

Session 1 – The Umbrella

Text: The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics – Hindson and Caner

Other references: Online Etymology Dictionary, Dictionary.com and the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

Optional Texts and Reading:

- Christian Theology – Millard J. Erickson
- No One Like Him, The Doctrine of God – John S. Feinberg
- Doctrine, What Christians Should Believe – Breshears and Driscoll

Theology – Definition

[thee-**ol**-uh-jee] Noun – The systematic study of the existence and nature of the divine and its relationship to and influence upon other beings.

Etymology of the word - **theology (n.)**

mid-14c., "the science of religion, study of God and his relationship to humanity,"

from Old French theologie "philosophical study of Christian doctrine; Scripture" (14c.),

from Latin theologia, from Greek theologia "an account of the gods,"

from theologos "one discoursing on the gods,"

from theos "god" (see theo-) + -logos "treating of" (see -logy).

Theology, by its very nature, and by its definition is an incomplete study and will remain incomplete in our human state. That is to say that we can never fully understand everything about God because we are not God. When we get into the doctrinal study of God then we can begin to understand why this is the case.

In this session, we will begin to look at world theologies first before we dive into doctrine in our next session.

World Theologies

The major theological systems in world religions are as follows, understand there are many minor systems...these are “the biggies: Monotheism, Polytheism, Pantheism, Panentheism, Gnosticism, Animism, Mythology, Agnosticism, and Atheism (the belief in no god, also Monism).

- **Monotheism** – Belief in one God. Systems holding to monotheism are Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. These three major systems hold to a strict adherence to a single deity. They also hold that there are not demi-gods (lesser gods).
- **Polytheism** – (Pg. 396) This is simply the belief in many gods. Word is derived from the Greek “poly” (many), and “theos” (god). Polytheism does not hold to a particular doctrine of attributes, they may have major and minor gods, gods may be regional. Polytheism is most prominent in historical study when you look at Roman and Greek mythology. In modern terms, Hinduism is the largest modern polytheistic system, also Wicca and Shinto systems.
- **Pantheism** – (Pg. 387) From the Greek “pan” (all) and “theos” (god). Holds that god is everything and that everything is god. Major groups include Hindu, Buddhism (Zen), Christian Science, Scientology, and New Age religions.

Major problems with Pantheism:

- 1) The pantheistic concept of ultimate reality (that God is everything and that any individual existence is an illusion) is self-defeating
 - 2) The pantheist view of the physical universe is contrary to known science
 - 3) The pantheistic worldview does not adequately answer the problem of evil.
- **Panentheism** – (Handout) From the Greek “Pan” (all), “en” (in), “theos” (god). System holds that god is in everything and everything is in god. If you want to read up on Panentheism, the link to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry is provided...but in layman’s terms, you can use the popular reference from Star Wars. “The Force” is essentially Panentheism.
 - **Animism** – (Pg. 21) From the Latin “anima” (soul). Broad category of belief systems that worship natural or visible representations of deities. Idol worship, folk religion. (Deuteronomy 18:10)
 - *Idol Worship* – self explanatory. Engraved or created statues.
 - *Projections of Nature* – projected god or gods within plants, animals, or inanimate objects.
 - *Ancestral Worship* – worship of dead family members or forbearers.

- **Gnosticism** – (Pg. 233) From the Greek “gnosis” (knowledge). Systems holds not to a pursuit of general knowledge, but toward attainment of salvation through secret knowledge of ancient mysteries.
- **Mythology** – (Pg. 365) From the Latin “mythologia” (legendary lore). Belief systems that utilize a set of stories to explain history, culture, science, etc.

Anti-Theologies

- **Agnosticism** – (Pg. 17) From the Greek “a” (without) and “gnosis” (knowledge). More of a philosophical stance that views truth claims that deal with the metaphysical realm – such as theology and the existence of God – as unknown or unknowable.

*The fatal flaw in most forms of agnosticism is that agnostics do not accept judicial proof for the existence of God. **Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all used logic to come to the belief that there must be a God or gods.** Others have pondered the intricate detail of a leaf, or the vast complexity of the universe, and deduced that there must be an undersigned Designer. The leaf and the galaxies serve as evidence. – Ergun Caner (Pg. 18)*

- **Atheism** – (Pg. 82) From the Greek “a” (without) and “theos” (god). The literal belief of atheism is that there is no God or gods beyond or in the world.
- **Monism** – (Pg. 348) From the Greek “mono” (one). The belief that everything, all reality, is just one thing.
 - **Attributive Monism** – all the elements that make up reality are made from the same basic “stuff.”
 - **Materialism** a sub-set of Attributive Monism that holds that everything in reality is material, and that all spiritual entities (God, angels, human souls) do not exist.
 - **Idealism** holds that all of reality is primarily spiritual...that everything is the product of one or more minds.
 - **Neutral Monism** – reality is neither material nor mental, but is some type of other “unknown” substance.
 - **Substance Monism** – There is one and only one thing, everything either flows from the one or is part of the one.

Syncretism – the amalgamation of one or more belief systems.