

SYTH 411 – Introduction to Theology

What is theology?

In the most basic form, theology is human speech about God, yet God must reveal Himself to us if there is to be theology. Theology is the study of God for the sake of knowing God.

Is theology a science?

Some views:

Aquinas – affirms the unity of human knowledge and is as certain that God is real as he is about other forms of knowledge. Theology is the queen of sciences.

Kuyper & Dooyeweerd – theology is no more privileged to the church than any other science. Theology is not the queen of sciences.

Ten Hoor – science is only knowledge of cosmos and theology is knowledge of God.

Reasons to oppose the notion that theology is a science:

1. Partly rooted in bad science that oversteps its boundaries/masquerades as a worldview
2. Reductionism – the uniqueness of theology, its basis in revelation, gets lost.

Concluding remarks:

1. Theology has to serve 3 publics: church, world, and academy
2. Scientific dimension of theology: theologians use arguments and evidence
3. Real issue: Unity of all knowledge; is theology universal or unique, particular.
Theology does not deal with universal faith phenomena but with the historically particular knowledge of God given to the Christian church!

What is the object of theology?

Can say that we can study God, God's revelation, religion, or the human response to God's acting.

1. Theology is the Science of God – Aquinas and Warfield

Basically that this science is mainly about God and teaches the knowledge of God. Must begin by establishing the existence of God, the capacity of the human mind to know Him, and the accessibility concerning Him. They both qualify their answer by saying that "God is not the object in and of himself, but always as he is in relation to us, to the world, as he reveals himself to humanity."

Weakness: Does not fully grasp the reality of man

2. Theology is the Science of Revelation

- God as revealed himself in his Word is the real object of theology – Berkhof
- The science of theology finds its object of investigation in the revealed, ectypal knowledge of God – A. Kuyper
- Another way to view this is that the facts of the Bible as the object – Charles Hodge

Weakness: Need more than merely facts

3. Theology is the Science of Faith/Religion – Schleiermacher

Says the Bible cannot be the object, because it is merely the avenue to God. Our access to God is experienced through faith, therefore faith must be the object.

Weakness: runs risk of normativity

4. Theology is the Science of the relation between God and creation/humanity - Calvin
Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of 2 parts: knowledge of God and of ourselves. Focus is on the covenant relationship.
Weakness: Hard to distinguish which comes first.

Difference b/t theology and philosophy of religion?

Theology is the normative study of a particular faith. Philosophy of religion studies the abstracts from all religions in order to determine what phenomenon they have in common and what distinguishes them.

Defend a position regarding the proper shape and purpose of theological education

There are 3 main divisions: Biblical, Church, and Practical application of church ministry. Biblical is exegesis to serve preaching and teaching. Church is the history of the church's understanding of the Bible. Good seminary curriculum should incorporate all 3 of these together. The Biblical aids in the understanding of the church and the Biblical and the church aid in the understanding of the practical (sort of hierarchal). All 3 of these are integral to the very structure of Christian ministry itself.

Revelation Info:

3 modes (Benjamin Warfield):

- External Manifestations (theophany) – these are visible and tangible, both event and explanation. God is making Himself known.
- Internal suggestion (prophecy) – vision and dreams, which come from God. Cannot keep silent and must speak.
- Concursive operation (inspiration) – emphasizes work of Holy Spirit, recognized in the writing of the Bible (not mechanical, but organic).

Terms:

General Revelation: Some manifestations of God that is universally present to all people, leaving everyone without an excuse.

Natural Theology: Conviction that true knowledge about God is possible apart from special Revelation (through human reason.) From Roman Catholic tradition

Common Grace: Conviction that there is a general favor of God shown to all people indiscriminately – He bestows gifts.

Infallibility and Inspiration: The trustworthiness of Scripture extends to every word. “Divine inspiration establishes Scripture as an infallible rule and sufficient canon for all of Christian faith and life by securing it against falsification, error, and deceit” Organic view of Scripture.

Attributes of Scripture:

Necessity of Special Revelation: arises from the inadequacy of general rev. to provide salvation. A gift from God. Special rev. required so that man can be in communion with God.

Primacy of Scripture: Scripture has primacy over all community tradition. Scripture is primary with respect to its proper nature and purpose (to awaken and nurture our faith in God)

Nature and Purpose of Scriptural Rev: so persons can enter into a redemptive relationship with God.

Sufficiency and Perspicuity: Bible is enough (does not need to be added to) and it is clear with respect to its purpose.