

THE CHRISTIAN
UNDERSTANDING
OF GOD

THEO 331 – week 1

DEFINING OUR TERMS

- HOW DO WE DEFINE THE TERM “CHRISTIAN”? WHY LABEL A PERSON A CHRISTIAN?
 - Sometimes the label is applied for THEOLOGICAL reasons, based on a **set of beliefs**
 - Sometimes the label is applied for SOCIOLOGICAL reasons, based on **belonging to a community**

SUBDIVISIONS OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

WESTERN CHRISTIANITY		EASTERN CHRISTIANITY		
REFORMATION		(ROMAN) CATHOLIC		ORTHODOX
PROTESTANT	ANGLICAN	LATINS	EASTERN CATHOLICS (MULTIPLE GROUPS)	ASSYRIAN
				ORIENTAL
				EASTERN

DEFINING OUR TERMS

- HOW DO WE SAY WHAT UNDERSTANDING IS AUTHENTICALLY “CHRISTIAN” ? WHO DECIDES?
 - Each Christian community has its own set of traditional beliefs
 - Some Christian communities have established forms of authoritative theological leadership

EXAMPLE OF A CREED

- I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
- I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
- I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

--The Apostles Creed

FORMS OF UNDERSTANDING

- TO “UNDERSTAND GOD” CAN MEAN TO UNDERSTAND HIS ESSENCE...
- IT CAN MEAN TO UNDERSTAND HIS ACTIONS OUTSIDE OF HIMSELF...
- OR IT CAN MEAN TO UNDERSTAND OUR RESPONSE TO GOD

THEOLOGICAL “ISMS”

- ATHEISM, OR NON-THEISM
 - THE BELIEF THAT THERE IS NO GOD
- AGNOSTICISM, OR “WEAK” ATHEISM
 - THE BELIEF THAT GOD CANNOT BE KNOWN
- DEISM
 - THE BELIEF THAT THERE IS A GOD, BUT THAT HE IS KNOWN ENTIRELY THROUGH REASON AND THE NATURAL REALM

THEOLOGICAL “ISMS”

- THEISM
 - THE BELIEF THAT THERE IS A GOD AND THAT THE EVIDENCE FOR HIM INCLUDES THE SUPERNATURAL
- PANDEISM
 - THE BELIEF THAT THE NATURAL UNIVERSE IS GOD
- PANTHEISM
 - AS PANDEISM, ONLY INCLUDING THE SUPERNATURAL

THEOLOGICAL “ISMS”

- PANENTHEISM (strong form)
 - THE BELIEF THAT THE UNIVERSE IS GOD, BUT THAT GOD IS BIGGER THAN THE UNIVERSE
- PANENTHEISM (weak form)
 - THE BELIEF THAT GOD IS ENTIRELY PRESENT TO THE UNIVERSE, WHICH DEPENDS ON HIM, BUT HE REMAINS DISTINCT FROM IT

THEOLOGICAL “ISMS”

- POLYTHEISM
 - THE BELIEF IN MULTIPLE GODS
- DITHEISM
 - THE BELIEF IN TWO GODS, USUALLY AS OPPOSED FORCES OF GOOD AND EVIL
- MONOTHEISM
 - THE BELIEF THAT THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD

THEOLOGICAL “ISMS”

- HENOTHEISM
 - THE BELIEF THAT, WHILE THERE MAY BE OTHER GODS, THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD “FOR US”
- UNIVERSALISM
 - THE BELIEF THAT ALL RELIGIONS ARE EQUALLY TRUE PATHS TO GOD
- OMNITHEISM, OR OMNISM
 - THE BELIEF THAT ALL RELIGIONS CONTAIN THE SAME CORE OF TRUTH