
A Brief Introduction to Christian Doctrine

Trinity College Bristol

What is theology?

Etymology...

Theos → *God*

Logos → *Word or reason*

Talk or reasoning about God.

What is theology?

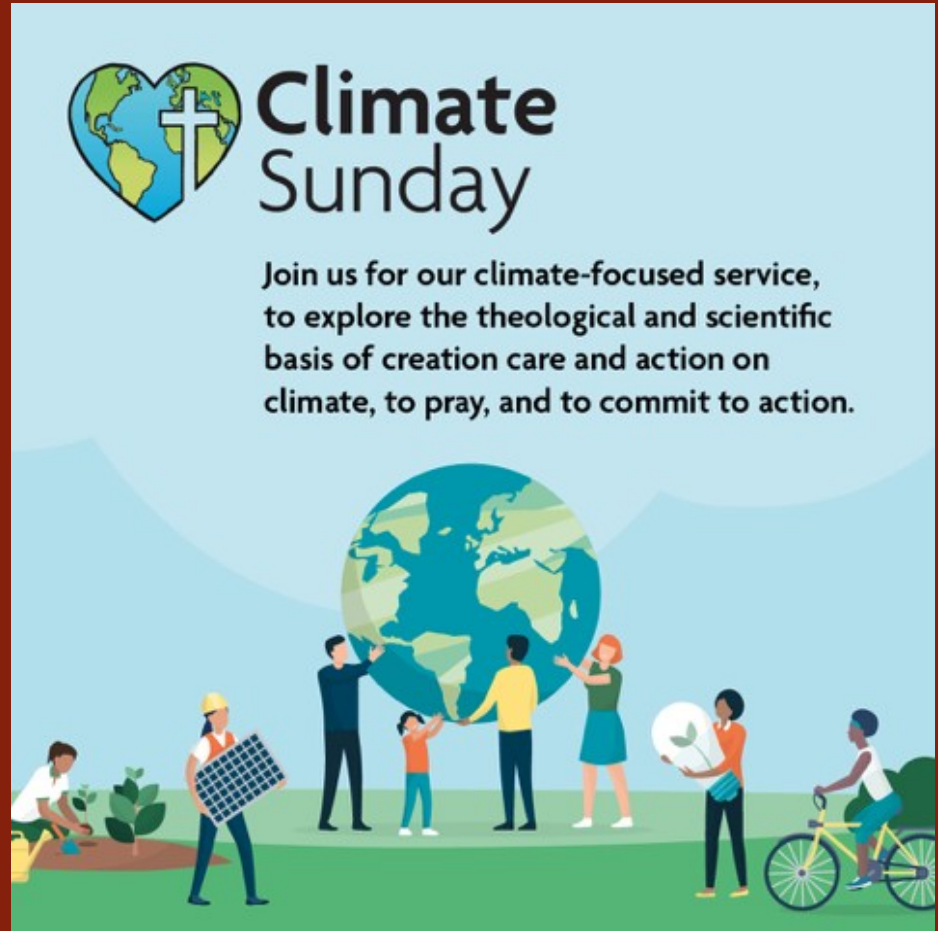
A possible definition from Thomas Aquinas...

Theology concerns itself with God and all things in relation to God.

To discuss...

Where would you begin?

What theological questions will you need to discuss to plan such a service?



Why theology?

Ideas about God matter, because everything comes from God, derives meaning in God, and is ultimately for God.

Truthful ideas about God speak truly about the shape of reality.

Distorted ideas about God distort the shape of reality.

The Problem of Prolegoma

‘We can say “man” in the loudest tones...But this does not mean that we say “God.”’

Karl Barth (CD II/1, p.269)

Theology starts with confession

‘Faith seeking understanding’

‘For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand.’

Anselm of Canterbury (11th century)

Also, Augustine in North Africa:

‘Understanding is the reward of faith.’

Where to begin?

With a recognition...

‘We ought to speak of God. But we are humans and as such cannot speak of God. We ought to do both, to know both the obligation and inability and precisely in this way give God the glory.’

Karl Barth, ‘The Task of Theology’

Where to begin?

God has **REVEALED** God's self...

But where?

And how?

Possible responses...

The Bible?

Human experience?

Jesus Christ!

A Brief Introduction to Christian Doctrine

Trinity College Bristol

Theology as an academic discipline

- Biblical studies
- Church history
- Historical theology
- Systematic theology
- Ethics
- Practical theology
- Comparative theology

My own approach...

Theology is rational reflection on the person, nature, and works of God which is guided by the witness of scripture, informed by tradition, and in conversation with culture.

Primarily systematic

Whose theology?

Christianity is a *diverse* religious expression...
over time...
and over place.

Whose theology?

Christianity is a *diverse* religious expression...
over time
and over place.

Which should foster...

humility