

Some Theological Terms

(*Note that the brief discussions are those typically or generally held; variations occur within each)

Calvinism, or “Reformed theology,” named after John Calvin (1509-1564), author of *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Theology continued development after Calvin’s (in opposition to Arminianism) particularly through the Synod of Dort (1619, which included the five TULIP points) and the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1646. Typically associated with Presbyterians. Emphasizes the sovereignty of God, predestination, total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints.

Arminianism named after Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) and continued development after him, notably in the Remonstrance (1610). Associated with Methodism, Wesleyanism, Holiness Movement, many charismatics, Free Will Baptists. Typically stresses a denial of the imputation of sin, prevenient grace, free will, redefinition of predestination to “information” only, human participation in salvation, and the possibility of loss of salvation.

Covenant Theology is a theology based on two covenants: works and grace (some add a third, redemption). Also known as Replacement Theology, viewing the church as having replaced Israel and with Israel having no future in God’s plan. A modern offshoot of this is Dominion Theology (Christian Reconstruction), a modern version of Puritanism seeking a theocracy.

Dispensationalism is a theology emphasizing differing stewardships or economies (“dispensations”) through which God deals with man, all of which are unified by grace through faith. It has a major focus on maintaining a consistent hermeneutic and a making a clear distinction between Israel and the church.

Roman Catholic Theology- the most significant difference from conservative Protestant theology is that authority is vested both in Scripture and in church tradition. Hermeneutical decisions therefore reside within the church hierarchy. Apocryphal books are included in the canon. There is an emphasis on Mary as a mediator and the role of sacraments is integrated with salvation.

Contemporary theologies- Generally have roots in modern philosophy more than Biblical authority. Includes schools such as Liberalism, Neoliberalism, Neoorthodoxy (“dialectical” or “crisis” theology). Some contain elements that would classify them as radical (form criticism, “worldly Christianity,” and process theology, among others). Modern theology with no sound Scriptural basis.

Socialist Theologies- Another class of modern theology. These emphasize social aspects of the Christian faith. This including the “theology of hope” and “liberation theology.” There are many variants but in general the focus on social issues replaces the recognition of sin and a need for a Savior. Biblical theology is typically second to material improvements.

Summarized in part from the Moody Handbook of Theology by Paul Enns

Scripture is the final authority; be careful with theological constructs! Our loyalty is to be to proper handling of Scripture, and not to any particular system or spiritual leader!