

Against Christianity
Peter J. Leithart
(Canon Press, 2003)

Week 2: Chapter 2
“Against Theology”

In Chapter 2, Leithart takes issue with the discipline of theology, claiming that it is a “product of Christianity and aids in its entrenchment.” As an alternative to the doctrines and timeless truths with which theology frequently concerns itself, Leithart suggests that our attention is more appropriately focused when we consider the Church’s language and myths. If theology fails to understand that right doctrine is only true when it is enfleshed in speech and worship, then theology is at risk of “ensuring that Christians have nothing to say about nearly everything.” But the Church *does* have something to say, something that is radically different from what the world says, even as what it says contains the whole world.

Opening Question:

When you think of the word “theology” and what theologians do, what images, settings, or concepts come to mind? How might this compare to activities that are cumbersome to describe, such as riding a bike or learning a dance?

Study Questions:

1. What are some examples of the theology that Leithart is against? What is Leithart *for* in this chapter?
2. Leithart talks a lot about language. When we speak of languages, we speak of native languages, secondary languages, foreign languages and of being fluent or proficient. Your native language is the language in which you think; it is part of your identity because it precedes your choice and your consciousness. How is the language of theology at odds with the language of the Church as Leithart describes it? Would you say that either of these languages is your native language? Are you proficient in either of them?
3. In section 19, Leithart says that the “Church faces a crisis of worldliness” because she “lacks a mastery of her own language.” What does Leithart mean by worldliness and what is at stake for the Church in this crisis?
4. In addition to language, Leithart focuses on the importance of myth and ritual (i.e. practices and liturgies). Myths are the stories we tell to make sense of the world and rituals are how we enact those stories. In the previous chapter, Leithart referred to the Church as an alternative governing body. In order to be an alternative governing body, however, the Church must also have an alternative myth and alternative rituals. What governing myth does Leithart say American churches have failed to supplant with the gospel? Do you agree with this? Are there other myths or rituals that the Church adopts rather than replaces?