Hitchens was strongly aligned with The Richard Dawkins Foundation, which has established a special Research Unit²⁶⁰, for the specific purpose of investigating and exposing the financial racketeering within the Christian church network, this phenomenon beckoned a more direct response from Hitchens, notwithstanding the reasonable assertion that he would have had a sound grasp of the power of pecuniary incentive which sustains this industry.

- In some continuation of the point immediately above, it is noted that although Hitchens engaged with academics and theologians from the Independent Church Network and its supporting academic infrastructure, his critique of the church and the doctrine of vicarious redemption appeared to be less than considerate of the current phenomenon of the *privatisation of Christianity*, with the doctrine of redemption being at the core of its *value proposition*. Hitchens was raised as an Anglican in England, as was Richard Dawkins, and appeared to have a deeper grasp of the 'mainstream' churches such as the Anglican Church and The Roman Catholic Church, in particular. In all fairness to Hitchens, it could be said that he was reaching the prime of his life as a critic of Christendom, when his life gave way to cancer; and that a further chapter of his campaign, on this aspect, could very well have been a reasonable expectation.

- Whilst Christopher Hitchens could be considered as having constructed a noteworthy case against the doctrine of vicarious redemption, the tendency, however, to pit Christian doctrine against science, and to prove that it is inconsistent with scientific precepts, is considered, both, unnecessary and a severe distraction to the key

²⁵⁹ A summary of this phenomenon, which Sean Fairclough calls, 'The Religio-Industrial Complex' can be viewed on film, Titled : '*Beware the Religio-Industrial Complex*'. Online Reference : JamesRandiFoundation (2012). Sean Fairclough - "Beware the Religio-Industrial Complex" - TAM 2012. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wm4q8Ff_rul>. [Accessed 6 February 2013].

²⁶⁰ The Research Unit works under the leadership of Sean Faircloth, who was referred to earlier in this study. Sean Fairclough is the Director of Strategy and Policy at the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science. Faircloth is the author of, '*The Attach of The Theocrats*' (2012). Whilst it is acknowledged that Hitchens would not have been unmindful of the reality of the business of redemption and church, it is noted that his cause would have been well served with a stronger critique of this aspect.

arguments postulated. Given the substance of the case formulated by Hitchens against the doctrine of vicarious redemption, there is sufficient in plain sight of the doctrine *itself* and its Scriptural underpinnings, upon which to rest the case, without introducing arguments about how unscientific the doctrine is. In fairness to Hitchens and others from the New Atheist movement, however, there will always be a need to demonstrate that religion cannot stand up to the rigours of scientific scrutiny, however, the need to invoke the scientific argument, more than is necessary, to disprove the essence of *faith-based* religion is considered counterproductive and a distraction to their cause.²⁶¹

5.4. The Future Relevance of the Doctrine of Vicarious Redemption.

To attempt to establish the future relevance of the Christian doctrine of vicarious redemption does raise two fundamental underlying questions which require initial treatment. Firstly, is redemption, from sources religious, a necessity in the first place? Framed in the language of Christopher Hitchens; from what human ill is vicarious redemption a remedy? Secondly, if the response to the first question is in the affirmative, is the Christian brand of vicarious redemption the best available option available on the doctrinal market?

For Christopher Hitchens, the enquiry ends at the first question, with the cumulative responses from the outcomes of this study pointing to his view that there is no human condition or ill, to which vicarious redemption is a remedy.

For the existing Christian world, as well as for the potential future market²⁶² for the faith, however, it is self-evident that there can be no Christendom, as it is now known, without the

²⁶¹ The documentary film which premiered April 2013, *'The Unbelievers'*, is the latest instalment from Richard Dawkins and fellow atheist, Lawrence Krauss. The film does appear to contain elements of the Science versus Religion debate, however, gauging from the reviews of the film, it does promise to be very engaging and enlightening.

²⁶² It is noted that the use of terms such as, 'markets', 'value proposition', 'racketeering', 'the industry of church', 'key commodity', 'enterprise', 'the privatisation of Christianity', 'cash cow', 'franchise network', and 'insider trading', which terms are usually associated with the fields of Commerce and Economics; are not applied flippantly

doctrine of vicarious redemption. Notwithstanding this, the comments of Batstone (2001, p.235) in this regard, may signal the erosion of the ground on which Christian doctrinal presently rests.

“It’s hard to imagine how fixed theologies like those of most organized religions will survive intact the on-line scrutiny given to ideas, opinions and proclamations. The network is a natural leveller of established institutions. Once individuals get their hands on the machinery of communications, they make and disseminate their own personal theologies.”

The three further points which emerge from an assessment of this extract by Batstone, is that, firstly, the combined effect of the advances in communications technology coupled with the gains made by the New Atheist movement, does signal a serious challenge to the integrity of the Christian church, in its efforts to sustain the credibility of its foundational doctrinal structure.

Secondly, the reality of the workings of New Media may compromise the required **depth of analysis** required to construct sound arguments for or against a particular subject or standpoint. To apply an idea mentioned in discussions by a learned colleague²⁶³, that the current advances in communications technology represents a ‘*compression of time and space*’, may not always count in favour of sound analysis and discourse. The related comments offered by Christopher Hedges (2008, p,180), below, with regard to the role of television in knowledge formation could also apply to the issues now under discussion; highlighting the caution with which New Media should be approached.

“The techniques of control in an image-based, anticomunal, consumerist culture are used for governing.....Those who practice these techniques are manipulative and cynical. They have robbed us of art, of democratic rights, of education, of respect for the world around us, of the sacred, and they have left us sputtering to each other

and are used with the intended seriousness they convey; to describe the workings of organised religion and the Christian church in particular.

²⁶³ The concept of the ‘compression of time and space’ is attributed to my colleague, Professor Tinyeko Maluleke, as mentioned during discussions in which the phrase was used.

in the simplified language of television. Television has given us a new image-based epistemology. It now subtly defines what is true. It determines what constitutes knowledge. It tells us what is real and unreal."

Thirdly, the reality of a new era of 'citizen theology' has already been entered into; an environment which resonates strongly with the work of Christopher Hitchens. Whilst, the pre-existing structures of religion, church and family will remain foundational sources of influence, the reality of this new era of 'citizen theology', points to new permutations of truth-seeking, which are derived from two dominant sources; Internet-based resources and through Social Networking. The reality of the changed world that Batstone (2001, p. 226) describes, requires of the church and Christendom that new ways be pursued to sustain its relevance in the world.

"What the printing press did for Europe in the sixteenth century, the convergence of telecommunications media is doing in our own time."

To make a point for the post-structuralist cause, it could be said that the ***court of public opinion*** is now in session, permanently.

It could, however, also be said that too much is being made of the effects of the new communications technology and New Media on shaping *tomorrow's theology* and that the church will withstand such changes, as it has always done. Perhaps so, but to hold dogmatically to this argument would be to be in denial of the significance of the changes and challenges under consideration in this study, in a world already changed as it has never been before; and the discussion has not even entered into the advances made within the fraternity of pure sciences, which may place into further question the relevance of Christian doctrine, in the future.

Having invested this study in a post-structuralist paradigm, it may be worth considering the following questions to get to the nub of the future relevance of the doctrine of vicarious redemption. What would be the relevance of the proposition of the Christian brand of redemption in a post-apocalyptic world? What would be the relevance of vicarious redemption

in the new world of innovation of internationally respected futuristic scientist, Craig Venter; where the replication of new life at cellular level is already a thing of the past?²⁶⁴ As controversial as this latter achievement may be, it does bring the relevance of the Christian storyboard of life; that of creation-sin-redemption-afterlife, whether taken literally or metaphorically, under serious scrutiny.

²⁶⁴ Craig Venter is the world renowned geneticist who was a part of the team which first achieved the decoding of the Human Genome (DNA) in 2000, under the Human Genome Project, headed by scientist Francis Collins. Craig Venter went on to record further significant ground-breaking scientific achievements and in 2010 announced the creation of new life in a laboratory, at cellular level. Craig Venter's interview with Sir David Frost on Al Jazeera Television, 22 December 2012, covers his achievements in further detail. An extract from this interview bears significance for this study and the questions raised as to the future relevance of the Christian doctrine of redemption.

"For the first time now we can actually design life in a computer, make the DNA Software and create new life forms that have never existed before."

Craig Venter.

Online Reference :

Al Jazeera English (2012). The Frost Interview - Craig Venter. [online]. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MuoE_LuXfBE>. [Accessed 22 February 2013].

It is noted, as a point of interest, that Francis Collins and Christopher Hitchens developed a close friendship, initially through matters religion. Francis Collins is a practicing Christian. Their friendship developed strongly after Hitchens was diagnosed with esophageal cancer. Francis Collins and Christopher Hitchens shared a deep respect for one another, despite the strong differences of opinion on the Christian faith. Collins worked closely with Hitchens' medical team in an attempt to isolate the gene linked to the spread of the cancer. Francis Collins and Craig Venter are considered to be amongst the modern day pioneers in decoding the Human Genome.

Online Reference :

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CHAPTER SIX-CONCLUSION

Having considered the theological structure of the doctrine of vicarious redemption and its central place within the Christian belief system, alongside Christopher Hitchens critique of this religious doctrine, it will now be evident that the complexity of both component subjects within this study left no place for any simplistic analysis of either the historical trajectory of the doctrine or of the contributions of Christopher Hitchens to this discourse. If there had been any doubt, at the start of this study, as to the impact which Christopher Hitchens has had on the world of religion and on the subject of redemption within Christendom, in particular, then such doubt has dissipated entirely.

More specifically, it is also evident that Christopher Hitchens' critique of the Christian faith has brought into serious question the doctrinal foundations of the faith and that his works could be said to have contributed to the erosion of the credibility and future effect of the doctrine. In this latter regard, Hitchens follows a long line of critics of Christian doctrine. However, it is clear that the Hitchens hermeneutic and the manner in which he deployed the substance of his arguments, in forms written or spoken, does mark a unique and valued contribution to the present discourse on the subject and the fact that Hitchens was not in service of either the church or the academia on these subjects, makes his contributions all the more significant.

To expect any study of this nature not to have to encounter areas of challenge and controversy would be naïve. The sheer girth and depth of the subject of redemption, itself, its nature and historical development, required that only research material which fell closest to the core subject matter be considered, to the exclusion of much of the deep theological controversies, over the ages, which gave shape to the Christian doctrine of redemption. With regard to the work of Christopher Hitchens and the influences which shaped his worldview, the challenge was to draw out the relevant supporting and opposing arguments, to those proposed by Hitchens, from a voluminous body of resource material, without detracting from the core

subject of this enquiry. These factors, together with the rapidly evolving media and communications environment into which this discourse has already shifted, found best expression in this study being undertaken within the theoretical framework of post-structuralism.

On the central subject of vicarious redemption, Christopher Hitchens was unequivocal in his rejection of the doctrine, as well as the Christian belief system as a whole. Beyond just this stated position, it was the manner in which he integrated material from a range of disciplines to construct a set of important perspectives and arguments which will remain his legacy. The range of Hitchens' critique, in relation to the doctrine of vicarious redemption, included his deconstruction, and case against, what is claimed to be revealed Holy Scripture, of the Bible. There could be no credible critique of the work of Christopher Hitchens on a subject as central and as complex as that of vicarious redemption without engaging in a fair measure of his particular form of biblical criticism, which was influenced strongly by the works of Thomas Paine.

A subject which was central to his stand against, both, vicarious redemption and the Christian faith, as well as the lived realities and sociological manifestations of the faith, was that of the degree to which this primary doctrine of the Christian religious apparatus was vested with any semblance of a moral code. In this regard, as well, his views were unambiguous, that the doctrine of vicarious redemption was immoral. More than just his critique of vicarious redemption being immoral, Hitchens saw no need for it in the first place. Where, for the Christian faith, *redemption* is sought as the remedy for the ill of sin and a fractured relationship with a divine being, Hitchens' cause was for the *emancipation from* religion and its subsidiary doctrinal infrastructure. In this latter regard, it is the work of Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins which has given the New Atheist movement the momentum it now enjoys in the world, with the continuing work of Sam Harris, Victor Stenger, Lawrence Krauss, Neil DeGrasse Tyson, Daniel Dennett, Richard Pryor (Deceased), George Carlin (Deceased), Dave Allen

(Deceased), Julia Sweeney, Bill Maher and others mentioned within this study, also adding their strong support, deceased or otherwise, towards the cause.

Hitchens held strongly to the view that, *church did not end on Sundays* and that doctrine such as vicarious redemption and the system of faith in a divine entity had ramifications for the shaping of public policy; a view that strongly shaped the vigour with which he carried his cause into the public sphere. It will, by now, also be evident that nothing Christopher Hitchens could have pronounced on the doctrine of vicarious redemption or the Christian faith could be understood outside of his strong anti-totalitarian position and his pursuit for the protection and entrenchment of civil liberties within a secular state, to which he found the church and religion, *a clear and present danger*. Whilst it may appear contradictory to the point just alluded to, Christopher Hitchens supported the protection of the individual's rights to freedom of religion, within the framework of a secular state, however, he went one step further to embrace the cause for an individual's rights to freedom from religion.

Christopher Hitchens has impacted the world of religion and the Christian faith in a substantial way; of that there can be no doubt. For the world of Christian apologetics, once the step is taken to engage with the work of Christopher Hitchens, leaving behind the vested self-interests in the industry of Christendom, the rediscovery of new meanings of 'revealed wisdom', with regard to matters of doctrine, and redemption in particular, may begin to take hold with revised and refreshed interpretations of the promise of emancipation from these ideas and doctrines. The principles of human solidarity and mutual benevolence which are innate to all, deserves re-entry and credible reintegration into this discourse; a cause to which Christopher Hitchens was committed to his last days, and a cause towards which, it is hoped, this study has made a contribution.

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