**Theology #3**

Everyone's a theologian!!!

Anyone who has thought about God is a theologian.

If you’ve ever wondered why there is suffering.

What is the meaning of life?

How did everything get here?

Why is there something rather than nothing?

What is the ‘truly’ good life?

Is there life after death?

If you’ve ever tried to figure out life’s ultimate questions, you’re doing theology.

Theology – God reasoning / reasoning about God.

Greek words: *Theos –* God

*Logos –* reason/wisdom/thought

Christian Theology – “faith seeking understanding”

*Christian* theology does not understand and then believe, it seeks to understand,

clarify, and reexamine what it already believes and is committed to.

It understands scripture *from within* the believing community (church).

-One begins in faith which is *ultimately a mysterious gift of grace* that has been

grasped.

-One begins as a new child adopted into a new family.

-Now, like a child, they are raised and taught the beliefs of the family.

-As we mature we realize how much larger our family/heritage is.

-A Christian theologian is one who seeks to understand their faith by studying the

God who took the initiative in disclosing himself (*revelation*).

-All Christians are theologians, but not all theologies are equal.

**Folk Theology** - Unreflective belief based on blind faith in a tradition of some kind.

* Rejects critical reflection/thinking.
* Enthusiastically embraces simplistic acceptance of beliefs and practices composed mainly of clichés, bumper stickers, church signs, and legends (i.e. hitchhiking angels, near death experiences, astronomers discovering Joshua’s missing day, crying Mary statues, faith healing TV evangelists, Bible as self-help for my family, business, finances, etc).
* Often anti-theology (not realizing that even this is a theology)
* Intensely experiential and pragmatic (if it grows it must be from God).
* Highly uninformed, unsubstantiated, testimonial, oral traditions.
* Encourages gullibility and simplistic answers
* Believes because it sounds spiritual, is led by people who are perceived to be spiritual, and/or conveys a spiritual feeling. (Examining them is often seen as unspiritual or critical).
* Most books in Christian book stores are filled with folk theology.

(Romantic fiction, End Times comic books, Encounters with angels, Church growth, Self-help, Bible codes, near-death experiences).

-The millions of stories and antidotes that circulate around on the internet.

(i.e. The science teacher who dropped the glass vase that did not

break).

-It stunts growth and blunts the Christian influence in the world.

-The poor and vulnerable are often exploited.

-It is the very thing that much of the pre-Reformation church was a fault for (relics, pilgrimages, buildings, superstitions, visions, money)

Tetzel (When a coin in the coffer rings a soul from purgatory springs) vs Luther (95 thesis).

**Lay Theology** - Arises when Christians dig deeply into the resources of their faith and

put their mind and heart together in a serious attempt to examine and understand that faith.

-Appears when ordinary Christians begin to question folk theology with its

childish, simplistic clichés and legends.

-Is a more examined and reasonable faith.

-It begins to understand Biblical terms and reads with more awareness.

*-Reflective* Christianity – formalized thinking.

-Uses our minds to organize our thoughts and beliefs.

-Attempts to expunge blatant contradictions.

-Critical thinking. (Questions the ways and the whys of what we believe).

-Involves logic.

-It becomes historically conscious and develops an awareness of historical

sources and the development of ideas – (i.e. will use a theological dictionaries for biblical terms).

-Develops some objectivity towards one’s assumed beliefs and practices

(recognizes personal bias).

-Realizes that reflection is a part of a maturing thought process.

-Socrates – “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

-We could say “the unexamined” (unreflective) faith is not worth believing.

\*Warning: When one begins to move from a folk theology to a lay theology it can create a lot of angst (this happens to many people when they go to Bible

School or to other post-secondary schools). Many become afraid and defensive about lifelong held convictions and either retreat back into a blind faith or give up on their faith.

**Ministerial Theology –** A reflective faith practiced by trained ministers and teachers

(both professional and lay) in Christian churches.

-In addition to many of the attributes of lay theologians, ministerial theologians:

-Know how to use biblical tools (concordances, commentaries).

-Have a good historical perspective on the development of

theology throughout the ages.

-Exhibits keen systematic thinking that involves recognizing

inconsistencies among beliefs and brings them into

coherence with each other (systematic theology).

-Have the ability to teach the church.

**Professional Theology –** A vocation that involves studying the tools (and/or writing the

tools) mentioned in the ministerial theology and instructing lay people and pastors in how to use them.

-Often appear skeptical and hostile to simplistic piety and devotion.

-Main job is to help lay theologians and ministers.

**Academic Theology –** Highly speculative, virtually philosophical.

-Often disconnected from the church and often has little to do with

concrete Christian living.

-Many are not even Christian

-Usually detrimental to the church.

\*Warning: Be careful that you don’t too quickly think something is Academic theology because *you* don’t understand it. (i.e. Olson’s book would fall in the category of Ministerial Theology written to Lay Theologians).

-Folk and Academic theology are of little value and are often dangerous to the task of examining the Christian faith.

-Much negative thinking about theology develops because of the extremes of

either folk or Academic theology.

-However, the lay, ministerial, and professional theologians all need each other.

-The laity needs their pastors to pull them away from folk theology.

-Pastors need professionals to keep them sharp and growing.

-Professionals need the laity and the pastors to keep them dealing with real life questions and not losing touch by becoming merely academic.

-Pastors need the laity to help them stay pastoral.

Folk (Lay —-- Ministerial —-- Professional) Academic

Unhealthy Healthy Unhealthy

*Conclusion*

-So, everyone's a theologian.

-The real question is, “What kind of theologian are you?”

-Theology is simply the attempt to reach below the surface of life and gain a deeper understanding of God.

-Christian theology is reflecting on and articulating the beliefs about God and the world that Christians share as followers of Jesus Christ. (*Who Needs…*38).

-Good theology enables a Christian to be rooted (discernment) and to avoid being swept along by the ever-changing currents (fads) that blow across the landscape (this will also save you a lot of money on books, pins, conferences, mugs, and other paraphernalia).

-Bad theology hurts people.

(i.e. such things as indulgences, church abuse, manipulation, money, physical health,

stupid debates and arguments - 1 & 2 Timothy - , arrogance).

**A word about arrogance/pride:**

-Theology is not about amassing knowledge, but about gaining wisdom.

-“Good theology moves beyond stating truths; it explores the significance of our beliefs or faith assertions for all of life.” (45).

-Theology has a healthy critical nature (it reacts against easy believing/naivety/superstition).

-At first some find this threatening as they may discover that certain things they have assumed to be true do not square with sound teaching.

-And true theological integrity should cause us to reject those beliefs.

-Some beliefs we will find ourselves become a bit more agnostic on (or a least less dogmatic on). - i.e. End Times views.

-Other beliefs we will find ourselves gaining even stronger convictions on.

- i.e. Trinitarian views.

-We learn the importance of what is important - i.e. Trinitarian views are more important than End Times views – unfortunately that is often not the case with many *folk* theologians.

-Theology assists *us* in being Christ’s disciples.

-Good theology ends up being lived out (Rom. 12:2).

-Paul letters continually move from theology to ethics.

-Good theology is about the head, heart, and hands.

-Discipleship involves our wills, emotions, intuitions, attitudes, actions, *and our mind*.

-Good theology leads to living, loving, and worshiping God with our whole being.

-Good theology assists Christians in having lives grounded with a biblically informed Christian worldview.

Doctrine is not an affair of the tongue, but of life;

it is not apprehended by the intellect and memory merely, like other branches of learning; but it is received only when it possesses a person’s whole being.

(John Calvin)

Discussion Questions:

1. What in today’s lecture did you find enlightening? (why)?

2. Was there anything in today’s lecture that made you uncomfortable? (why)?

3. Has your upbringing encouraged you to question, or to not question, your beliefs?

(explain).

4. What elements of folk theology do you realize are true about you?

5. What are some things that you would like to do to change that to become more of a

lay theologian?

6. How are you going to go about making sure this happens?