

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY PROPER

Various beliefs regarding God (or gods)

Deny existence of any God (actually and/or practically)

Atheism—There is no god of any kind, no supernatural being. The universe consists entirely of matter and energy. Nothing should be worshiped. E.g., Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*; Dan Barker, *Godless*

Agnosticism—The existence or non-existence of any divine being is impossible to determine. Therefore, we are not responsible to worship any supposed god.

Consider God as one in essence with the universe

Pantheism—God is everything, and all reality is God. God is not a personality or anything separate from the universe.

Dynamism—God is an impersonal life-force or energy pervading the universe and directing all events.

Consider God as separate from the universe

Polytheism—There are many gods who have supernatural power. They should be worshiped. They direct or influence events in the universe.

Animism—(a subset of polytheism) Nature is filled with personal spirits which cause the various natural events.

Idolatry—The spirits of gods dwell in certain objects made by men, or are reached through such objects.

Henotheism—While there are many gods, the worshiper selects one of them for worship, holding that this god is superior to the others.

Dualism—There are two gods over the universe, which are equal in power, and yet can be opposed to each other.

Monotheism—There is only one God. This God has personality and acts in the universe. He must be worshiped.

Deism—There is only one God. This God has set the creation of the universe in motion and has then allowed it to continue without interference.

Limited Theism—There is one God who is active in the universe. While he is supernatural, he is not infinite. There are limits to his power or time.

Process Theology—There is one God who is active in the universe. He actually changes over time and becomes more powerful, yet never omnipotent.

Christian Theism—There is one God, who has revealed himself to man by Jesus Christ and in the Bible. He exists in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Assumptions of theology proper

In this class we will assume that God does indeed exist and that the Bible is his revelation of himself to us. The reasons for this assumption are discussed fully in the courses dealing with revelation and with apologetics.

Jesus while here on the earth, and the Bible as a whole, present a consistent picture of Christian theism. While the Bible does not seek to prove God's existence and attributes, it often refers to them and presents a unified picture of God.

While God himself is incomprehensible to us, we believe that what he reveals of himself to us is true. Hence we can know God truly, even though partially. Furthermore, God has commanded us to know him. Jesus said, "Learn of me." In prayer, study, and meditation God's saints through the ages have come to know and love God more and more, not only for what he has done, but for what he is in himself. Therefore, we assume that we can truly learn of God through his revelation to us.

Definition of God

Perhaps the finest definition penned by man is that of the Westminster Shorter Catechism #4, "What is God? God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth."

According to later legend this definition came to the lips of the youngest member of the Assembly in prayer (probably the Scotsman George Gillespie), but this legend is not

supported by contemporary records, which show him actually to have been absent at the time.

This definition was expanded in the WLC 7:

God is a Spirit, in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty; knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.

And in the WCF 2:

1. There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty; most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

2. God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them; he is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom, are all things; and that most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest; his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature; so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them.

All the standards then proceed to set forth the triune nature of God, which should also be included in the definition of God. However, consideration of the Trinity will be taken up later in this course.

Note that all these definitions deal with the nature of God as existing, and also with his attributes, nature, or character, and his relation to the created universe. These categories provide an excellent framework for the study of theology proper.