

Issues in Thinking about God

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Slides are available at:

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Week 1

Thinking about God in a pluralistic world. The challenge of modern theology

- J. Macquarrie, *In Search of Deity. An essay in dialectical theism*, NY 1987
- V. Brummer, *Speaking of a Personal God*, Cambridge 1992
- J.-L. Marion, *God Without Being*, Chicago/London 1991
- K. Barth, 'The Word of God and the Task of the Ministry' in: Id., *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, pp. 183ff.

Introduction

- Thinking about religion and about God no longer an exercise for theologians only
- It takes place within an increasingly pluralistic environment.
- Over the past 200 years the way religion in W Europe is understood and practised has changed radically
- Notable is the rise of atheism

Introduction II

- Atheism is a product of the Christian world in Western Europe.
- It is part of a wider phenomenon: pluralisation and individualisation of religious options.
- Two main theological responses:
- A) Preservation of theology's universal claim at the price of giving up on specific characteristics

Introduction III

- B) Maintaining the specific character of theology by giving up on its claim to universal validity.

Traditional Themes I: Transcendence/Immanence

- Critique of anthropomorphism in traditional religion:
- Xenophanes (6th/5th c. BC):
 - The Ethiops say that their gods are flat-nosed and black,
While the Thracians say that theirs have blue eyes and red hair.
Yet if cattle or horses or lions had hands and could draw,
And could sculpture like men, then the horses would draw
their gods
Like horses, and cattle like cattle; and each they would
shape
Bodies of gods in the likeness, each kind, of their own.
- Diels/Kranz, fr. B 16, 15)

Traditional Themes II

- Christian tradition: three ways (*via eminentiae, analogiae, negativa*)
- Principle of analogy in Aquinas (STh, Part Ia, q. 13, art. 5)
- Negative theology in Ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite (*The Mystical Theology*)

Traditional Themes III

- Focus on Incarnation mitigates the emphasis on transcendence (influence on doctrine of God through Trinity)
- Yet the focus on Christ opens up the tension between knowledge of God through nature or through grace.
- This became an issue in the controversy over natural theology (e.g. Barth/Brunner)