

The great theologians

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Theology (Greek theologia, from theos – God and logos – word study) is a set of religious doctrines about nature and actions of God that are built in the form of idealistic speculations. These speculations are based on texts that are treated as the divine revelation. The doctrine of religious dogma and philosophical thinking that the framework of these speculations contained was designed to protect these dogmas and justified them (Highfield, 52). There are many well-known theologians who are actively engaged into the science of theology. Athanasius of Alexandria is one of them.

St. Athanasius was born in Alexandria. His mother followed the example of Anna who brought his son Samuel to the temple of the Lord. Athanasius' mother led him to St. Alexander, Patriarch of Alexandria, and left him in the church to serve God.

He started his life at the temple feverously fulfilling all commandments of God. In 319, the Patriarch ordained him to a deacon of the Church of Alexandria. Future prelate considered that some people did not have enough faith, no true piety, and sought only glory for themselves. At that time Arius gained priesthood having entered the Church. He blasphemed Christ, despised Mother of God, and disturbed people by urging them to seek honor and glory.

A lot of people listened to him and followed this heresy. They were called the Arians. This heresy was so widely-spread that it almost engulfed the entire Church. St. Athanasius was the participant of the First Council of Nicaea.

At that time, he spoke up against Arius. “ Three years later Athanasius was made – against his wishes – the bishop of Alexandria, one of the greatest

cities of the empire” (McDermott, 31). Bishop Athanasius attended churches, made many public appearances, and fought against the Arians. He wrote about them and denounced them. All untrue Christians rose up against him and began to slander him. At that time, Constantine the Great reigned.

He was the patron of the Christian Church. He was knowledgeable about the issues of military strategy, diplomacy and public affairs. However, he was not highly aware of the affairs of church. Therefore, he wavered between the Arianism and the Orthodoxy. The heretics took advantage of the kindness and simplicity of the emperor and surrounded his entire court penetrating into all positions and spreading heresy.

They accused Archbishop Athanasius in that he did not listen to the emperor and imposed taxes separately from the royal treasury. The Emperor was aware of the strife and enmity, and attempted to make peace. He offered St. Athanasius to leave the country for some time. The Saint spent the major part of the emperor’s long reign in exile.

When Constantine the Great died, his second son Constantius inherited the throne. The entire imperial court joined the Arians side. They began casting out the Christians. Bishops were exiled while ungodly men, treacherous adulterers, and heretics were assigned to prominent posts in the society. St. Athanasius had to flee to Rome where he spent three years.

Some time later, Arianism and heretics were punished, and the wicked king was killed. St. Athanasius was allowed to return to Alexandria. The rest of his life was spent in peace. Augustine of Hippo is another outstanding theologian

whose influence on the destiny and dogmatic side of the Christian teachings was almost unprecedented.

He is one of the Fathers of the Church and the founder of Augustinianism. Augustine of Hippo is the founder of the history of the Christian philosophy. Augustine's Christian Platonism prevailed in Western philosophy and Catholic theology until the 13th century. He is considered to be "the most influential theologian ever" (McDermott, 48). His famous theological and philosophical work is "The City of God".

He came to Christianity after Manichaeism, Skepticism and Neo-Platonism. In particular, he supported the doctrine of predestination, i. e. God predetermines whether a person is to be blessed or cursed. Human history described in the Augustine's book "The City of God" is viewed as a struggle between two hostile kingdoms – the kingdom of the God's enemies resigning in the secular world and the kingdom of God. He identified the kingdom of God with the Roman Church.

Augustine was the preacher who popularized trustworthiness of human consciousness and enormous power of love. He set the route for the spiritual development both of the African and the whole Western Church for several centuries. His polemics against Priscillian, the Arians, the Donatists and other heretical sects were the best indicators of his enormous merit. Perspicacity, keen intelligence, unbreakable faith and creative talent are reflected in his numerous writings that had enormous influence on the anthropological Protestant doctrine. He believed that the essence of the Christian teaching concerned the person's ability to perceive the grace of God.

Augustine believed that God created matter and incorporated it into various forms, properties and destinations, thereby creating everything in the world. Evil is not a substance-matter, but rather the product of its damage, defect and oblivion. God is the source of life, pure form, the greatest beauty and the source of wealth. The world exists due to the continuous process of creation manifested by God who constantly regenerates everything that is mortal. Augustine justified inequality that exists in the society.

He argued that inequality was an integral part of social life. Therefore, it was meaningless to strive for equality in terms of wealth as inequality was an ever-existing phenomenon of the secular life. However, all people were considered to be equal in their relation to God. Moreover, Augustine encouraged people to live peacefully. John of Damascus is a well-known poet and theologian. He was born in Damascus in a rich and noble Christian family.

He got excellent education and gained vast knowledge about the world. At that time, the iconoclastic heresy supported by Emperor Leo III the Isaurian emerged in Byzantium and was rapidly spreading all over the empire. In an attempt to protect the Orthodox veneration of icons, John wrote three treatises named “ Apologetic Treatises against those Decrying the Holy Images”. They infuriated the emperor. However, the author could not be imprisoned or executed as he was not the Byzantine. Therefore, the emperor exploited the slandering methods.

He ordered to compose a fraud letter on behalf of John that contained the Damascus Minister’s offer to help the emperor to conquer the Syrian capital.

Leo the Isaurian sent this letter and its hypocritical smarmy answer to the caliph. The caliph immediately ordered to deprive John of the post, to cut off his right hand and to hang it in the town square. However, John's severed arm was returned to him on the same evening. He started to pray and asked the Holy Mother of God to heal him.

When he was falling asleep, he saw the icon of Holy Mother and heard her voice telling him that he had been healed. When he woke up, he saw that his hand was unharmed. Having learnt about the miracle, the caliph asked for his forgiveness and wanted to assign him to the former post, but John refused. He gave up his wealth and went on a journey to Jerusalem with his step brother Cosme. In Jerusalem, he became an ordinary novice in a monastery. He wrote the fundamental paper " Source of knowledge" that consists of three parts.

The first part " Dialectic" outlines philosophical ideas of Aristotle. The second part " Book of heresy" identifies and analyzes teachings that are contrary to the Christian ones. The third part " Exact Exposition Orthodox faith" systematizes the Orthodox doctrine. This work presents readers with a systematic description of the author's ideas concerning God, creation of the world and human being, and determines its place in this and other worlds. Damascus used in his work mainly such method as compilation (in accordance with its motto " I do not like anything of my own") based on Aristotelian logic.

From this point of view, the theology of Damascus lacked originality, even by the medieval standards. However, he did what had to be done: by removing

contradicting dogmas from the church, he turned the Orthodox doctrine into a more or less coherent system. This work influenced greatly future generations of not only Orthodox, but Catholic theologians as well, for instance it had a huge impact on Thomas Aquinas. The Damascus' work still remains the main source of the grounding ideas of the Christian faith for the Orthodox Church. Anselm of Canterbury was born in 1033 in Italy.

He was a monk at first, and then he became the abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Le Bec. Since 1093, he was the Archbishop of Canterbury. Anselm is the most prominent representative of the early scholasticism. He is the author of the treatises " Monologue", " The addition to the arguments", " Dialogue on Grammar", and" Why God is a man". Anselm was often called " the second Augustine" because of his reputation of a thinker.

The main problem of the Christian philosophy concerning the relationship between faith and mind was determined by Anselm in the Augustine's manner. He praised faith at the expense of mind. He thought that faith was a prerequisite of knowledge. Therefore, he thought not in order to believe, but rather believed in order to understand. Anselm formulated four proofs of the God's existence.

Three of these proofs concerned the creation idea. His evidence is based on two assumptions: (1) all creatures are different in their extent of perfection, and (2) things endowed with perfection in varying degrees possess relative perfection that is essentially different from the perfection of the highest degree. For example, every item is good. We desire things because they are

good. However, things are not equally good, and none of them is utterly perfect.

The good itself is a primary Being that transcends everything, and this Being is called God. Anselm's ontological proof is an attempt to demonstrate that the concept of being lies, in fact, in the notion of " God". The idea of God can be expressed by the formula: " something that is impossible to conceive completely". Everyone, even a madman who denies the God's existence, understands the meaning of this expression. Therefore, it is within the grasp of his understanding.

This formula exists as a way of understanding, so it is real. This evidence suggests that a person is able to come into contact with the First Being, and that such contact can occur in mind. Some of the later thinkers (Bonaventure, Descartes, Hegel) shared these Anselm's ideas, while others (Thomas Aquinas, Kant) denied them. Thomas Aquinas is an outstanding theologian and philosopher of the Middle Ages. He was born in a wealthy Italian family not far from the town of Aquino in the kingdom of Naples. He was brought up in the monastery of Monte Cassino because his parents wanted him to become the abbot of that monastery.

" He was destined for a career in the church" (Healy, 1). Despite the demands of his family, Thomas did not want to stay there. In 1244, he joined a completely different order – the Dominican one. Having completed his studies in the University of Naples, he entered the University of Paris where he met his future teacher – Albert the Great. Thomas spent four years with Albert in the University of Cologne.

In some years, his period of wandering started, which fully corresponded to the well-established tradition of the Dominican Order. He attended the largest universities in Rome, Bologna and Naples. He spent about ten years in the papal court in Rome. There he completed his work “ Summa contra Gentiles”. The revival of the Latin Averroism prompted the Pope to send Thomas to the University of Paris.

Insignificance and vanity of all earthy things including his work were revealed to Aquinas right before his death. He was awarded post mortem with the title of the “ Angelic Doctor”. In 1323, he was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church according to the decision of the papal curia His main monumental works “ Summa contra Gentiles” and “ Summa Theologica”, i. e. about three thousand articles, summed up the theologically-rationalistic searches of scholasticism for the development of faith in the form of common sense. Thomas Aquinas stated that his task was to order the set in unity and not just the contemplation of unity detached from all multiplicity.

He sought to prove the existence of God from the existence of things. This way of thinking is different from the abstract speculations of the early scholastics (Anselm of Canterbury) that were focused mainly on Plato, Neo-Platonism and Augustine. The peculiarity of the Thomas’ theology is that he was able to synthesize seemingly incompatible styles: ideas of Aristotle and Plato, with the ideas of the Christianity grounding everything with the help of rational thought. Unlike his predecessors, Aquinas possessed full knowledge of the Aristotle’s works. Prior to the era of Aquinas, people’s ideas about Aristotle were blackened with the Neo-Platonist accretions.

Aquinas followed the genuine Aristotle and treated Platonism with antipathy. Aquinas managed to convince the church that the system of Aristotle should be chosen as the basis of the Christian philosophy, and that both the Muslims and the Christians misinterpreted Aristotle. Thomas Aquinas is the first scholastic teacher of the church. In 1879, he was recognized as an official Catholic religious philosopher who associated Christian faith with the philosophy of Aristotle (as opposed to another “ Father of the Church” – St. Augustine whose work was based on the idealistic views of Plato). Martin Luther is the leader of Reformation in Germany and the founder of the German Protestantism.

He translated the Bible into German establishing norms of the German language. Martin Luther made 95 theses against indulgences in the period of rising social movements that criticized the Catholic Church. These abstracts contained basic provisions of the new religious doctrine that rejected basic tenets and the whole system of the Catholic Church. Rejecting the Catholic dogma that the church and the clergy were essential intermediaries between a man and God, Luther declared the faith of the Christian to be the only way of salvation that is granted to him/her directly by God. Afterwards, the ascetic monk, who knew the Bible thoroughly, began distributing his leaflets all over Germany. There was also the first printed short translation of the Old Testament from Latin into German.

Luther rebelled against local priests and against the Pope himself who was considered the God’s representative on earth. Martin Luther argued that the earthy life and the whole secular order that provided a person with the opportunity to gain faith occupied an important place in the Christian

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religion. He rejected the authority of the papal decrees and epistles (Holy Tradition) and demanded the restoration of the authority of Scripture. Luther rejected the claims of the clergy for a dominant position in the society. Luther limited the role of the clergy to instructing the Christians in terms of humility and awareness of the man's total dependence on the grace of God concerning the salvation of the soul.

The idea of independence of the secular state from the Catholic Church proclaimed by Luther was of great historical importance. In 1520, he declared in the appeal "To the Christian Nobility of the German nation" that the struggle with the papal dominance was an issue concerning the entire German nation. On December 20, 1521, Professor of Theology in the University of Wittenberg, Martin Luther committed sacrilege at the entrance city gate. He set a fire and threw a papal bull into it. He was sentenced to excommunication for this deed. This way, Martin Luther became a representative of the new direction of the Christian religion – the Reformation, and then of the Lutheran movement, Protestantism and Evangelicalism.

John Calvin is a French theologian, one of the leaders of the Reformation and the founder of Calvinism. Calvin's main work is "Institutes of the Christian Religion". He studied in Paris where he studied the works of Martin Luther. In 1533, Calvin settled in northern Switzerland. He taught theology and became a prolific writer. He wrote the preface of the French translation of the Bible.

Nearly at the same time, the first edition of his major work "The establishment of the Christian Religion" was published. It was a systematic

study of the Protestant faith. Calvin started a vigorous Protestant propaganda in Geneva. He proposed to introduce harsh rules concerning church discipline and morals of the citizens. However, his ideas were not approved by the City Council.

In 1538, he was exiled from the city. Meanwhile, Calvin's ideas won the sympathy of the citizens. They asked for the return of their spiritual teacher. In September 1541, Calvin returned to Geneva. Calvin lived in the city till death and founded a new direction in Protestantism called Calvinism. Like Luther, Calvin rejected the hierarchical construction of the church and its subordination to the Pope.

The task of the Church was religious education for all citizens, especially children. In order to accomplish this task, Calvin carried out a number of reforms aimed at promoting the "secular asceticism". Lush Catholic cults were abolished. Entertainment, dancing, bright clothing and loud laughter were prohibited. Calvin was convinced that God had absolute freedom that was above human justice, and therefore, no one could judge the God's decisions.

Jacob Arminius is a theologian who formulated a theological system that balanced Calvinism and created a new direction in the evangelical Protestantism. Germanzoon Jacob "who would later follow academic custom and latinize his name to Arminius" (Stanglin & McCall 3) was born about 1560 in a small town in Holland. He had difficult childhood and adolescence. He studied in several Dutch universities, and then he entered the Geneva Theodore Beza Academy and the University of Basel. In 1587, Arminius was

recalled to his homeland where he passed the exam and was ordained to the pastor in Amsterdam.

In 1589, he disagreed with Dirk Koorhertom who criticized the thesis of the Calvinism concerning the unconditional selection of people who deserved salvation. However, Jacob found out that the arguments of the opponent were convincing. Indeed, people depended on the divine grace from the soteriological perspective. The possibility of salvation did not make a positive outcome inevitable because God did not force people to accept his grace. Jacob concludes that the God-given free will should exercise the ability to choose between good and sinful actions, and that human beings should answer to God for the consequences of their choice. He avoided to declare his views openly due to the fear of retribution for the revision of the key provisions of the Calvinist providential ideas.

Jacob wrote about the selectivity of God in appointing people who deserved salvation: those believers who accepted Jesus Christ and sincerely repented in the eyes of God would be saved. People could turn their free will to salvation. Jacob Arminius position did not lose its influence after his death. It attracted a lot of followers in the Protestant world. In the history of philosophical ideas concerning the topic of God's existence, Kant's position holds a special and unique place.

On the one hand, the philosophy of Kant that is actually the last of the secular ideas of the Enlightenment Period cannot be called "theistic". Kant does not state the existence of God as an objective reality. He neither proceeds from this objective nor leads to it. On the other hand, his

philosophy cannot be called “atheistic” because Kant does not exclude, but even hints at the existence of God and makes the possibility of the God’s existence an essential part of his world-view. In all three “Critics”, the theme of God is presented as the theme of the inevitable “ideal” of transcendental dialectic nature. In each case, God is reached due to an appropriate need-logical, ethical, and aesthetic-teleological.

Immanuel Kant revises the concept of “faith” that still remains in his teaching and fills it with a new philosophical sense that is very different from the theological one. According to the philosopher, the belief in the old sense of the word misleads people and makes them susceptible to superstitions. Breaking the postulates of religion, Kant nevertheless remains a sincere Christian. He believes in God who will not limit the freedom of a man. Immanuel Kant considers a man to be a moral subject. Ethical issues are central in his teaching of philosophy.

A philosopher has an extremely uncompromising attitude towards atheism. However, Kant is recognized as one of the destroyers and critics of the religious worldview. There is no place for faith in his philosophical doctrine that is able to replace knowledge. Kant criticizes all believers. He says that faith comes from the human need to reduce uncertainty bounds in the world around them.

Faith is required in order to neutralize the feeling that human life is in constant threat. Thus, the German philosopher appears to be in conflict with theological teachings. Kant draws attention to the fact that faith is, first of all, a kind of prudence. Despite all of the above mentioned ideas, the

German philosopher still retains to the category of “ faith” while developing his theory. However, he advocates for a different understanding of faith in his theory. In his works, Kant asks concrete questions.

“ Critique of Pure Reason” questions what a person can know. “ Critique of Practical Reason” asks what the same person should do. Finally, “ Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone” wonders what people can actually hope for. Karl Barth is often called a contemporary “ father of the Church” and is included in the list of the most famous theologians in the history of Christianity. He is mentioned alongside Augustine and Aquinas, Luther and Calvin.

Karl Barth was born in Basel, Switzerland. Bart was distinguished through unusual intelligence, great capacity to work, seriousness of purpose, democratic spirit, respect for the arts, especially music, and, finally, a keen sense of humor. In Bern, Bart grew up and received his early religious training and formal education. “ Karl settled early on a career in theology, and began the grand tour of universities typical for European students of the day” (Mangina, 1). Karl Barth received theological education in the universities of Bern, Berlin, Tubingen and Marburg.

He attended lectures of a well-known liberal theologian Adolf Harnack. At the age of 25, he became a pastor of the Reformed Church in Switzerland. At 35, he began teaching the Reformed-Calvinistic theology in Gottingen. Later, he became a professor of theology. From 1922 to 1933, he published a magazine on dialectical theology. In the beginning of 1927, he took active part in the ecumenical movement.

In 1935, having refused to swear allegiance to Hitler, he was deported from Germany. There appeared the “ Company of Karl Barth” in West Germany in the early 1970s. A similar society was created also in the U. S. His major works are “ Romans” and “ The Gottingen Dogmatics”. His writings were based primarily on the doctrines of Luther and Calvin.

Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky influenced formation of his views. He was especially affected by their ideas about the irrationality of human nature and social life that led to the alienation of people from God and to the deep spiritual crisis. All the above mentioned theologians played a significant role in the formation of the contemporary Christian Church.