

Theology Proper**H. Graham Wilson, Jr.**

Theology Proper is a scientific investigation of things that may be known of the existence, Persons, and characteristics of the Trinity----but apart from their works. Man's source of knowledge may come from intuition, tradition, reason, and revelation. There are two grand divisions in Theology Proper: 1) Theism and 2) Trinitarianism. The former concerns the existence and character of God as an extramundane Being, the Creator, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. The latter is recognition of the three Persons who comprise the Godhead.

Theism means a belief in God and it has two subdivisions. The Naturalistic form of Theism is a rational philosophy regarding God as being restricted to one Divine Essence, monotheism. One Godhead, three persons---Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity.

Naturalistic Theism argues that the book of nature is as much God's book as is the Book of Revelation. The universe is His work and therefore must attest to His Being. Naturalistic Theistic arguments are based on reason. The existence, personality, wisdom, and power of God are viewed in these arguments. There is no proof from nature or reason of the love of God or His saving Grace. All of redemption is found in written revelation.

The major arguments of Naturalistic Theism are: *argumentum a posteriori* and *argumentum a priori*. The former is inductive and the latter is deductive. *Argumentum a posteriori* conforms to the process of human reason. It moves from particulars to principle, from effect to cause. There are three arguments offered as *a posteriori* arguments in Naturalistic Theism.

First is the Cosmological argument. This argument depends on the assumption that every effect must have a cause. God exists and is the First Cause of all things. The effect is dependent upon its

cause for its existence and that nature cannot produce itself. The universe is both designed and created by God. The argument stresses various qualities of God. God is self-existent, eternal, all-wise, powerful, unlimited, self-active and the vital source of life.

The second argument is the Teleological argument. This recognizes the rational ends in creation. Order and useful arrangement in a system imply intelligence and purpose in the organizing cause. The fact of design exposes the rational purposes of the Creator. The human organism denotes both existence and rational purpose of the Designer.

The third argument is the Anthropological argument. This traces from the mind and spirit of man back to the Creator. The moral argument is that man has an awareness of right and wrong, a sense of morality. This leads to the existence of a personal intelligent First Cause and adds attributes of God which may be observed in the constitution of man. It suggests the elements of the First Cause of intellect, sensibility, and will; and the moral feature of conscience in man. These declare his Creator to be actuated by holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

The *argumentum a priori* is the Ontological argument. This is the philosophical theory of reality. It is the science or systematic discussion of real being. This is the doctrine of the categories or universal necessities characterized by all existence. There is a reality of substance where the mind recognizes it to exist. The argument rests on the fact that all men have an awareness of God. *Ontos* (*eimi*) means “being” or “existence”.

There are Antitheistic theories under Theology Proper, contained in Naturalistic Theism. A few will be mentioned with short definitions. These views reflect the blindness of the human thought when there is no divine revelation.

Atheism (no God) is a theory that openly and positively denies the existence of God. It is an anti-supernatural approach to life and its origin. The etymology signifies a denial of the being of God.

Agnosticism is the idea that no one can know that God exists. It is a subjective view of “I will not

believe”. **Evolution** is an anti-supernatural approach to life and its origin. Here it is thought that the

Cosmos has been developed from crude, homogeneous substances and has evolved to its present

heterogeneous advanced state by means of resident forces and natural selection.

Evolution is stated in two forms, Theistic and Atheistic. Theistic evolution recognizes God as the Creator of the original materials, but contends that evolution is the method by which all development

from the supposed primitive state to present has been achieved. Atheistic evolution rejects the

Person of God, His creation work, and contends matter is self-developing.

In the field of biology the statement is “Phylogeny recapitulates ontogeny.” The origin of the

species is seen in the embryological developmental stages of organ systems and identifies the

primitive evolving to the complex. Evolution really does not concern the origin of anything, rather it

has to do with explaining the unfolding of things from an assumed birth. **Materialism** is the doctrine

that claims the facts of experience are explained by referring to the reality, activities and laws of

physical and material substances. A scientist should be about explaining his observation by the

physical causes and never interject the supernatural. The origin of matter is not explainable in this

system.

Polytheism is a belief in more than one God. **Pantheism** states that God is everything and

everything is God. **Panentheism** teaches God is in the world the way a soul or mind is in a body.

Deism holds that God created the world but denies His supernatural intervention. He abandoned His

creation once completed and it is self-sustaining. **Positivism** assumes man's knowledge is restricted to phenomena, and of these man can only know in part. **Monism** is a belief that reality is ultimately unified. A philosophical position that appeals to a single unifying principle to explain all the diversity of observed experience. **Dualism** as a theory of interpretation which explains a given situation or domain in terms of two opposing factors or principles. **Pluralism** is a philosophical meaning in which the essential unity of the world is denied. All these topics or more or less native to the unregenerate mind.

Next under Theology Proper is **Biblical Theism**, the personality of God. Biblical Theism is the revealing of information of the wonderful truths about God in succinct terms delivered by divine inspiration and forever preserved. The revealed truth of God is classified as abstract, that which concerns His Person, His attributes, His decrees and His names. Unity or essence is stressed.

The second designation of revealed truth of God is labeled **concrete**. This concerns His manifestation of Himself in three Persons. The stress is that God subsists in a trinity of Persons, termed **Trinitarianism**. Three Persons each having divine nature. There is but one God (Deut. 6:4). The doctrine teaches the oneness or onliness of God, that there are three eternal distinctions and each is deity. The Father generates the Son, the Son is begotten of the Father, the Spirit proceedeth from the Father and the Son. The Son is identified as God (Matt. 1:23; Lk. 1:29; John 1:1; I John 5:20; Rom. 9:5; Col. 1:15). The Holy Spirit is also identified as God (Acts 5:3-9; II Cor. 3:17). The Father is God as clearly stated in numerous passages (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1; Matt. 27:46; John 20:17; Rev. 1:1).

For Christians there is “one Lord,” Jesus Christ (I Cor. 8:6), and if God is to be Lord, and Jesus is the “one Lord,” then Christ must be affirmed to be God. He is the God-man, incarnated God. The first article of the Nicene Creed states that firm belief in monotheism and the Person of the Father: “I believe in one God The Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.”

One of the Arian arguments against the doctrine of the Trinity was that it led inevitably to tritheism. The Nicene Fathers and their followers at Constantinople answered this in their credal statement. Significantly the Father (God) is described as “maker of heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1) and of all things visible and invisible.” The same is attributed to the Son (God), “by Whom all things were made” (Col. 1:16).

The third article of the Nicene Creed states: “And I believe in the Holy Ghost (Spirit), the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified. The Holy Spirit is also the “Giver of life” as seen in NT passages (Jn. 3:5; Rom. 8:10). This is part of redemption, life eternal is the offer and only God can offer this. He (the Holy Spirit) was active in creation (Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4). Further it is only God who is to be worshipped by the Christian (Lk. 4:8), and He will not share his Glory with another (Isa. 48:11-13). The Nicene Creed, with centuries of theological discussion and controversy behind it, still to this day teaches the Trinity as seen in the NT: that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, while distinct from each other Personally, are the same God. The Bible teaches there is one God and that this God is three distinct Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and that these Persons are co-equal and co-eternal.

The doctrine of the Trinity as taught in the Nicene Creed is an accurate representation of the Biblical teaching of what is theologically called the doctrine of the Trinity. The question is “do you believe?” The confession is, “I believe in One God the Father...and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the...Son...and in the Holy Ghost (Spirit).” All other material is explanation of what I (we) believe about these Persons of the Godhead. “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost...”