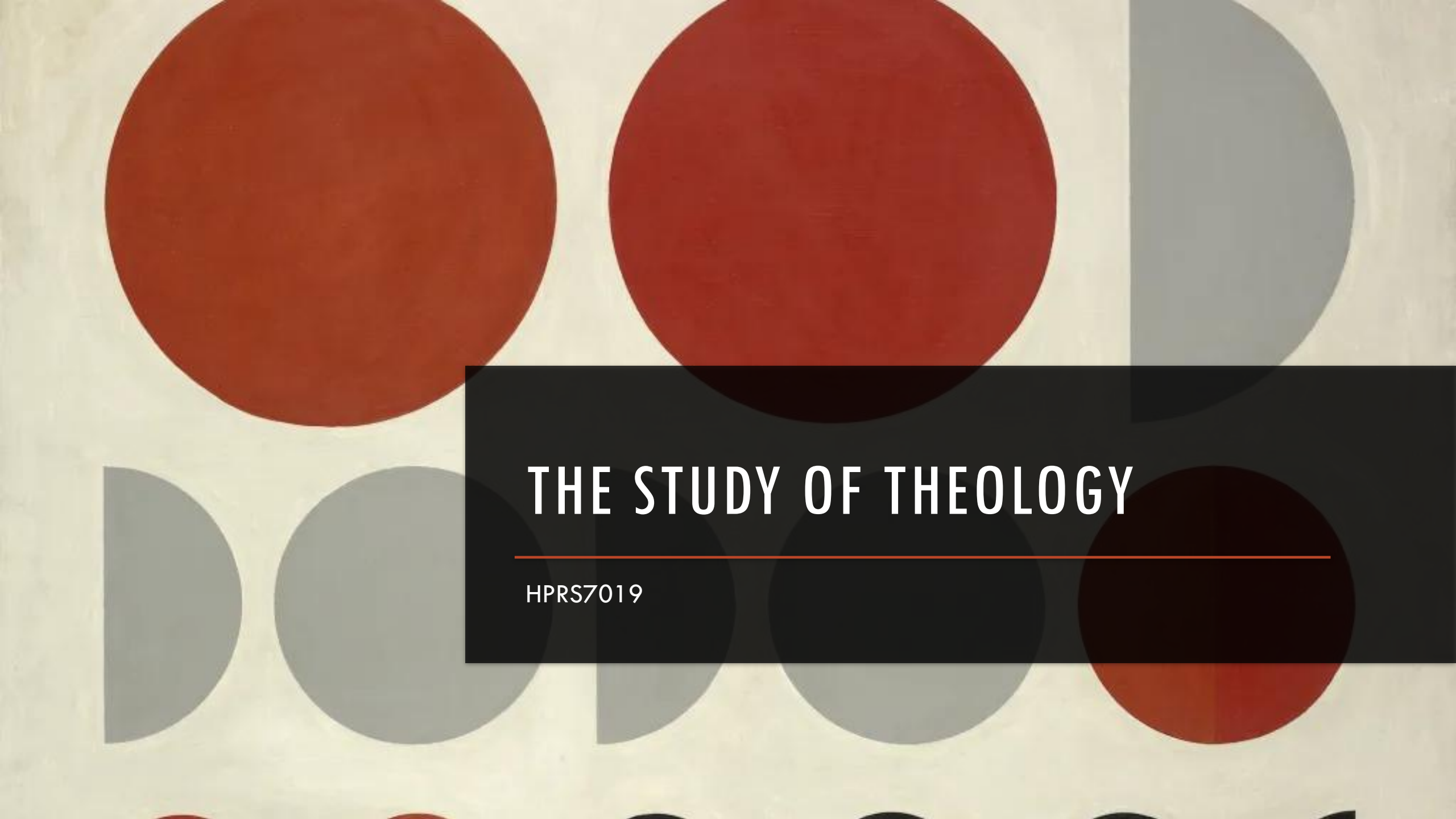


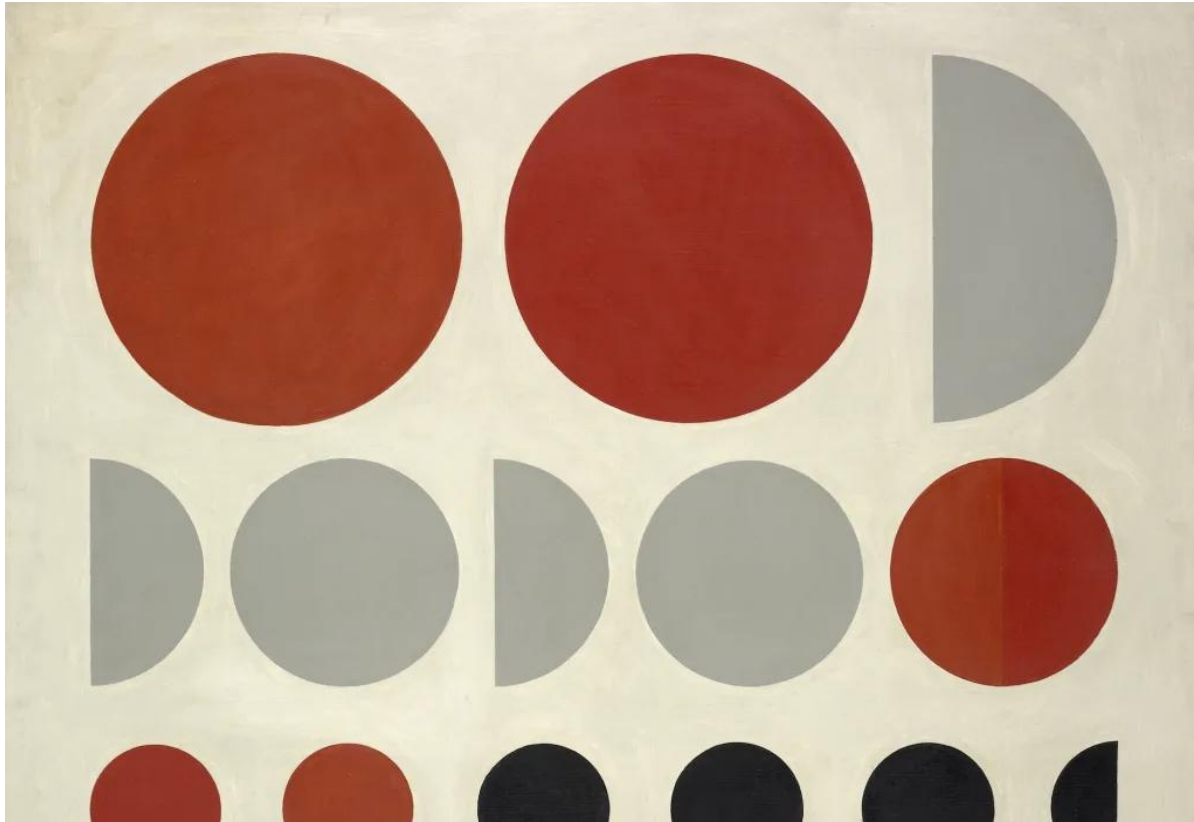


THE STUDY OF THEOLOGY

HPRS7019



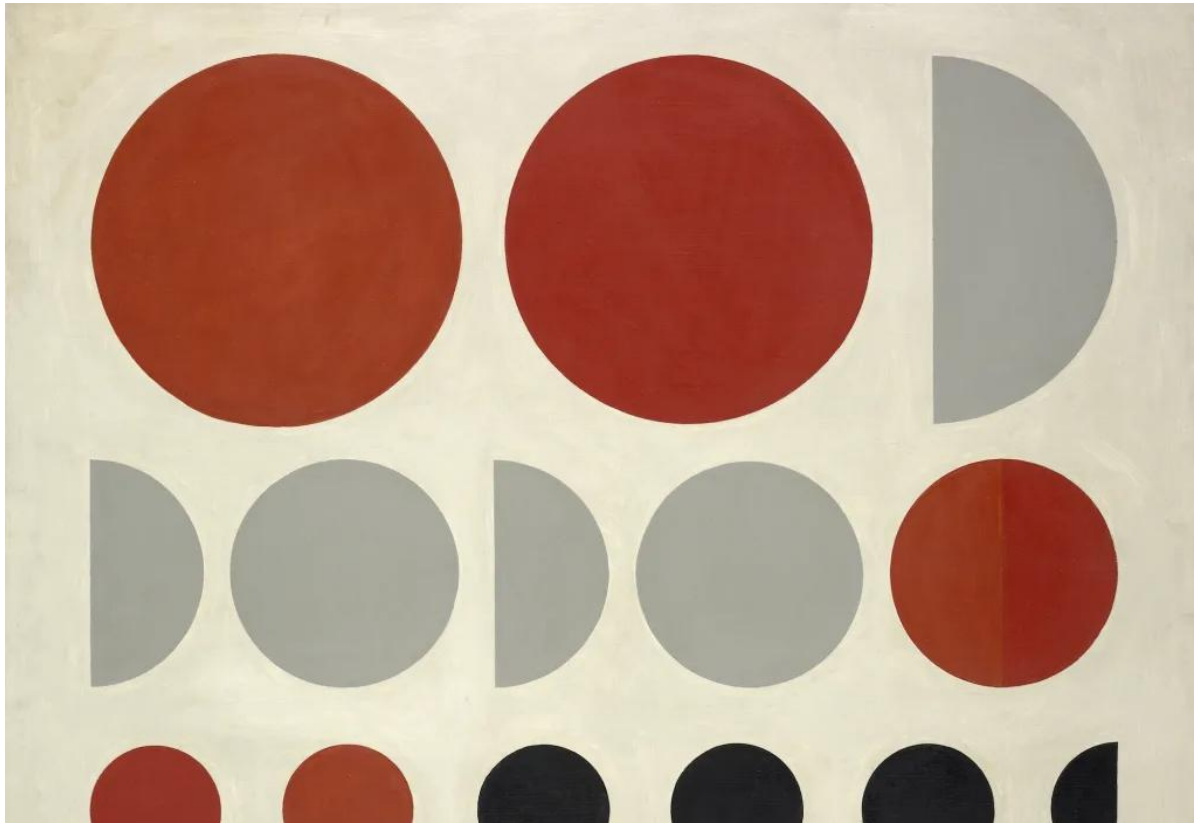
THE OBJECT OF THEOLOGY



FAITH AND THE OBJECT OF THEOLOGY

Theology is part of the life of faith, but how does it serve Christian faith?

- Is theology an attempt to make sense of faith itself?
- Or is theology an attempt to understand the object of faith?



FAITH AND THE OBJECT OF THEOLOGY

“Object”: that into which theology inquires; its subject matter.

- Lots of prolegomena gives attention to the methods employed in theology, but without reflecting on the object of theology.
- Methods of inquiry in any discipline are adapted to their particular object
- The object of inquiry determines which skills are relevant to acquire in pursuit of that knowledge.

FAITH AND THE OBJECT OF THEOLOGY

Theology is an act of the understanding.

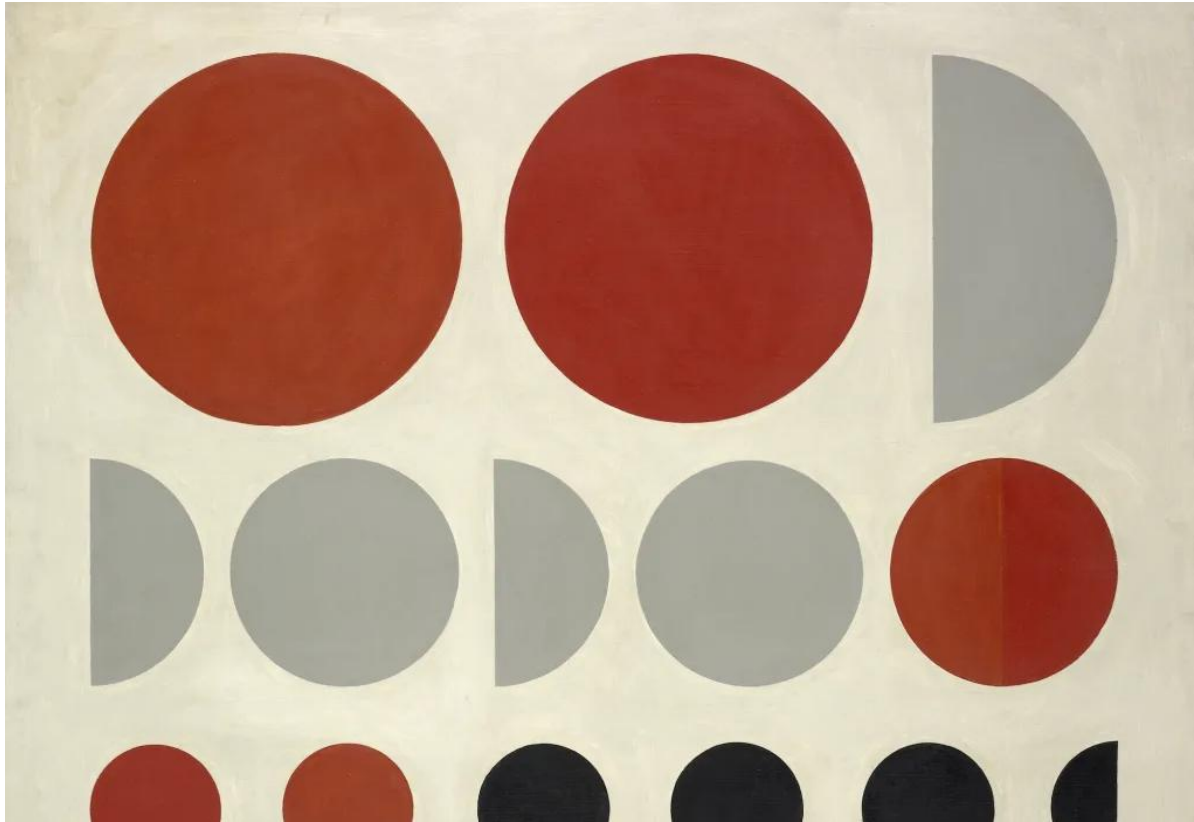
The object of theology depends upon:

- Whether faith is an act of understanding.
- How God reveals himself to faith.
- Whether God is knowable.

Two approaches to the object of theology:

- God and All things in God
- The “Essence” of the Christian Religion





1. GOD AND ALL THINGS IN GOD

God is the primary object of theology
as he is the First Principle of all things.

The divine nature and its perfections.

The will and works of God.

1. GOD AND ALL THINGS IN GOD

Created realities are the secondary object of theology as they are “effects” of God.

Theology speaks of non-divine things: the natural order, history, human nature and culture.

These might be rightly studied in many ways, but theology does so under the aspect of their relation to God.



1. GOD AND ALL THINGS IN GOD

Theology is about everything but “not everything about everything” (Webster, *God Without Measure*, I:215).

“Sacred doctrine does not treat of God and creatures equally, but of God primarily, and of creatures only so far as they are referable to God as their beginning or end.” (Aquinas, *STh I*, q. 1, a. 3.)



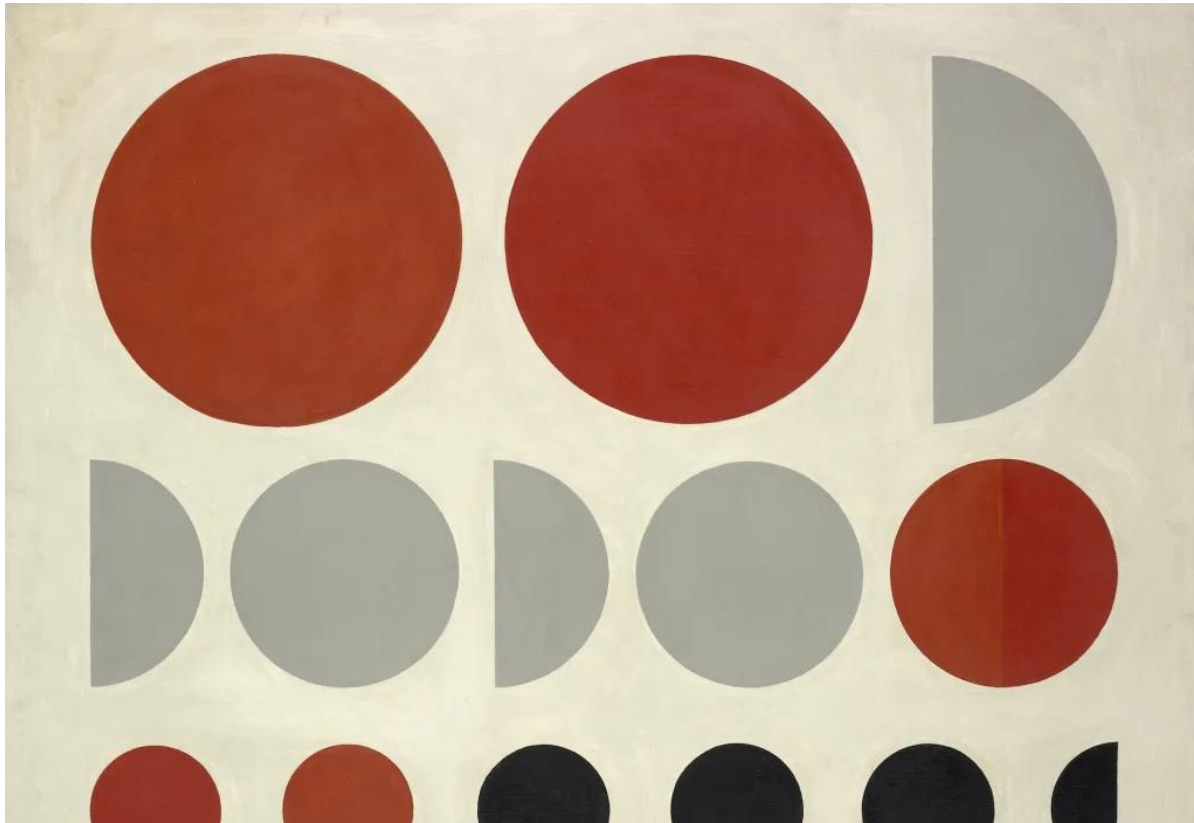
1. GOD AND ALL THINGS IN GOD

Created things are “signs” in which we contemplate God’s nature and will.

Knowledge of God is always mediated by some created reality. In order to speak about God, therefore, theology *must* speak about creatures.

Knowledge of God is always creaturely: we know God as creatures might know God, not as God knows God. But the object of faith and the object of theology are identical.



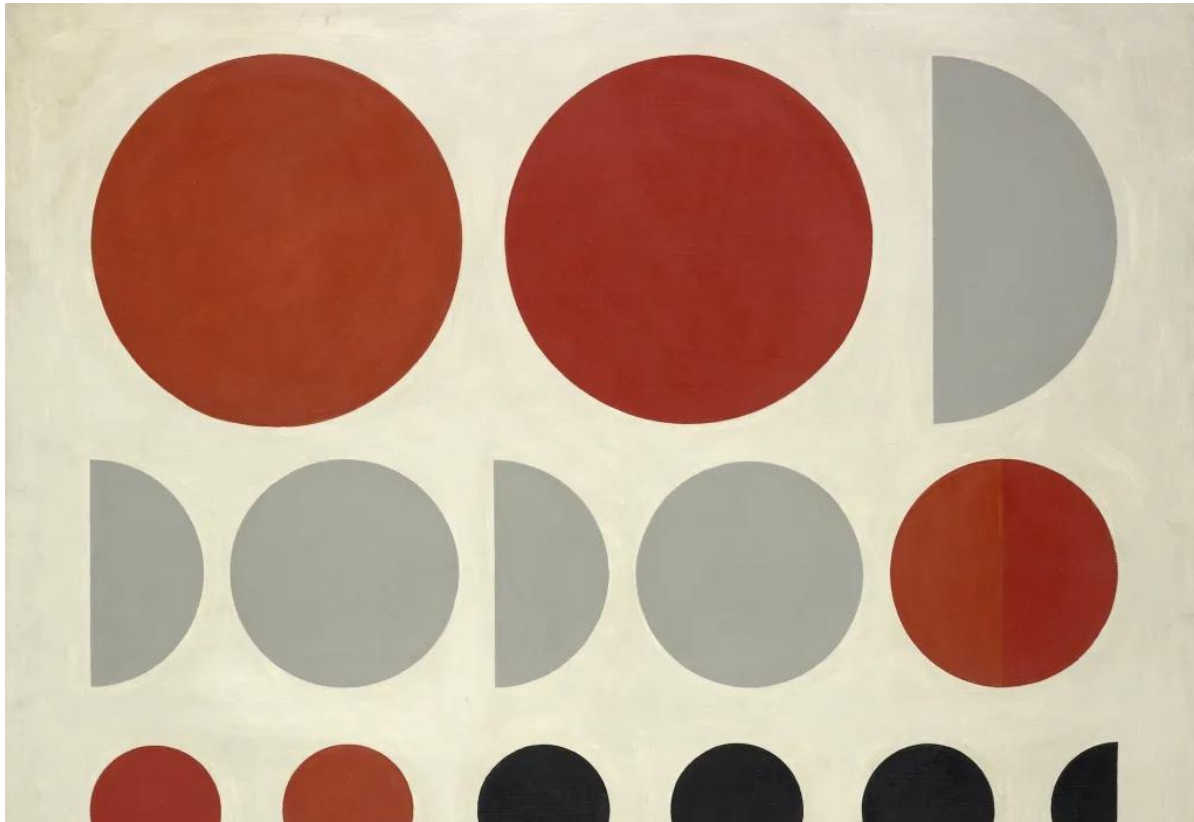


1. GOD AND ALL THINGS IN GOD

Two versions on the “Formal Object” of
Theology:

God in Himself (Aquinas, STh I, q. 1, a.
7)

God in His Revelation (Turretin, Inst.
I.V.IV)



2. THE “ESSENCE” OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

Enlightenment: Knowledge limited to the circle of “experience” so that the *historical* is the *real*.

God, as transcendent, is not the object of human experience.

And so, while God may be an object of *faith*, he cannot properly be an object of *knowledge*.

2. THE “ESSENCE” OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

Theology gravitates toward the scientific study of the *fact* of the Christian religion, that is, through an archaeology of its human cultures:

- Phenomenology & psychology of faith
- Critical history of the development of Christian teaching/tradition
- Comparative analysis of the social forms taken by the Christian church



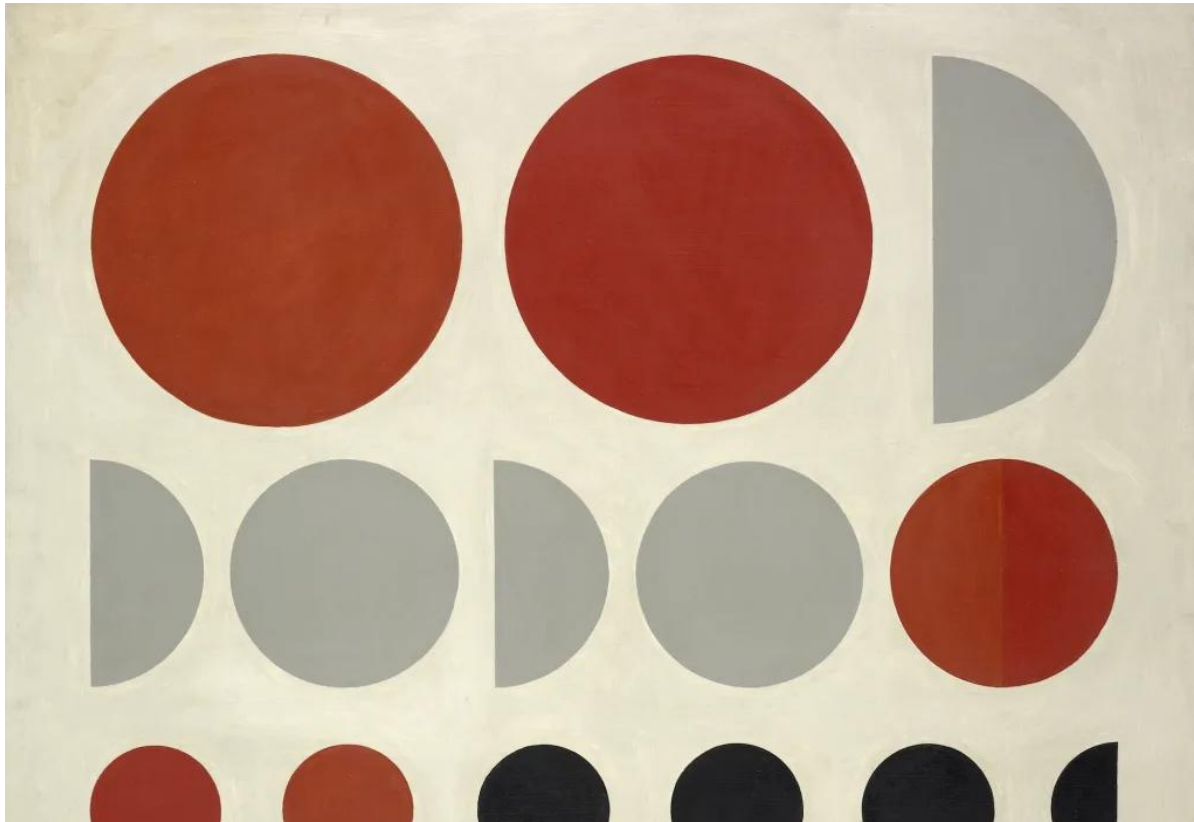
2. THE “ESSENCE” OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

These phenomena are understood within the particular historic sequence that defines the Christian religion.

They are critically analysed and compared in an attempt to distinguish what (if anything) is continuous across the changing cultural expressions of the Christian faith.

This is the “essence” of the Christian religion: that idea, value, or feeling which defines the Christian religion and sets it apart as a discrete historical movement.





2. THE “ESSENCE” OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

Naming the essence requires a transition from history to theology:

Schleiermacher: traced back to Christ as the origin, and certified by appeal to the unique character of Christ’s own life/faith.

Troeltsch: cannot name any “essence” because it requires some cause outside of history to set up an “authoritative norm”, invalidating historical-critical study.

REVELATION AND
THE OBJECT OF
THEOLOGY

REVELATION AND THE OBJECT OF THEOLOGY

Does theology differ from the history of the Christian religion?

One cannot engage in theology as a disinterested observer. Theology adopts a particular disposition toward the truth of the Christian faith. In the words of Anselm, it is “faith seeking understanding”.

But the object of faith is God. So faith concerns itself not merely with historical phenomena, but with God’s revelation of himself within history.



REVELATION AND THE OBJECT OF THEOLOGY

To the extent that theology concerns itself with faith, therefore, it must concern itself with faith's object. It cannot be content with history alone. In order to become *theologia*, it must interest itself in God himself.

“No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.” (Jeremiah 31:34 (NRSV))



REVELATION AND THE OBJECT OF THEOLOGY

One of the critiques of the “God and all things” view is that it directs attention away from history, or that it minimises God’s engagement with creatures in history. Is that necessary?

In one sense that is true: it treats God as object of theology because it takes God’s life to be even greater, more comprehensive, and more real than history itself.

There can be no inversion of the material order of theology: God principally, then all things in God.



REVELATION AND THE OBJECT OF THEOLOGY

In another sense, though, the events of history are invested with tremendous significance, not only because they play a part in the sequence of events in which the Church develops.

But because God truly manifests himself by means of them





READING

The first text is from Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, which argues that "sacred doctrine" is an inquiry into the nature of God.

The second reading is Gavin Hyman's essay on the relation of Theology and Religious Studies.

These two approaches to theology engender different theological methods because they suppose theology to have different objects – either revelation or the phenomena of religious experience.



READING

Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*
Ia, Question 1 (Articles 1–8)

Hyman, Gavin. “The Study of
Religion and the Return of
Theology.” *Journal of the
American Academy of
Religion* 72, no. 1 (2004):
195–219.