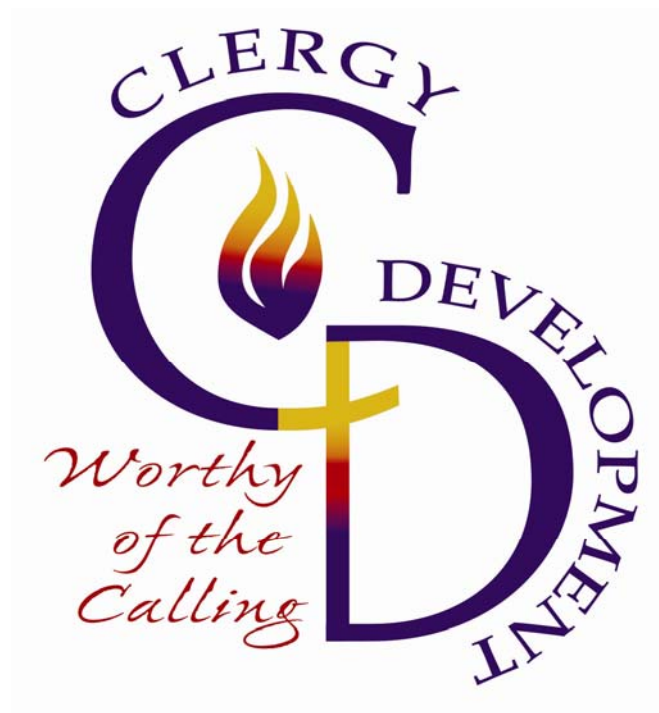

Student Guide

Investigating Christian Theology 1



Clergy Development
Church of the Nazarene
Kansas City, Missouri
816-999-7000 ext. 2468; 800-306-7651 (USA)
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The **Modular Course of Study** is an outcome-based curriculum designed to implement the educational paradigm defined by the Breckenridge Consultations. Clergy Development is responsible for maintaining and distributing the Modular Course of Study for the Church of the Nazarene.

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Series Foreword

A Vision for Christian Ministry: Clergy Education in the Church of the Nazarene

The chief purpose of all persons—indeed, all of the creation—is to worship, love, and serve God. God has made himself known in His deeds of creation and redemption. As the Redeemer, God has called into existence a people: the Church, who embody, celebrate, and declare His name and His ways. The life of God with His people and the world constitutes the Story of God. That story is recorded principally in the Old and New Testaments, and continues to be told by the resurrected Christ who lives and reigns as Head of His Church. The Church lives to declare the whole Story of God. This it does in many ways—in the lives of its members who are even now being transformed by Christ through preaching, the sacraments, in oral testimony, community life, and in mission. All members of the Body of Christ are called to exercise a ministry of witness and service. No one is excluded.

In God's own wisdom He calls some persons to fulfill the ministry of proclaiming the gospel and caring for God's people, in a form referred to as the ordained ministry. God is the initial actor in this call, not humans. In the Church of the Nazarene we believe God calls and persons respond. They do not elect the Christian ministry. All persons whom God calls to the ordained ministry should continue to be amazed that He would call them. They should continue to be humbled by God's call. The *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene states, "we recognize and hold that the Head of the Church calls some men and women to the more official and public work of the ministry." It adds, "The church, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, will recognize the Lord's call" (*Manual*, Church of the Nazarene, paragraph 400).

An ordained Christian minister has as his or her chief responsibility to declare in many ways the whole Story of God as fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. His or her charge is to "tend the flock of God . . . not under compulsion, but willingly, not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock" (1 Pet 5:2-3, NRSV). The minister fulfills this charge under the supervision of Christ, the chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:4). Such ministry can be fulfilled only after a period of careful preparation. Indeed, given the ever-changing demands placed upon the minister, "preparation" never ceases.

A person who enters the Christian ministry becomes in a distinct sense a steward of the gospel of God (Titus 1:7). A steward is one who is entrusted to care for what belongs to another. A steward may be one who takes care of another person or who manages the property of someone else. All Christians are stewards of the grace of God. But in addition, in a peculiar sense a Christian minister is a steward of the "mystery of God," which is Christ, the Redeemer, the Messiah of God. In all faithfulness, the minister is called to "make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel" (Eph 6:19, NRSV). Like Paul, he or she must faithfully preach "the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (Eph 3:8-10, NRSV).

In fulfilling this commission, there is plenty of room for diligence and alertness, but no room for laziness or privilege (Titus 1:5-9). Good stewards recognize that they are

stewards only, not the owners, and that they will give an account of their stewardship to the master. Faithfulness to one's charge and to the Lord who issued it is the steward's principal passion. When properly understood, the Christian ministry should never be thought of as a "job." It is ministry—uniquely Christian ministry. No higher responsibility or joy can be known than to become a steward of the Story of God in Christ's Church. The person who embraces God's call to the ordained ministry will stand in the company of the apostles, the Early Fathers of the Church, the Reformers of the Middle Ages, the Protestant Reformers, and many persons around the world today who joyfully serve as stewards of the gospel of God.

Obviously, one who does not recognize, or who understands but rejects, just how complete and inclusive a minister's stewardship must be, should not start down the path that leads to ordination. In a peculiar sense, a Christian minister must in all respects model the gospel of God. He or she is to "shun" the love of money. Instead, the minister must "pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness." He or she must "fight the good fight of the faith" and "take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called" (1 Tim 6: 11-12, NRSV).

Hence, the Church of the Nazarene believes "the minister of Christ is to be in all things a pattern to the flock—in punctuality, discretion, diligence, earnestness; 'in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left' (2 Cor 6: 6-7)" (*Manual*, Church of the Nazarene, paragraph 401.1). The minister of Christ "must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, ⁸but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, ⁹holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching . . . able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict." (Titus 1: 7-9, NASB).

In order to be a good steward of God's Story one must, among other things, give oneself to careful and systematic study, both before and after ordination. This will occur not because he or she is forced to do so, but out of a love for God and His people, the world He is working to redeem, and out of an inescapable sense of responsibility. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the attitude one brings to preparation for the ministry reveals much about what he or she thinks of God, the gospel, and Christ's Church. The God who became incarnate in Jesus and who made a way of salvation for all gave His very best in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. In order to be a good steward, a Christian minister must respond in kind. Jesus told numerous parables about stewards who did not recognize the importance of what had been entrusted to them (Mt 21: 33-44; 25: 14-30; Mk 13: 34-37; Lk 12: 35-40; 19: 11-27; 20: 9-18).

Preparation for ministry in Christ's Church—one's education in all its dimensions—should be pursued in full light of the responsibility before God and His people that the ministry involves. This requires that one take advantage of the best educational resources at his or her disposal.

The Church of the Nazarene recognizes how large is the responsibility associated with the ordained Christian ministry and accepts it fully. Part of the way we recognize our responsibility before God is seen in the requirements we make for ordination and the practice of ministry. We believe the call to and practice of Christian ministry is a gift, not a right or privilege. We believe God holds a minister to the highest of religious, moral, personal, and professional standards. We are not reluctant to expect those

standards to be observed from the time of one's call until his or her death. We believe Christian ministry should first be a form of worship. The practice of ministry is both an offering to God and a service to His Church. By the miracle of grace, the work of the ministry can become a means of grace for God's people (Rom 12: 1-3). One's education for ministry is also a form of worship.

The modules comprising the Course of Study that may lead a person to candidacy for ordination have been carefully designed to prepare one for the kind of ministry we have described. Their common purpose is to provide a holistic preparation for entrance into the ordained Christian ministry. They reflect the Church's wisdom, experience, and responsibility before God. The modules show how highly the Church of the Nazarene regards the gospel, the people of God, the world for which Christ gave His life, and Christian ministry. Completing the modules will normally take three or four years. But no one should feel pressured to meet this schedule.

The careful study for which the modules call should show that before God and His Church one accepts the stewardly responsibility associated with ordained ministry.

Acknowledgments

Every module is the accumulation of effort by many people. Someone writes the original manuscript, others offer suggestions to strengthen the content and make the material more easily understood, and finally an editor formats the module for publication. This module is no different. Many people have contributed to this module. Every effort has been made to represent accurately the original intent of the principal contributors.

Principal Contributor

The principal contributor for this module is Rodrick T. Leupp. Dr. Leupp was born in Portland, Oregon. His parents provided wonderful Christian nurture within the Church of the Nazarene, a church he has attended all of his life. He was educated at Northwest Nazarene University, Pacific School of Religion, and Drew University, earning the Ph.D. in Theology at Drew University.

Dr. Leupp has fifteen years of teaching experience, including eight formative years at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary in Metro Manila, the Philippines, from 1992 to 2000. There he met Stephanie Brank, and they were married in 1993. Their two daughters were both born in the Philippines.

In 1996 Rod's first book was published, a work in trinitarian theology entitled *Knowing the Name of God*. He has written dozens of book reviews and several articles for *Holiness Today*. He has also pastored many small, United Methodist congregations. He is devoted to the Wesleyan theological heritage.

Responder

Each module was reviewed by at least one content specialist to ensure that the content did not represent a single, narrow view or opinion. The responder provided suggestions the principal contributor could integrate into this module.

The responder for this module was Wesley D. Tracy. Dr. Tracy has coauthored several books on spiritual formation. *The Upward Call: Spiritual Formation and the Holy Life*, written with Morris Weigelt, Janine Tartaglia, and Dee Freeborn, was published in 1994 by Beacon Hill Press and has gone through several printings in English and Spanish. Dr. Tracy was the principal author of *Reflecting God*, a layperson's textbook on spiritual formation published by Beacon Hill Press and the Christian Holiness Partnership and sponsored by the 23 supporting denominations of CHP. This book is supported by three other items written by Wesley Tracy: *The Reflecting God Workbook*, *Reflecting God Leader's Guide*, and *The Reflecting God Journal*.

Tracy holds five higher education degrees including degrees from Southern Nazarene University, Nazarene Theological Seminary and two doctorates from San Francisco Theological Seminary. He has published more than 1,000 articles and has written or coauthored some 25 books. He has served as a pastor, as editor of eight Christian periodicals, and as an educator at MidAmerica Nazarene University, Nazarene Theological Seminary, as well as special adult education projects in Europe, Latin America, and Asia.

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Syllabus

Investigating Christian Theology 1

Educational Institution, Setting or Educational Provider:

Location of the Course:

Course Dates:

Name of the Instructor:

Instructor's Address, Telephone, and E-mail Address:

Module Vision Statement:

Historically, theology has been known as “the Queen of the Sciences.” While calling it that today may seem overly dramatic, all pastors-in-training will agree that a basic grounding in Christian theology is essential. Everything a pastor does—praying, counseling, preaching, leading in worship—can and in one sense *must* be understood theologically. Whether acknowledged or not, theological implications assert themselves throughout the entire pastoral task, from first to last, top to bottom, front to back, side to side. It is too much to claim that theology is “the only game in town,” so far as the pastor is concerned, yet no other game makes any sense without theological awareness.

Even a seemingly non-theological task like conducting a church board meeting may be the occasion for theological reflection. For example, current approaches to God as triune suggest the Trinity is itself the model for perfect human community, being more than one that yet always functions, acts, and believes as one. Applied to the church board situation, this may mean the pastor does not dominate the meeting, but shares collegially with all present, working with them toward consensus or even unanimity.

It has been said that practical theology is the “crown jewel” of all theological study. These two modules are not strictly speaking courses in practical theology, and yet the practical dimension of theology must always be kept in view. Noted Nazarene theologian J. Kenneth Grider liked to talk about theology wearing overalls, and this homespun example is exactly correct. Albert Outler has well defined John Wesley's theology as an example of a “folk theology” at its best. Regarding Wesley's theology as a whole, “practical divinity” is the operative watchword.

Overall Hopes for These Two Modules

1. To survey the grand heritage and great tradition of orthodox Christian theology. Our survey will touch on biblical foundations, selected historical developments, and some contemporary problems and restatements.
2. The tone of these two modules is intentionally *irenic* (leading to consensus and peace) rather than *polemic* (tending to seek conflict and emphasizing disagreement with other Christian traditions). To use a cliché, this means we are more interested in building bridges than walls. Doctrines such as the triunity of

God, Jesus Christ as fully divine and fully human, the reality of sin, and Jesus Christ as God's anointed Redeemer are universally accepted across the Christian spectrum.

3. Having said that, Wesleyan distinctives such as prevenient grace and entire sanctification will be stressed where appropriate.
4. To understand something of how theologians work and what theologians do, which also means to appreciate the craft of theological thinking. We do this remembering that the local pastor is also a theologian. We desire to appreciate theology as both an intellectual and a practical discipline.
5. It is important to see links between Christian theology and both ethics and worship.
6. At times we may engage in some theological analysis of culture.
7. Overall, the goal of a deeper knowing of the Triune God must motivate our every impulse. Recall that Søren Kierkegaard said, "Only that which edifies is true for me." This is our goal: edifying truth.

A Few Governing Assumptions as We Begin

Virtually all systematic theologies have two or three central emphases that serve to govern and guide everything said, claimed, and articulated by that particular theology. Wesleyan or Nazarene theology has often been guided by

- a. the grace of God, especially the Wesleyan view of prevenient grace.
- b. the hope that Christian theology may be seen as an integrated whole. The *ordo salutis* (Latin, meaning "the order of salvation") is for Nazarene theology the organizing principle of the whole.

In "The Scripture Way of Salvation" John Wesley expressed the order of salvation in fluid and dynamic terms: "So that the salvation which is here spoken of might be extended to the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul till it is consummated in glory." Nazarenes have often stressed the two moments of justification (initial sanctification) and entire sanctification (Christian perfection). Wesley's quote means both of these two "moments" need to be taken in the broader context of the entire drama of salvation.

- c. the classic meaning of theology is that it is simply the study of God. To intend to study God may of course mean very many things, but it cannot mean *only* an intellectual and rational approach to God. Experiential knowing of God has always been important for Nazarene people. Studying God must always lead to praising Him. *Orthodoxy* (right or correct doctrine) cannot finally be separated from *Doxology*, the true worship of God. These must be wedded to correct conduct or action, which is *Orthopraxis*. These three realities—Doxology, Orthodoxy, Orthopraxis—in some ways function as a "holy trinity" of theological method and formulation. They can be conceptualized separately, but each needs the other two to be complete.
- a. Phineas F. Bresee believed Nazarene theology ought to be characterized by this dictum, which was not original with him, and yet reflected his way of theologizing and Christian ministry: *in essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, in all things love*.

Educational Assumptions

1. The work of the Holy Spirit is essential to any process of Christian education at any level. We will consistently request and expect the Spirit's presence within and among us.
2. Christian teaching and learning is best done in the context of community (people being and working together). Community is the gift of the Spirit but may be enhanced or hindered by human effort. Communities have common values, stories, practices, and goals. Explicit effort will be invested to enhance community within the class. Group work will take place in every lesson.
3. Every adult student has knowledge and experiences to contribute to the class. We learn not only from the instructor and the reading assignments, but also from each other. Each student is valued not only as a learner but also as a teacher. That is one reason so many exercises in this course are cooperative and collaborative in nature.
4. Journaling is an ideal way to bring theory and practice together as students synthesize the principles and content of the lessons with their own experiences, preferences, and ideas.

Outcome Statements

This module contributes to the development of the following abilities as defined in the *U.S. Sourcebook for Ministerial Development*.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- CN18 Ability to list and explain the Nazarene Articles of Faith
- CN19 Ability to identify and explain the main characteristics of the nature of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Human Person, Sin, Salvation, the Christian Life, the Church and Sacraments, and Eschatology
- CN20 Ability to reflect theologically on life and ministry
- CN21 Ability to demonstrate understanding of the sources of theological reflection, its historical development, and its contemporary expressions
- CN22 Ability to articulate the distinctive characteristics of Wesleyan theology
- CP10 Ability to synthesize, analyze reason logically for discernment, assessment, and problem solving, and live with ambiguity
- CP11 Ability to analyze the validity of arguments and to identify their presuppositions and consequences
- CP21 Ability to envision, order, participate and lead in contextualized theologically grounded worship

OUTCOME STATEMENTS

- *Ability to integrate Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience for theological reflection*
- *Ability to describe the role of systematic (or Christian) theology in the life of the church*
- *Ability to systematically reflect on the Christian faith*
- *Ability to reflect theologically on specific activities in parish ministry and discover adequate foundations for appropriate actions*
- *Ability to give a theological rationale for leading a church-in-mission (i.e., a missional church)*
- *Ability to integrate Wesleyan disciplines into spiritual practices that are becoming significant enrichments to one's personal journey*

- *Ability to reflect systematically and comprehensively about the nature and content of the Christian faith, and to do so for the sake of Christ's Church and His World.*
- *Ability to discern theological trends in the wider culture, especially as these trends impact the progress of Christian ministry*
- Ability to defend the historic Christian faith. Christian Theology 1 is not primarily an *apologetic* venture, yet everyone who takes this class must emerge with a defined sense of the integrity of the Christian faith, which would necessarily translate into the ability to be a defender of the faith to one degree or another.

Recommended Reading

The following books by Nazarene authors are used extensively in these modules on Christian Theology. They provide a rich understanding of theology for study in these modules and also for continued reference throughout the student's career. Whenever possible, they should be a part of every Nazarene pastor's personal library.

Dunning, H. Ray. *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988.

Grider, J. Kenneth. *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994.

Lodahl, Michael. *The Story of God: Wesleyan Theology and Biblical Narrative*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994.

Staples, Rob L. *Outward Sign and Inward Grace: The Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1991.

Staples, Rob L. *Words of Faith: An Easy Reference to Theological Terms*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2001.

Wynkoop, Mildred Bangs. *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1972.

Course Requirements

1. **Class attendance, attention, and participation** are especially important. Students are responsible for **all** assignments and in-class work. Much of the work in this course is small-group work. Cooperative, small-group work cannot be made up. That makes attendance imperative. Even if one does extra reading or writing, the values of discussion, dialogue, and learning from each other are thwarted. If one lesson is missed, the instructor will require extra work before completion can be acknowledged. If two or more classes are missed, the student will be required to repeat the whole module.

Small-Group Work. Nothing is more important in this course than small-group work. The class members will be assigned to groups of two to four students each. The group members will serve as study partners for explorations and discussion.

2. Assignments

Journaling: The only ongoing assignment for this module is your journal. It is to be used regularly, if not daily. On at least one occasion during the term, the instructor will check the journals. In each lesson a journal assignment is included.

The journal should become the student's friend and treasury of insights, devotions, and ideas. Here the integration of theory and practice occurs. The spiritual life nature of the journal helps guard against the course of study being merely academic as you are repeatedly called upon to apply the principles studied to your own heart and your own ministry situation.

This journal is not a diary, not a catchall. It is, rather, a guided journal or a focused journal in which the educational experience and its implications are selected for reflection and writing.

The framers of this curriculum are concerned about the way that students fall into learning "about" the Bible, or "about" the spiritual life rather than learning—that is coming to know and internalize the Bible and spiritual principles. The journaling experience ensures that the "Be" component of "Be, Know, and Do" is present in the course of study. Be faithful with all journaling assignments.

Daily Work: This module has regular homework assignments. It is called daily work because even though the class may only meet once a week, the student should be working on the module on a "daily" basis. Sometimes the homework assignments are quite heavy. The assignments are important. Even if homework is not discussed in class every session, the work is to be handed in. This gives the instructor regular information about the student's progress in the course. The normal time for homework to be handed in is at the beginning of each class session. **All** assignments are to be completed.

Course Outline and Schedule

The class will meet for 30 hours according to the following schedule:

Session Date	Session Time	
		1. Christian Theology—Its Function, Focus, and Practice in the Local Church
		2. The Sources and Definition of Christian Theology
		3. How Can We Speak of God?
		4. Five Theological Models of Revelation
		5. Knowing God as Creator
		6. What Kind of a World Is It?
		7. Some Classic Approaches to Thinking About God's Power and Wisdom
		8. Some Classic Approaches to Thinking About God's Holiness and Love

		9. Recent Ways of Speaking of God and Thinking Theologically
		10. Continuing the Conversation About Contemporary Theology
		11. The Doctrine of the Trinity: Vital Center or Antique Relic
		12. Biblical Foundations of the Trinity
		13. Who Is the Christian God?
		14. The Christian Life and the Trinity
		15. The Convergence and Divergence of Philosophy and Christian Theology
		16. Further Investigations into Demonstrations for the Existence of God
		17. How Should We Regard Religions Other than Christianity?
		18. Christianity Engages Culture
		19. Humanity Graciously Endowed: Theological Anthropology
		20. The Element Within Us, or Thinking About Sin

Course Evaluation

The instructor, the course itself, and the student's progress will be evaluated. These evaluations will be made in several ways.

The progress of students will be evaluated with an eye for enhancing the learning experience by:

1. Carefully observing the small-group work, noting the competence of reports, the balance of discussion, the quality of the relationships, the cooperation level, and the achievement of assigned tasks
2. Careful reading of homework assignments
3. Completion of all homework assignments
4. Journal checks

The course materials and the teacher will be evaluated by frequently asking and discussing the effectiveness and relevance of a certain method, experience, story, lecture, or other activity.

Some evaluation cannot be made during the class itself. Some objectives will not be measurable for years to come. If students encounter the transforming power of God at deeper levels than ever before, learn devotional skills and practice them with discipline, and incorporate the best of this course into their own ministries, the fruit of this educational endeavor could go on for a long time. In truth, that is what we expect.

Additional Information

A reasonable effort to assist every student will be made. Any student who has handicaps, learning disabilities, or other conditions that make the achievement of the class requirements exceedingly difficult should make an appointment with the instructor as soon as possible to see what special arrangements can be made. Any student who is having trouble understanding the assignments, lectures, or other learning activities should talk to the instructor to see what can be done to help.

Instructor's Availability

Good faith efforts to serve the students both in and beyond the classroom will be made.

Journaling: A Tool for Personal Reflection and Integration

Participating in the course of study is the heart of your preparation for ministry. To complete each course you will be required to listen to lectures, read several books, participate in discussions, write papers, and take exams. Content mastery is the goal.

An equally important part of ministerial preparation is spiritual formation. Some might choose to call spiritual formation devotions, while others might refer to it as growth in grace. Whichever title you place on the process, it is the intentional cultivation of your relationship with God. The course work will be helpful in adding to your knowledge, your skills, and your ability to do ministry. The spiritually formative work will weave all you learn into the fabric of your being, allowing your education to flow freely from your head to your heart to those you serve.

Although there are many spiritual disciplines to help you cultivate your relationship with God, journaling is the critical skill that ties them all together. Journaling simply means keeping a record of your experiences and the insights you have gained along the way. It is a discipline because it does require a good deal of work to faithfully spend time daily in your journal. Many people confess that this is a practice they tend to push aside when pressed by their many other responsibilities. Even five minutes a day spent journaling can make a major difference in your education and your spiritual development. Let me explain.

Consider journaling as time spent with your best friend. Onto the pages of a journal you will pour out your candid responses to the events of the day, the insights you gained from class, a quote gleaned from a book, an ah-ha that came to you as two ideas connected. This is not the same as keeping a diary, since a diary seems to be a chronicle of events without the personal dialogue. The journal is the repository for all of your thoughts, reactions, prayers, insights, visions, and plans. Though some people like to keep complex journals with sections for each type of reflection, others find a simple running commentary more helpful. In either case, record the date and the location at the beginning of every journal entry. It will help you when it comes time to review your thoughts.

It is important to chat briefly about the logistics of journaling. All you will need is a pen and paper to begin. Some folks prefer loose-leaf paper that can be placed in a three-ring binder, others like spiral-bound notebooks, while others enjoy using

composition books. Whichever style you choose, it is important to develop a pattern that works for you.

Establishing a time and a place for writing in your journal is essential. If there is no space etched out for journaling, it will not happen with the regularity needed to make it valuable. It seems natural to spend time journaling after the day is over and you can sift through all that has transpired. Yet, family commitments, evening activities, and fatigue militate against this time slot. Morning offers another possibility. Sleep filters much of the previous day's experiences and processes deep insights, that can be recorded first thing in the morning. In conjunction with devotions, journaling enables you to begin to weave your experiences with the Word, and also with course material that has been steeping on the back burner of your mind. You will probably find that carrying your journal will allow you to jot down ideas that come to you at odd times throughout the day.

It seems that we have been suggesting that journaling is a handwritten exercise. Some may be wondering about doing their work on a computer. Traditionally, there is a special bond between hand, pen, and paper. It is more personal, direct, aesthetic. And it is flexible, portable, and available.

With regular use, your journal is the repository of your journey. As important as it is to make daily entries, it is equally important to review your work. Read over each week's record at the end of the week. Make a summary statement and note movements of the Holy Spirit or your own growth. Do a monthly review of your journal every 30 days. This might best be done on a half-day retreat where you can prayerfully focus on your thoughts in solitude and silence. As you do this, you will begin to see the accumulated value of the Word, your course work, and your experience in ministry all coming together in ways you had not considered possible. This is integration, weaving together faith development with learning. Integration moves information from your head to your heart so that ministry is a matter of being rather than doing. Journaling will help you answer the central question of education: "Why do I do what I do when I do it?"

Journaling really is the linchpin in ministerial preparation. Your journal is the chronicle of your journey into spiritual maturity as well as content mastery. These volumes will hold the rich insights that will pull your education together. A journal is the tool for integration. May you treasure the journaling process!

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Lesson 1: Christian Theology—Its Function, Focus, and Practice in the Local Church

Due This Lesson

None

Learner Objectives

To help students

- understand the focus and function of Christian theology
- see how theology and ministry are connected as a practical matter
- ask why theological study is necessary
- become aware of how theological situations and problems are necessarily a part of their everyday lives—to begin to view life theologically

Homework Assignments

Read:

- The syllabus for Investigating Christian Theology 1. Note any questions you want to ask the instructor.
- Resource 1-5, The Study of Christian Theology. Note the scripture references. Be prepared to discuss the rationale and relevance of Christian theology to preparation for Christian ministry.
- Resource 1-6, Christian Theology or Systematic Theology. Note the reasons given for selecting Christian Theology as the name of this module and the proposed structure for the lessons.

Write a three- to four-page theological autobiography. Use the following for guidelines:

- What is your earliest recollection of and interest in religious and spiritual matters?
- What are the formative factors on your theological outlook? Include reference to persons, circumstances, events, travels, study, etc.
- When you were very young, did you think of God as more like your father or more like your mother? Or most of all like your pastor?
- What is the relationship between your knowledge of Christian theology and progress of your spiritual life? How can theological study bring you closer to God?
- How is a theological autobiography similar to a confession of personal faith in Jesus Christ or a story of your conversion? How different?

Bible Study:

As part of your preparation for the next session study 2 Timothy 3: 16-17 and 2 Peter 1: 20-21.

Journal Prompts:

- Write in your journal about a new concept that you encountered in today's lesson. In what ways could this new idea influence your life? Your assumptions about religion or spirituality? What feelings did this new insight provoke? Suspicion, fear, anger, freedom, joy, relief?
- Listen and write. Listen with "theological ears" to the common conversations you hear for the next three days, at home, in the supermarket, at work. Notice how many theologically oriented statements you hear:

"I guess it wasn't meant to be."

"God helps those who help themselves."

"Those kinds of people should keep their place."

"Mother Nature must have been offended; the hurricane killed ten people."

"She was killed by a drunk driver—God must have had a reason."

"He was always such a proud one. Now he has cancer. Just goes to show you."

"Why would God let me get pregnant?"

- Theology and Ministry. Ponder the story about Fred Craddock (told in "Punctuate the Finish") and reflect in your journal about how theological study and ministry necessarily go together.

Relevant Christian Theology

Whose judgment should we trust as to whether or not any Christian theology is relevant? We mentioned that every minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ is in fact a working theologian. That may be the first criterion of relevance. That would include:

- Can this theology be preached?
- Can it be prayed?
- Can it be sung?
- Is it sufficient for launching the missions work of the church?
- Can it be effectively and simply presented to non-Christians in a compelling and convincing way?
- Is this theology a fully formed pastoral theology that can address any conceivable pastoral situation: sickness, death, bereavement, exultation, skepticism, secularism, materialism, etc.?

Theology—the Study of God

The study of theology is the study of God.

We study God simply because God *is* and to study Him is to practice loving God with our minds.

The writer John Updike once said theology is an enterprise that by its very definition must unravel and be knitted together again for every new generation.

The basic root ingredients or substance of theology do not change, but the ways of application necessarily must change with changing times, cultures, and situations.

In broadest outline, that upon which virtually all Christians agree is:

- The Triune God
- The Person of Jesus Christ
- The Work of Jesus Christ

Religious Symbols

Tillich believes symbols, especially religious ones but also from the realms of politics, history, and art, are characterized by the following four criteria:

- A symbol, unlike a mere sign, actually participates in the reality to which it points.
- A symbol invites us into levels of reality that are otherwise closed for us. Examples would be a great play or piece of music.
- Symbols cannot be made up out of the thin air whenever one wishes to do so. Tillich writes, "They grow out of the individual or collective unconscious and cannot function without being accepted by the unconscious dimension of our being."
- Because no one can invent symbols at will, they are like living beings, and therefore they grow and they die.¹

Incorrect Theological Views

What are some examples of theological views that might be better left behind?

- In the face of evil that does not yield to easy explanations, many of our statements and declarations about God are simply wrong. We may subtly or even blatantly blame God for the evil. Common sentiments such as “God took her home” may or may not be worth saying, depending on the circumstances. They might even do more harm than good. To speak of God’s enduring goodness, justice, and mercy when things have turned impossibly bad is a miracle of grace.
- The “name it and claim it” theology, which tries to force God’s hand toward bestowing material gain.
- Speaking of love sloppily without counterbalancing it with justice and responsibility.

The Study of Christian Theology

by
Al Truesdale

In the Apostle Paul's instructions to Timothy he urges him to be a diligent steward of the Christian faith. Paul tells this young minister—his student and son in the Lord—how to conduct himself in "the household of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim 3: 15). As a minister of the gospel, Timothy must faithfully and comprehensively proclaim and teach the whole Christian faith as it was authored by the Lord and taught by the apostles. Timothy must jealously guard "the mystery of our religion: God in Christ was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in Glory" (1 Tim 3:16).

If Timothy will diligently fulfill his charge, then Paul says, he "will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the good doctrine which he has followed" (1 Tim 4:6).

After two thousand years of Church history, and after perhaps millions of ministers have proclaimed the gospel, Paul's charge to Timothy remains as urgent and as much in effect today as ever before. A person who enters upon the ordained Christian ministry absolutely forfeits control over his or her own agenda and ideas, and lives only to proclaim "in all wisdom and insight the mystery of God's will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:10). All of this for "the praise of God's glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. For in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph 1:6-7). And a person who wants to enter the ordained Christian ministry will demonstrate his or her commitment to the "mystery of God" by a "manner of life that is worthy of the gospel" (Phil 1:27).

But even though one is deeply committed to fulfilling the charge given to Timothy, and now to us, he or she must patiently and prayerfully, in a spirit of humble and obedient worship, carefully study the whole content of the "mystery of God in Christ Jesus." One's personal faith in Christ is of course absolutely foundational for the Christian ministry. Only after one in obedient faith first partakes of the grace of God in Christ Jesus can he or she even hope to proclaim and teach the gospel to others. But the Christian minister is called to more. He or she must drink deeply from, be immersed in, "the faith" about which Paul spoke to Timothy. Upon the Christian minister is placed a responsibility for the faith that is unique to the office of the ordained ministry. Anyone who is unwilling diligently and humbly to walk the pathway that leads to becoming a good steward of "the faith" should honestly avoid the Christian ministry. Following the path that leads to becoming a good steward of "the faith" will last a lifetime.

For almost two thousand years, entry into the pathway has involved a faithful and worshipful study of theology. The word is composed of two Greek words, "Theos," or "God," and "logos," or "word." Theology is an attempt to give the most complete and faithful expression possible to God's self-disclosure in Christ. It is an effort to understand the relationship between Christ and "the household of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15). The study of theology is an attempt, under the Spirit's guidance, to understand how the Church

of the living God can best bear witness to the riches of God's grace both in the Church and in the world. Because of the inexhaustible riches of "Christ the mystery of God" (Col 1:24-29), and because of changing circumstances in the world in which the Church bears witness, the study of theology and its expression is never finished. The foundations of "the faith" never change, but as the Apostle Paul demonstrated by his preaching to diverse cultures, the Church must always seek the most insightful means possible for declaring Christ, the wisdom and power of God (1 Cor 1:10-30).

The Church "does" theology in order to enrich its understanding of God, to reaffirm the scandal of the Cross (1 Cor 1), to bolster its faith in Christ, to enlarge its grasp of holy living, to instruct in righteousness, to help accomplish the Great Commission and to give an account of its faith in the world. "Doing" and "studying" theology should be a joyous form of worship because it is a sustained effort better to understand the Christ who is our life and peace. All efforts to separate the study of theology from spontaneous worship and vibrant discipleship will end in a desert of frustration. It will lead to sterility and disappointment.

So for one who wants to enter the ordained Christian ministry and who sets out to study theology, he or she should do so with the greatest of joy, diligence, humility, and hope. As the history of the Church has proceeded from century to century, it has been adorned with the names of persons, many of them pastors of congregations or leaders of groups of pastors and congregations, who have joyously and faithfully done the work of theology for us. They have done so not because they wanted to waste time in fruitless speculation, but because they wanted to advance the gospel of their Lord, to protect "the faith" against subversion, and to amplify the faith of Christ's sisters and brothers.

He or she who sets out to embrace and fulfill Paul's charge to Timothy follows in the footsteps of the early apologists, the Church Fathers such as Athanasius and Augustine, and reformers such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, and Karl Barth. All of them were lovers of "the faith," and all of them sought only to "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior" (Titus 2:10). So as we proceed through this module, this part of the pathway that will eventually lead to ordination by God in the Christian ministry, let us do so with happy anticipation, believing firmly that the Holy Spirit will be our chief teacher.

While Christian theology is a whole that deals with "the faith," it has numerous branches, all of which serve the common good of the Church, and each of which plays a particular role. The branches follow a natural order, with each building upon the next. But there is also an important interdependence within the various branches. They are: biblical theology, historical theology (church history and the history of Christian thought); systematic theology; missiology; moral theology (Christian ethics); the practice of Christian ministry (leading in worship, preaching, counseling, administration, and so forth). There are numerous fields of study that are related to theology, but that derive their primary identity from other sources. Some of these are philosophy of religion, the study of world religions, psychology of religion, sociology of religion, and so forth.

The subject of this module is Christian theology, or systematic theology. It is directly reliant upon biblical and historical theology. Systematic theology is the Church's effort to provide a comprehensive statement of, or account of, its faith in the Christ in whom the eternal God became incarnate and redeemer. It seeks to systematically voice the nature and content of the Christian faith. Systematic theology occurs within the

Church and for the Church's faith. Systematic theology is "faith seeking understanding." To achieve its goal, systematic theology uses many tools, one of which is reflective and analytic thought. In the strict sense, systematic theology is neither the proclamation of the gospel of God nor is it "faith" in the sense of one's saving relationship with Christ. It is neither the presence of Christ in the sacraments or in preaching, nor is it the Church's shout of "Hallelujah!" in worship, testimony, and praise. Instead, it is faithful and comprehensive reflection upon the God who is the author of our faith.

It is possible to dismiss systematic theology as irrelevant to the Church's life only if one misunderstands the responsibility placed upon the Church when it confesses, "Christ is Lord." Systematic theology serves to augment the content and meaning of this, the Church's constituting affirmation. In fact, if a Christian minister, and if the Church, treats "the faith" with the care and importance it deserves, all dimensions of ministry and Christian life ought to occur under the guidance of theological reflection.

If a minister acts, plans, and speaks under instruction from worldly values and goals rather than being formed by theological principles, commitments, and insights, then to that extent he or she will depart from the gospel of God. The gospel alone is a minister's warrant for existence.

To prepare for proclamation of the gospel, we joyfully undertake the study of Christian theology.

Christian Theology or Systematic Theology?

by
Roderick T. Leupp

Care was taken in the naming of this entire course of study. It seemed most sensible to call our study Christian Theology instead of Systematic Theology, although this latter designation is often used and in most important ways is synonymous with the one we chose here, Christian Theology.

There is Nazarene precedent for using the term "Christian Theology." After all, this was the title given to the *magnum opus* written by the man who is still likely to be the greatest theologian in Nazarene history: Dr. H. Orton Wiley. The three volumes of this set appeared during World War II: 1940, 1941, and 1943. I happily inherited my father's set from his college days, and later purchased for \$20 autographed copies in a second-hand store. It was a wise investment.

Wiley wrote before today's questions of multiculturalism and religious diversity had fully asserted themselves. Yet even sixty years ago, to designate a body of knowledge and understanding as **Christian** theology said in a deliberate and intentional way that Jesus Christ is the **center** of everything preached, taught, asserted, confessed, and hoped by the Christian Church. And this is, if anything, even truer today than when Wiley wrote.

Christian Theology, then, says from the outset that this is not just any "theology in general" or heedless investigation into any or every intuition about the divine. Theology that is decisively **Christian** rejoices to know that God has become fully revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Buddhist, Islamic, or perhaps especially Jewish theology no doubt shares some common presuppositions and even conclusions with Christian theology. To call all of these endeavors "theological" reminds us that, intellectually speaking and experientially realized, there are ties that bind the Christian to other religions. In other words, when Jewish and Islamic theologians do theological work, they exercise their brains in much the same ways as Christians do. But "Christian" rightly highlights what can never be negotiated away, that is, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

What Is Systematic about Christian Theology?

Is the System the Solution?

Traditionally, as we have already said, the work of Christian theology was often called systematic theology. In coming lessons we will indicate something of the systematic, orderly, and disciplined quality of all theological thinking. Awareness of these dynamics was what propelled the concept of "systematic" into prominence in the first place. Given the choice between order and chaos, who would not choose order?

"Systematic" typically refers to how the topics of Christian theology are categorized, laid out, and investigated. Wiley, for his part, believed that six broad headings were sufficiently flexible to allow all of the essential questions of Christian theology to be discussed. They are:

- Part I: Introduction: The Province of Theology
- Part II: The Doctrine of the Father
- Part III: The Doctrine of the Son
- Part IV: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit
- Part V: The Doctrine of the Church
- Part VI: The Doctrine of Last Things

One will quickly note the trinitarian nature of Wiley's structure. This is a traditional approach, and one that really cannot be improved upon. Throughout these two modules of Christian theology, we will follow this traditional path of a trinitarian structure. It will be more implicitly assumed than blatantly stated.

H. Ray Dunning follows the same plan in his work *Grace, Faith and Holiness*, which is subtitled as "A Wesleyan Systematic Theology." Dunning wisely uses the plural form "doctrines" instead of Wiley's singular "doctrine," which sounds a note of flexibility and comprehensiveness.

- Part I: Prolegomena [Matters of Introduction]
- Part II: Our Knowledge of God
- Part III: The Doctrines of God the Sovereign [God the Father]
- Part IV: The Doctrines of God the Savior
- Part V: The Doctrines of God the Spirit

Dunning's categorization is, if anything, even simpler than Wiley's. Dunning considers the doctrine of the church, also known as **ecclesiology**, under the broad umbrella of the Holy Spirit, and places the "Last Things" in an appendix he labels "Speculative Eschatology."

The two-volume Lutheran **Christian Dogmatics**, edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, is a slight study in contrast as to how a theology might arrange itself. The two large volumes address twelve theological **loci** [singular **locus**], or locations. If we set these twelve locations alongside both Wiley and Dunning, we will observe far more agreement than disagreement:

- First Locus: Prolegomena to Christian Dogmatics
- Second Locus: The Triune God
- Third Locus: The Knowledge of God
- Fourth Locus: The Creation
- Fifth Locus: Sin and Evil
- Sixth Locus: The Person of Jesus Christ
- Seventh Locus: The Work of Christ
- Eighth Locus: The Holy Spirit
- Ninth Locus: The Church
- Tenth Locus: The Means of Grace
- Eleventh Locus: Christian Life
- Twelfth Locus: Eschatology

In terms of these two modules, Module One covers the first through the fifth loci, and Module Two seven through twelve.

Christian theology, then, presents itself in a systematic way, as illustrated by reference to Wiley, Dunning, and the Lutheran dogmatics. Other systematic theologies could be adduced for further examples. There is an orderly progression from matters of introduction (often called **prolegomena**) to the body of theology itself. Since God

the Father is "first among equals" regarding the three Triune Persons, He is treated first. From there the conversation progresses logically to Jesus Christ the Son, the Holy Spirit, the church, the sacraments, the living of the Christian life, and the last things.

However systematic theology may be, the systematic principle is meant to enhance and not smother theological life and creativity. The Holy Spirit is not only the Spirit of order and decorum, but also the Spirit of joyous spontaneity. The systematic principle should never stifle Spirit-induced ecstasy, a word that has a much richer connotation than the drugged-out state it is typically connected with today. To speak "ecstatically" is literally to speak outside of oneself, to stand in the power of the Holy Spirit. The seasoned theological voice of Rob L. Staples rightly puts his finger on this very issue, calling the dialectic between "Spirit" and "Structure" ***The Wesleyan Dilemma*** (*Outward Sign and Inward Grace: The Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality*, Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1991, pp. 21-39). We have already named theology in a Wesleyan key to be a theology of grace, and grace is both ordered and spontaneous.

One tradition inherited from my wife's family is that of exchanging lists of desired gifts prior to the Christmas gift-giving season. Grace works something like that: we must tell God what we desire, so that we can receive His bounty. This is like Staples' idea of the ***structure of grace***.

But grace also sometimes "sneaks up on us" in ways that are delightfully unexpected, unprogrammed, and unplanned for. How boring would Christmas be if we only received what we had asked for? Spontaneous gift giving is akin to the ***spirit of grace***.

Lesson 2: The Sources and Definition of Christian Theology

Due This Lesson

Reading
Three- to four-page autobiography
Bible study
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- discover, identify, and explain some of the ways Scripture, revelation, reason, tradition, experience, and culture contribute to the construction of Christian theology
- embrace the study of theology as a worthy life goal and to “do” theology with competence
- write an acceptable definition of Christian theology that provides a foundation for personal life and ministry

Homework Assignments

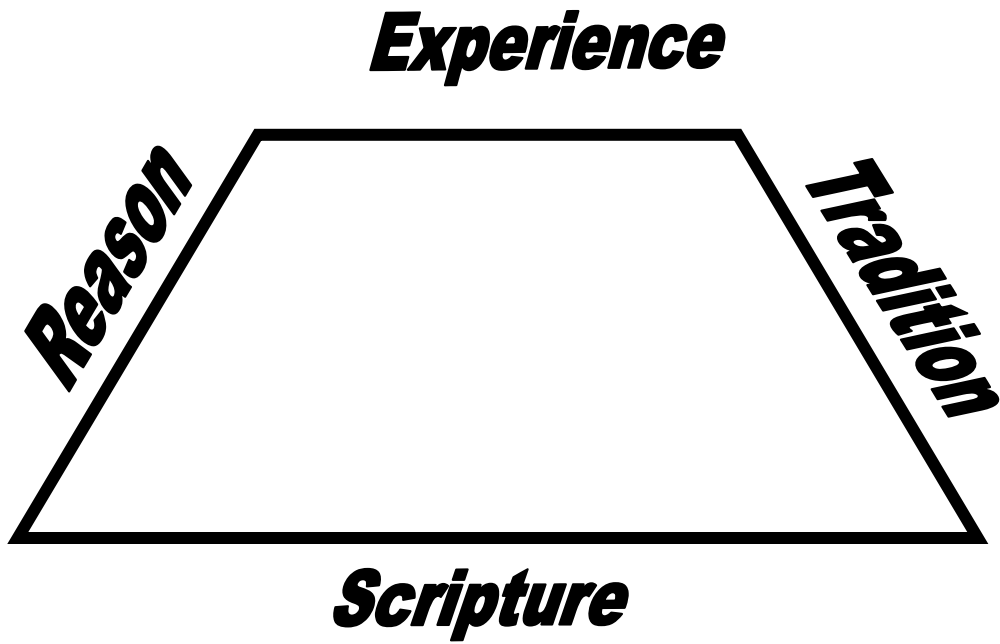
Interview three people.

- Ask them if they use expressions like “Good heavens” or “My God” or “For heaven’s sake” or “For God’s sake” or similar expressions.
- One theologian has written that when such expressions are used, “Neither belief nor unbelief is any longer involved here.”
- If someone uses some of these expressions, ask if he or she is using them in a religious or nonreligious way.
- Write a short essay of three pages reporting your findings.

Journal Prompts

- In your journal write the final draft of your definition of Christian theology.
- You may wish to begin by defining something that seems very familiar to you, but is yet capable of abstraction. Three ideas could be family, freedom, and love. You may also want to try to define evil, to go in a different direction. Once you have defined with success one of these familiar—and yet perplexing—realities, you are ready to try to define Christian theology.
- It is also suggested that you discuss a proper definition with your spouse, your pastor, or your spiritual guide.

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral



Definitions

The classic definition of theology, which can scarcely be improved upon, is "faith seeking understanding." This comes from Augustine, seconded later by Anselm in the Middle Ages.

Jaroslav Pelikan teaches. "Theology is a disciplined reflection upon the truth of Christian revelation."²

The sixteenth-century, Church of England's Richard Hooker defined theology as "the science of things divine."

Thomas Aquinas's earlier definition named it "sacred science."

In the twentieth century Karl Barth used similar language in calling theology "the happy science."

Pelikan thinks theology deserves to be called a science if it has "a prescribed function, a disciplined methodology, and a rational structure."³

Pelikan's Theology⁴

Prescribed Function

- Is there one main function supported by auxiliary functions?
- If so, what is that main function?
- Is it to understand the mysteries of God, to uphold believers in their faith, to present an apology for the gospel to unbelievers, to support the missionary efforts of the church, to evangelize the unreached, to provide a theological grounding for the church's compassionate ministries and social outreach?

Disciplined Methodology

- Is the work of theology to be compared to other sorts of intellectual work?
- How can anyone learn more about his or her way of "doing" theology, that is to say, of theological method?
- Is the discipline theology requires different from the disciplines of the Christian life such as fasting, prayer, attending worship, and reading the Bible?

Rational Structure

- We have earlier likened the task of building a theology to the building of a house.
- Some commentators liken theology to the rules necessary to play a game, or the grammar that gives structure, form, and cohesiveness to every language.

Macquarrie's Formative Factors in Theology⁵

John Macquarrie names six sources of theology in his *Principles of Christian Theology*. Macquarrie makes three important points regarding these six factors.

- They are not all equal and should not be regarded as equals.
- Every one of them taken by itself could conceivably be, and in fact has been, the launching point and centering insight for an entire theological system.
- Every sound theology must take all six of these factors into consideration as it is constructed.

1. Experience

Theology is an intentionally reflective endeavor . . . reflection upon the real, vital, and true experience of the Triune God.

We are inherently social beings, and our own personal religious experiences need to be validated and corroborated by a wider community of faith.

2. Revelation

Primary source of theology

Revelation is characterized by a "gift-like character," and hence it is a kind and form of knowing that is distinctly different from our ordinary ways of knowing.

3. Scripture

The Bible is a witness to the reality of revelation, but is not itself considered as revelation.

Here we must part company with Macquarrie, preferring instead the outlook of Karl Barth, who taught that revelation followed a triune pattern. Jesus Christ is incarnate revelation, the Bible is written revelation, and the preached Word can become, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, spoken revelation.

4. Tradition

“Scripture needs the complement of tradition in order to guard against private interpretations of scripture, for almost anything can be read into Scripture.” Tradition lives when the Holy Spirit is the enlivening breath animating the Church and its members; tradition dies when merely human efforts reject divine presence.

5. Culture

To say that one must be culturally aware is simply to claim that every theologian must be in the world.

Culture should be used to describe the way people organize and live their lives.

6. Reason

How we use our reasoning capacity is one way we demonstrate to ourselves and to the world exactly where we stand.

Macquarrie-Wesley Comparison

Macquarrie	Wesley
Experience	Scripture
Revelation	Tradition
Scripture	Reason
Tradition	Experience
Culture	
Reason	

Study Guide for Articles of Faith

In small groups study one of the following Articles of Faith from the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene.⁶

- The Triune God
- The Holy Scriptures
- Free Agency
- The Church
- The Lord's Supper

Follow this guide for the study of your assigned article.

1. Read the supporting scriptures in at least two translations.
2. Match ideas, phrases, and words you find in the scripture passage with ideas, phrases, and words in the Article of Faith being studied.
3. Is the connection between the Article of Faith and the Bible passage under study, direct and primary, or is it indirect and incidental?
4. If you were going to preach on the topic treated in the article under study, what two Bible texts would you rely upon the most?
5. If you were to plan a worship service based on the theme of this Article of Faith and the selected scriptures, what hymns or gospel songs could you use to support this theme? What prayer, responsive readings, and other acts of praise?

TRADITION

How does tradition contribute to Christian theology?

Discussion starters:

1. "Tradition" is derived from the Greek word "paradosis," which suggests, "that which has been delivered." It also stands on the Latin word "traditio" which means, "that which is passed on."
2. Read 2 Timothy 2:1-2.
3. One way tradition lives up to its "paradosis" and "traditio" duties to deliver or pass on the Christian faith is through the creeds.
 - Read aloud the Apostles' Creed. (You may also want to look at the Nicene Creed, no. 14 in *Sing to the Lord*.)
 - Explain the concepts and discuss how the theological affirmations of the creeds have been integrated into your church's and your personal theology.
4. Tradition alone cannot hold up the "house of theology." That would be to give all the votes to the dead. But when mortared into the foundation with Scripture, experience, and reason then let the rains come.

The Apostles' Creed⁷

I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;

He descended into hades;
and the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Church universal,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

Experience

Experience as Contributor to Theology

1. Nazarene theologian H. Ray Dunning notes that a true religious experience includes
 - an awareness of an Other impinging upon one's consciousness (Rudolf Otto calls this the Numinous—the encounter with the Holy).
 - a basic orientation or reorientation of one's life and being.⁸

2. "My mother used to tell of her experience with God even before she knew how to get saved. She had been to church a few times, but didn't even have a Bible. Her own mother died when my mom was a child. Motherless, she was farmed out to relatives. Even to her old age, Mother would say, "I will never get over my encounters with God as a child. I didn't really know how to pray. The people I stayed with seldom went to church for any reason. I worked hard, and was harshly disciplined. And I was lonely—but not truly alone. For after my chores were done on that Kansas farm I would often walk through the prairie grass or sit by the creek that ran through the Flint Hills and gaze at the sunset. And God would come and give me strength and hope. I knew the Lord was my friend, even though no one told me that. 'I have been a Christian for many years now,' Mom would say, 'but God has never been more real to me than when I needed Him so desperately as a motherless child.'" —Wesley D. Tracy
 - Does this experience meet the stated criteria in "1" above?
 - Have you had a similar experience?
 - How do you think the mother in this anecdote would react to the old saying that "God never hears a sinner's prayer"?

3. Read Isaiah 6 and Acts 9:1-9, 17-19.
 - Were Isaiah and Saul aware of an Other impinging on their consciousness?
 - Did this encounter reorient their lives? How?
 - In what ways did this encounter influence their theology, their belief systems?

4. John Wesley's journal entry from May 24, 1738, may also be relevant here. He describes his heart as being strangely warmed.

5. Though "experience" is indeed a very broad concept, it often means, "faith seeking understanding" of its subjective side.

Reason

Reason as Contributor to Theology

1. Write for five minutes on the quotation attributed to the French philosopher Blaise Pascal: "The heart has reasons, which the reason cannot know or fathom."
2. Read Romans 1:19-20. What does this scripture say about the use of reason in knowing God?
3. Define what you think the phrase "natural theology" means.
4. Reflect on your interactions with people of a different race you have known or currently know. Are the reasoning processes of African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, or whites different from each other? Does this say anything about the world God has created?
5. Thomas Aquinas believed the attempt to demonstrate or "prove" the existence of God was to love God with all of one's mind. What do you think of that?

Culture

Culture as Contributor to Theology

1. Culture always has a hammer and saw and trowel working away in “the house of theology.” Sometimes it makes great and good contributions; sometimes it boards up a window. Evaluate the theological construction revealed in the following example:

In Kansas City a television reporter was talking about a severe case of child abuse. Showing rare good taste, instead of showing the battered and bruised child on camera, the reporter interviewed a sociologist, asking, “Why do parents abuse their children?”

The sociologist replied, “They really have no choice. Their parents abused them, and that’s the only way they know to relate to children.” She repeated herself. In a 45-second clip she said six times, “They really have no choice.”

- In what direction has culture shoved this sociologist’s doctrine of humanity? Her beliefs about free will? The power of the environment in raising children?
 - Does the Bible treat human beings as “having no choice” or as “free and responsible”?
2. Culture has many good things to contribute, for it represents the best way a group of people has found to cope with the challenges and opportunities of life.
 - In what ways did Jesus Christ, the Son of God, adapt to and accommodate human culture in order to express redemptive love?
 3. List some positive practices in the culture of your nation, your city, your church, and your family that, though they may not be particularly religious, work toward the good of all. Discuss ways in which such factors help to construct the “house of theology.”

Lesson 3: How Can We Speak of God?

Due This Lesson

Three-person interview
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- appreciate that the Triune God has made himself known to mortals
- recognize how theological speech is related to common, everyday speech, yet also different from it
- learn something of analogical speech, and how this relates to the general task of speaking and thinking about God

Homework Assignments

Research/Writing

Find eight or ten sentences/statements containing the word "revelation." These sentences should **not** be taken from books of Christian theology, but rather from general media sources such as magazines, the Internet, advertising, newspapers, television, and so forth. Once the sentences have been collected, analyze the various uses of "revelation" that have been uncovered, showing agreement and disagreement with the Christian view of revelation.

Journal Prompt

Go to a favorite spot of natural or scenic beauty, a wayside, a park, or a stream. Look around you. Do you see the hand of God there?

Orientation Quotes

"A God comprehended is a God denied."

"If one thinks he has understood God, what he has understood is *not* God."

"If one subjects everything to reason our religion will lose its mystery and its supernatural character. If one offends the principles of reason our religion will be absurd and ridiculous."

—Blaise Pascal

"Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior."

—Isaiah 45:15, NIV

"Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as his counselor has instructed him?"

—Isaiah 40:13, RSV

"What God has given to us is inexhaustible, but we are only little people, still on the way to fully understanding everything, while the gospel needs restating in ever new situations."

—Hendrikus Berkhof⁹

"As a result of the earthly distance and man's guilty estrangement from God, revelation now takes place in a hidden manner."

—Hendrikus Berkhof¹⁰

"The doctrine of revelation is not simply one doctrine among others, but a doctrine by which every other doctrine may be said to stand or fall."

—Jaroslav Pelikan¹¹

"O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!"

Romans 11:33, RSV

"For who in the skies above can compare with the LORD?"

Psalms 89:6a

To *understand* and to *comprehend* God is, using the common understandings of these words, to approach God cognitively, analytically, rationally. The gift of a mind is among God's choicest bestowments. When the Holy Spirit's light infuses the human mind we can, with discernment, know God.

Speaking of God

Three ways of speaking about God are often utilized by Christian theologians.

Two of these ways yield unproductive results, which leads us to conclude that the third way is the best way.

Univocal

This simply means that whatever we say about ourselves as creatures must be true in the same way about God, and vice versa.

Equivocal

Equivocal speech means there are no points of contact at all between the divine and the human.

Analogical

Analogical speech is symbolic speech. God is *like* a ferocious lion, a menacing she-bear . . . God is also *like* such heavenly and earthly certitudes as light, cloud, rock . . . God is also *like* such heavenly and earthly certitudes as light, cloud, rock.

The Use of Analogy

- Analogies connect what is otherwise vague and abstract with the real world of human experience and knowing.
- Analogies are not forever. They take their meaning from the surrounding culture of meaning. Hence new situations and new occasions may well call forth fresh ways of addressing God analogically.
- Analogies are important for the missions work of the Christian church, because they allow the traditional and often timeless statements about God to be restated in fresh and relevant ways. But as we suggested above, there are limits as to what is appropriate. Jesus Christ is the *Lamb of God*, but this cannot be translated into the “pig of God” just because a given culture favors pigs over lambs. Pigs are not lambs, and lambs are not pigs.
- Analogies are also appropriate for every level of Christian education. To tell a primary learner that Jesus is just like your best friend invites the immediate comparison between the friend, who is known, and Jesus, who is now known according to how the best friend is known.

One Analogy That May Not Work and Two That Do Work

Analogia entis or the analogy of being

The analogy of being says there is an unbroken chain of being from the Triune God through celestial beings such as angels, through human beings, through the animal kingdom, perhaps ending with lower life forms such as insects.

Analogia fides or the analogy of faith

Analogia relationalis or the analogy of relations

We know God through faith, through relating to Him through His Son Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and these two analogies make this valuable point.

Reality of Revelation

Jaroslav Pelikan indicates some of the possible meanings we may attach to revelation.

- “The disclosure of the hidden future.” This is suggested by the Greek word *apokalypsis*, which means “revelation.”
- Revelation as event, which is grounded in the covenant theology of the Old Testament and taken up by Christian theology.
- The chief revelatory event for Christians is the Incarnation, meaning that now revelation is to be found in a person, Jesus Christ.
- Revelation as doctrine, for example 1 Timothy 6:20, “Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you” (in some versions “the deposit of faith”).¹²

Pelikan's Four Points Study Guide

1. Which of these four examples of defining revelation is best understood by the average Christian layperson?
2. Write the outline of a parable expressing the truth of revelation as found in one of Pelikan's definitions. You may recall some of the parables of Jesus Christ as the truths they were meant to impart.
3. Contrast Christian revelation with ideas in the broader culture that pose themselves as "revelatory" in quality and nature. Some obvious "false" revelations would be psychics and the new age movement. But what of talk show hosts? Are they selling their own special brand of revelation? What about the entire American consumer culture? How much advertising is predicated on "revelation"?
4. What are the implications of Christian revelation for the devotional life?
5. How does this information instruct my intellectual life? How is the "knowing" of revelation different from, and related to, any other sort of knowing?
6. In what ways does what we have studied inform the practice of the Christian ministry?
7. What are the implications for Christian worship?
8. If we truly believe God is in many ways hidden, transcendent, and unknowable, why are there so many books, tapes, workshops, and traveling seminars that promise "Five Easy Steps to Divine Intimacy"?

Two Ways of Speaking of Revelation

General and Special Revelation

General revelation is that revelation which God has sown in the created world, in moral order, in human conscience, in the patterns of history that prove God loves and cares for the world, in the sense of beauty that sometimes overtakes all but the most jaded and cynical.

Special revelation is closely tied to the biblical history of creation and redemption.

The veteran Nazarene theologian H. Ray Dunning stresses the importance of special revelation as follows:

The Christian faith understands itself to be a response to a divine self-disclosure. It claims that God has made himself known in a preliminary way in a history recorded in the sacred writings known as the Old Testament and in a final and decisive way in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. Revelation, the doctrine of this divine self-disclosure, is the central methodological category of Christian theology.¹³

Propositional Revelation and Experiential Revelation

Propositional revelation or revelation as doctrine

The American Fundamentalists of the 1920s believed in propositional revelation. Five or six propositions comprised the center of Christian theology, and everything else had to be understood in terms of this list.

- the inerrancy of the Bible
- the deity of Jesus Christ
- the virgin birth of Christ
- the substitutionary atonement for sins
- the miracles of Christ
- the literal Second Coming

Experiential revelation or revelation as encounter

Those who hold to this idea say, with much plausibility, that God does not reveal merely words or propositions about himself, but reveals His very essence, His inner self, the Triune God.

Quotes from Karl Barth

Theology must begin with Jesus Christ, and not with general principles, however better, or, at any rate, more relevant and illuminating, they may appear to be: as though He were a continuation of the knowledge and Word of God, and not its root and origin, not indeed the very Word of God itself. Theology must also end with Him, and not with supposedly self-evident general conclusions about what is particularly enclosed and disclosed in Him: as though the fruits could be shaken from this tree; as though in the things of God there were anything general which we could know and designate in addition to and even independently of this particular. The obscurities and ambiguities of our way were illuminated in the measure we held fast to that name and in the measure that we let Him be the first and the last, according to the testimony of Holy Scripture. Against all the imaginations and errors in which we seem to be so hopelessly entangled when we try to speak of God, God will indeed maintain Himself if we only allow the name of Jesus Christ to be maintained in our thinking as the beginning and the end of all our thoughts.¹⁴

It would be the false deity of a false God if in His deity His humanity did not also immediately encounter us. Such false deities are by Jesus Christ once for all made a laughingstock. In Him the fact is once for all established that God does not exist without man.¹⁵

In Jesus Christ there is no isolation of man from God or of God from man.¹⁶

He is the Lord humbled for communion with man and likewise the Servant exalted to communion with God. He is the Word spoken from the loftiest, most luminous transcendence and likewise the Word heard in the deepest, darkest immanence. He is both, without their being confused but also without their being divided; He is wholly the one and wholly the other. Thus in this oneness Jesus Christ is the Mediator, the Reconciler, between God and man. Thus He comes forward to **man** on behalf of **God** calling for and awakening faith, love, and hope, and to **God** on behalf of **man**, representing man, making satisfaction and interceding. Thus He attests and guarantees to man God's free **grace** and at the same time attests and guarantees to God man's free **gratitude**.¹⁷

Prayer of St. Augustine¹⁸

"GOD, always the same, let me know myself, let me know you. I have prayed. . . .

"God our Father who exhorts us to pray, who makes it possible for us to pray, our entreaty is made to you, for when we pray to you we live better and we are better.

"Hear me groping in these glooms, and stretch forth your right hand to me. Shed your light on me, call me back from my wanderings. Bring yourself into me so that I may in the same way return to you. Amen."

Lesson 4: Five Theological Models of Revelation

Due This Lesson

Eight-ten "revelation" statements
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- understand the five basic views of revelation
- appreciate the centrality of the doctrine of revelation for all of Christian theology
- evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of revelation when viewed in terms of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, which necessarily includes personal experience

Homework Assignments

The Models of Revelation

- Interview two Nazarene pastors. Explain to them the five models of revelation as best you are able. Ask each of them to say which of the five models is typical of the Church of the Nazarene, both laity and clergy.
- Write a three-page paper about the experience and the responses.

Journal Prompt

All Christians agree in one way or another that Jesus Christ reveals the truth about God. For you personally, how, why, and under what conditions does Christ reveal the reality of God?

Revelation as Doctrine

Francis Schaeffer represents this perspective when he writes, "God has spoken in a linguistic propositional form, truth concerning himself and truth concerning man, history, and the universe."¹⁹ Faith would then be mental and moral assent to the propositions that can be clearly "mined" from the Bible.

Advantages of the revelation as doctrine approach are chiefly these:

- Those who live their Christian lives according to this plan have a clear and distinct sense of where they stand as Christians. Most if not all ambiguity, perplexity, and confusion are swept away, leaving only the clear and piercing light of Christian truth.
- Likewise, someone who is schooled in this approach to revelation will be able to give a clear and convincing account of his or her Christian faith. Propositional revelation is a powerful tool for Christian apologetics.
- Because all are clear as to where they stand, a lively sense of mission and outreach is fostered.

Weaknesses include:

- Does the Bible make any self-sustaining claims of propositional infallibility? In other words, is the revelation as doctrine model even supported in the Bible?
- This model is highly authoritarian. It is based on *Thus Saith the Lord* rather than on *Come, Let Us Reason Together*.
- In communications as a whole, propositions ordinarily play a rather minor role.
- God really reveals not propositions, but rather *himself*.
- This model of revelation does not promote "dialogue" with other religions, and not even with other Christians who are not convinced of the truth of propositional revelation.

Revelation as History

Here revelation means the “mighty acts” through which God reveals himself in history.

Strengths of revelation as history would be:

- The Bible seems to depict a God who acts, first of all in the history of Israel, and in the fullness of time in His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. This way of understanding the Bible is sometimes called the *Heilsgeschichte* approach, a German compound word meaning “holy history,” or (better) “the history of salvation.”
- God is a God who acts, who willingly engages people where they need Him the most, in their respective histories.
- Not only does God act, but in the Bible God consistently acts on behalf of the poor, a point picked up today by liberation and African-American theologians.

Weaknesses:

- It is very difficult to determine exactly *what* is an act of God.
- Should “event” be elevated over “word” in the Bible? The Incarnation is the “Word made flesh.” In the Old Testament Israel was often reminded to “Hear, O Israel.”
- Much of what is found in the Bible is not really historical material at all; for example, the Wisdom literature.
- Although there is history in the Bible, the consistent viewing of things through the lens of history has only been possible since the rise of “historical consciousness,” which is barely 200 years old. Earlier periods in the history of the church may not have used history as a means of interpretation. James Barr, for example, has written

It is certain that our forefathers, emphatically as they understood that Christian faith was implanted in earthly reality, in space and time, flesh and blood, were able to do this without accepting ‘history’ as an organizing bracket in their theology at all.²⁰

Revelation as Inner Experience

Revelation as inner experience is more concerned with the *reception* of revelation than with the *giving* of revelation.

Advantages of viewing revelation as inner experience include:

- Promotes the devotional life.
- May lead the gifted to write poetry and hymn lyrics that edify the Body of Christ.
- May also further dialogue with other religions, because Christian religious experience may be similar in some ways to the experience of followers of other religions.

Weaknesses

- Seems to assume one is “spiritually gifted” in much the same way some people have a “knack” for music, art, or the study of languages. But not everyone is religiously “musical” in exactly that way. This model may therefore be somewhat elitist and exclusive.
- Certainly there are instances in the Bible of “ecstasy” before God, but we must also remember that some of the prophets complained they were deaf, dumb, and blind when it came to the knowledge of God.

Revelation as Dialectical Presence

Dialectics is a “call and response” to Christian theology and living. Presence implies that whatever the first apostles felt and believed when in the presence of Jesus Christ is also available to us today.

The advantages of the dialectical presence view are:

- Has some foundation in the Bible, especially in the prophets and the “message about the cross” (1 Cor 1:18).
- Because this view of revelation centers in Jesus Christ, it gives new force and meaning to the subjects of sin and redemption.
- The emphasis on Word and Spirit may also lead to a renewed interest in the doctrine of the Trinity.
- May lead to strong preaching, with its heavy emphasis on the Word of God made available in Jesus Christ.

A basic criticism of this persuasion would be:

- The stress on Jesus Christ is to be praised, but this may lead to what is sometimes called “Christomonism,” meaning revelation is *nowhere found* but in Jesus Christ. This seems like an extreme position, which may work against the idea mentioned above of *general revelation*, wherein God is known through nature, creation, art, beauty, history, politics, family life, and so forth.

Revelation as New Awareness

This model is close to revelation as inner experience, although that idea is here expanded and "radicalized." "New awareness" means cosmic consciousness in ways that mere inner experience does not. To be in the company of new awareness is also to appreciate the unity of all world religions.

Summarizing the Five Models

In the carefully chosen words of Avery Dulles, here are summary statements of all five of the models we have discussed:

- Revelation is divinely authoritative doctrine inerrantly proposed as God's word by the Bible or by official church teaching.
- Revelation is the manifestation of God's saving power by His great deeds in history.
- Revelation is the self-manifestation of God by His intimate presence in the depths of the human spirit.
- Revelation is God's address to those whom He encounters with His word in Scripture and Christian proclamation.
- Revelation is a breakthrough to a higher level of consciousness as humanity is drawn to a fuller participation in the divine creativity.²¹

Revelation in Hymns

<i>Sing to the Lord</i>	Hymn Title	Evidence
124	"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"	
205	"Tell Me the Story of Jesus"	
152	"Fairest Lord Jesus"	
108	"All That Thrills My Soul"	
625	"What a Friend We Have in Jesus"	
134	"My Jesus, I Love Thee"	
163	"O Come, O Come Emmanuel"	
281	"Jesus Paid It All"	
224	"My Savior's Love"	
225	"And Can It Be?"	
432	"Arise My Soul, Arise"	

Evaluating the Five Models of Revelation

You have now studied the strengths and weaknesses of five models of revelation. Consider these five once again in terms of what you know of Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience—including your own personal experience. Having evaluated these models, you are now asked to rank them according to your personal choice, as to how they match up with the Wesleyan Quadrilateral of Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience. Rank the five from one to five, with **ONE** being the greatest agreement with the Wesleyan Quadrilateral and **FIVE** being the least agreement. Be prepared to explain and defend your ranking. You may want to write out some of your reasons.

_____ **Revelation as Doctrine**—Revelation is divinely authoritative doctrine that is inerrantly proposed as God’s word in the Bible and/or by official church teaching or dogma.

_____ **Revelation as History**—Revelation is the self-revelation of God by His great deeds in history.

_____ **Revelation as Inner Awareness**—Revelation is the self-revelation of God through His intimate presence in the depths of the human spirit.

_____ **Revelation as Dialectical Presence**—Revelation is God’s address to those whom He encounters and meets through His word in Scripture and in Christian proclamation.

_____ **Revelation as New Awareness**—Revelation is a cosmic or transcendental breakthrough to a higher level of consciousness, as humanity is drawn toward an ever-greater participation and immersion in the divine creativity.

Lesson 5: Knowing God as Creator

Due This Lesson

Three-page interview paper
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- value the centrality of God as Creator for the whole of Christian theology
- see the necessary connection between our thoughts about creation and other points of Christian theology
- become discerning observers of other worldviews, to evaluate and understand how they agree and disagree with Christian perspectives

Homework Assignments

Hymn Study

- Find "This Is My Father's World" (p. 75 in *Sing to the Lord*) and "Stewards of God's Creation" (p. 76 in *Sing to the Lord*).
- Write a 2- to 3-page essay demonstrating how both God's immanence and transcendence can be found in these two selections.

Journal Prompt

- Reflect on the phrase or verse from one of the two hymns that stood out to you.
- How have events in your past influenced your understanding of God as Creator?

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling²²

Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heav'n, to earth come down!
Fix in us thy humble dwelling;
All thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, Thou art all compassion;
Pure, unbounded love Thou art,
Visit us with Thy salvation;
Enter ev'ry trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe, Thy loving Spirit
Into ev'ry troubled breast!
Let us all in Thee inherit
Let us find that second rest.
Take away our bent to sinning;
Alpha and Omega be.
End of faith, as its Beginning,
Set our hearts at liberty.

Come, Almighty to Deliver;
Let us all Thy life receive.
Suddenly return, and never,
Nevermore Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve Thee as Thy hosts above,
Pray and praise Thee without ceasing,
Glory in Thy perfect love.

Finish then Thy new creation;
Pure and spotless let us be.
Let us see Thy great salvation,
Perfectly restored in Thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heav'n we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

—Charles Wesley

Bible Study about Creation

PART 1: Bible Passages about the Creation:

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| A. Psalm 19:1 | B. Genesis 1:31 | C. 1 Timothy 4:4 |
| D. Jeremiah 10:12 | E. Psalm 24:1 | F. John 1:3 |
| G. Genesis 1:1 | H. Psalm 74:16 | I. Hebrews 1:1 |
| J. Psalm 8:1 | K. Genesis 1:26 | L. Psalm 8:6 |
| M. Exodus 4:11 | N. Colossians 1:16 | O. Psalm 33:6 |

PART 2: Creation Statements

Find a verse (or verses) that

- _____ 1) teaches that creation came about by God's power, wisdom, and understanding.
- _____ 2) says human beings were created in God's image.
- _____ 3) says the heavens declare the handiwork of God.
- _____ 4) shows that humankind is responsible to God for the care of the earth and its creatures.
- _____ 5) the earth was created out of nothing.
- _____ 6) the earth was created by God's word.
- _____ 7) tells us to whom all creation belongs.
- _____ 8) reveals the role of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, in creation.
- _____ 9) teaches us that God created the days and the seasons.
- _____ 10) reveals who created the earth.
- _____ 11) asserts the original goodness of all that God had made.
- _____ 12) our response to the original goodness of all things must be thanksgiving.

Biblical Understanding of Creation

1. All that there is, or could be, owes its existence to the sovereign God. The idea of *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing) is not explicitly found in Genesis, but does not violate the spirit of Genesis.
2. God is a *creator* and not merely an *arranger* or *designer* of materials that were already there.
3. Creation is basically good, although evil soon perverts and ruins God's good world.
4. Because God created all things good, the presence of evil in the world does not count against God's goodness.
5. Creation is the work of the entire Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
6. The goal toward which creation is headed is expressed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.
7. Therefore creation is the first link in the chain that is the Christian doctrine of redemption: *creation—covenant—salvation*.
8. Reconciliation should be thought of as occurring on a cosmic scale, enveloping thrones, powers, dominions, principalities, and authorities, and not merely individual souls.

The New Creation²³

As there will be no more death, and no more pain or sickness preparatory thereto; as there will be no more grieving for or parting with friends; so there will be no more sorrow or crying. Nay, but there will be a greater deliverance than all this; for there will be no more sin. And to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-[in]-One God, and of all the creatures in him!

—John Wesley

Three Views of God's Relationship to Creation

Instructions: As you listen to the remarks about these three views, try to associate the phrases and names listed on the left with the three schools of thought listed on the right. For example, if you think number 1, "das ganz Andere," is about Transcendence, you would place 1 on the line below Transcendence.

<i>Phrases and Names</i>	<i>Schools of Thought</i>
1. das ganz Andere	Immanence
2. Sallie McFague	
3. Omnipresence	
4. Karl Barth	_____
5. Hinduism	
6. Deism	Transcendence
7. God Is Other, People	
8. The whole world is God's body	
9. God's way of being near	_____
10. Isaiah 6	
11. Pantheism	Theism
12. God is no disinterested bystander	
13. Divine empathy	_____
14. New Age spirituality	
15. A painter's relationship to his or her work	

Lesson 6: What Kind of a World Is It?

Due This Lesson

Essay about two hymns
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help

- beginning students of Christian theology understand further the problem of evil, which is one of the most serious barricades to authentic Christian faith
- give beginning pastors some practical suggestions they can employ in giving counsel to those asking for explanations and analyses regarding the continuing presence of evil in a world overseen by a good God
- give some introductory materials on the discussion of science and religion

Homework Assignments

You have the choice of doing one of the following two assignments, but not both:

1. Write a three-page book review of Al Truesdale's *If God Is God, Then Why? Letters from Oklahoma City* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1997), **or** *If God Is God, Then Why? Letters from New York City* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2002). Both are available from the Nazarene Publishing House. A skilled book review should accomplish two things at a minimum:
 - an "unpacking" of the contents of the book. The reader of your review should be given enough information about the book's arguments and flow of thought to know that you have studied the book thoroughly.
 - some of your personal responses to the book, including especially how it affected you personally. Will anyone be reading this book twenty years from now? Would you recommend it to a friend? If you could have coffee with the author, what are two or three questions you would ask the author?
2. Collect a media file of articles dealing with the controversy surrounding the relationship between science and religion. The media file should contain at least ten entries. Articles should be from both secular and religious publications. You may use the Internet but limit Internet collection to five articles. Do not collect articles only from Christian publications or secular publications.

Visit a large shopping area and observe the word "power" in the general public arena. Write down six to eight uses of the word "power" and then compare these to the Christian use of the power of God.

Journal Prompts

How has evil affected my personal life? As I reflect on the incursion of evil into my life, am I able to define evil and the problem of evil with greater care and relevance?

The Dilemma of God and Evil

Theodicy, which derives from the Greek words for God (*theos*) and justice (*dike*), is the attempt to speak of the goodness and fairness of God while at the same time taking full account of evil.

Three sides to the problem of evil

- God is unsurpassably good.
- God is incomparably powerful.
- Suffering and evil nonetheless exist. Why?²⁴

Three tempting solutions, with warnings against accepting any of them:

- To say that evil is not really evil after all. Yet this is to ignore a plain fact of our lives, the persistence of evil.
- To deny the absolute goodness of God. Then God is no longer the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition, brimming over with unceasing care, love, and mercy.
- To claim that the nasty continuance of evil must indicate some limitation of God's power. If God is limited in power, then this must be the best God is capable of. Evil then becomes part of finite existence and God becomes less than all-powerful.²⁵

Oden's summary statement is this:

"The Almighty God, unsurpassable in benevolence, allows conditions and contingencies to occur that by the abuse of freedom result in real evil and suffering, yet God's incomparable love and power are not diminished. But how can all three be held together? The answer involves the patient reflection on Scripture and tradition and a careful examination of freedom abused."²⁶

Eight Affirmations Regarding the Problem of Evil
Affirmation One: God Does Not Directly Will Suffering

God does not wish any ill to His creation or anything in it. The created order is good because it reflects the goodness God has planted within it. Yet because of sin and finitude, suffering and evil are very much a part of the everyday fabric of our lives. Suffering may be permitted and allowed by God, as in the case of Job, but is never *directly willed by God*. Oden explains:

The natural order, with time, causality, and finitude, is the setting in which God's own goodness is to be received and experienced insofar as human finitude proportionally is able to experience it. However, in light of our personal and social sin, it happens that guilt, anxiety, and suffering enter into the otherwise good world.²⁷

Pastoral Scene: What's Wrong—or Right—with This Picture?

Meg Woodson, a pastor's wife, gave birth to two children.

They are both dead now.

Both died from cystic fibrosis—CF they call it. Joey died at age 12. Peggy lived to become a college student. She braced herself for her last trip to the hospital by taking a 3x5 card with a quotation from William Barclay on it: "Endurance is not just the ability to bear a hard thing, but to turn it into glory." How she had hoped to turn this hard thing—CF—into glory.

But she spent most of her last few days clutching her quote card and screaming prayers to God to stop the pain. Her mother said God "decided to let her death top the horror charts."

"I will never forget," Meg Woodson said, "those shrill, piercing, primal screams."

Afterward she wrote to her friend Philip Yancey, "I tell you, Philip, it does not help to talk of . . . God almost always letting the physical process of a disease run its course. Because if He ever intervenes, then at every point of human suffering He makes a decision to intervene or not, and in Peggy's case His choice was 'Let CF rip'. . . . How could God be in a situation like that and sit on His hands?"²⁸

If you were Meg's pastor, what would you think, say, and do?

Eight Affirmations Regarding the Problem of Evil

Affirmation Two: The Abuse of Free Will Results in Evil

This is perhaps the most common and accepted approach to formulating any theodicy. It exonerates God and places the blame on the abuse of human freedom by creatures who are attempting to be God. We would all probably agree with Oden,

God apparently would have done less than the best if God had created a whole world without any free beings capable of moral activity and therefore without some proportional capacity for communion with God himself.²⁹

Tertullian, an early Christian theologian of the late second and early third century, believed God knew that humans would abuse the freedom he gave them, but this could be prevented only by taking away from humankind those very attributes which most defined human nature: intelligence, accountability, responsibility, and freedom.

The free will defense admits, sadly, that human freedom has produced much evil in the world. But it claims, with justification, that human freedom has produced far more good than evil throughout history.

Pastoral Scene: What's Wrong—or Right—with This Picture?

I don't usually get ruffled at a funeral, but the pastor upset me at Doug's final rites. He proclaimed, "God has called Doug home." It was tragic enough. Doug had left a wife and two teenage sons behind. But how anyone could point to God's calling Doug home is quite beyond me.

Truth is, he worked himself to death at the age of 51. He worked a full-time job and also maintained his own business on the side. He never took a vacation and got little rest. Friends tried to warn him, but Doug was supporting not only his family, but also every toy and gadget he could make a down payment on—boat, golf cart, Lexus, RV, and a vacation home. He played the stock market like a gambler. His love of money and things was all-consuming.

If you wanted to put his death in biblical or religious terms I wouldn't say, "God called him home." I would say he was kicked to death by the golden calf.

Should we blame God for what our free choices do to us? What would you have said if you had to preach Doug's funeral?

Eight Affirmations Regarding the Problem of Evil
**Affirmation Three: God's Power Can Draw Good
Out of Any Evil**

From the long-range view of history, "the Fall" of Adam can be viewed as a "happy fall." Adam fell in order to lead to the possibility of redemption. "If Adam had not fallen," writes Oden, "God would not have had the occasion of this fall out of which to bring a far greater good, in fact history's greatest good, redemption in Jesus Christ."³⁰

The biblical and historical evidence for this claim is very impressive. Oden writes:

When the perversions of power or natural calamities lay human societies low, the human spirit is powerfully challenged to re-seed and re-root. The evidence is abundant: bondage in Egypt, the struggle for the promised land, Babylonian captivity, Job's calamities, the crucifixion of Jesus, Paul's thorn in the flesh, the blood of the martyrs, the fall of Rome, and so on—a song of many verses.³¹

Many wise Christian theologians, including especially Augustine, have taught that God allows evil to exist so that in His sovereign will and timing, He can bring something much greater from evil.

Pastoral Scene: What's Wrong—or Right—with This Picture?

The preacher in Manila, The Philippines, shared with us the story of the thorn birds. It is a legend of the ancient peoples of the Australian outback. This ancient myth is about a bird that sings just once in its life. But it sings more sweetly than any other creature on the earth. From the moment it leaves its nest it searches for a thorn tree, and does not rest until it has found one.

Then, flying among the savage branches, it impales itself upon the longest and sharpest spine. And dying, it rises above its own agony to out-carol the lark and the nightingale.

One superlative song, and its life is the price. But when the thornbird sings, the world stops to listen, and God in His heaven smiles. For the best is only bought at the cost of great pain . . . or so goes the legend.

Then the preacher told us, "While this story does not exactly mirror the Christian faith, it does bring to mind the noble truth that in all probability—

The noblest song you will ever sing
The most redemptive service you will ever give
The most helpful hand you will ever lend
Will somehow be related to your deepest suffering."

As a pastor, would you counsel your people that even if they experience evil, God will redeem it and bring good out of it? Why? Are there any scriptures related to this?

Eight Affirmations Regarding the Problem of Evil

Affirmation Four: Evil Does Not Limit God's Power

God is infinitely free, but this freedom is not threatened by the gift of freedom God gives to His creatures. It is not a "zero sum" game, where the universe is allotted only a finite supply of freedom, which God arbitrarily controls. Here is Oden's summary statement of this point:

Only God is so unsurpassably powerful that he is willing to take the 'risk' . . . of living in intimate dialogue and communion with a foreseeably fallen, sinful, self-alienating creature, and all this without any threat to God's own identity or holiness!³²

Pastoral Scene: What's Wrong—or Right—with This Picture?

Everyone was enjoying a day at the lake. The temperature was moderate and the humidity virtually nonexistent. Fish were biting in the morning mist. A noontime picnic brought everyone together for a feast of chocolate cake, watermelon, and grilled hot dogs. People were looking forward to the evening devotional around the campfire. This annual family reunion was one not soon to be forgotten.

About 3:30 p.m., as the women were tidying around the cabin and the children water-skiing, someone wondered where two-year-old Samatha might be. Some thought she was taking a nap. Others thought she might have ridden with the men into the nearby village to buy more provisions. Others were certain she was riding in the ski boat and having the time of her life.

None of these options proved true. A vague sense of "we will find her eventually" soured into a gripping panic. Frantic searches ensued. Darkness closed. The local county sheriff was called in to assist with the search.

After a fruitless, all-night search, Samatha's bloated and waterlogged body washed up on the lakeshore five cabins away. Everyone was horrified. Fingers were pointed all the way around. How could people be so irresponsible as to believe someone else was watching this toddler?

At the memorial service the pastor remarked more than once about how God had called one of his best little angels back home again. Some nodded in silent agreement with this sentiment; others fumed at the thought of making God somehow complicit in this horror.

Uncle Bill and Aunt Verna, who were marginal churchgoers at best, were moved by the memorial service. They were heard to say to other family members that they now realized just how valuable life is, how they were now ready to receive life as a gift from God as never before. The funeral was a kind of "conversion" for Uncle Bill and Aunt Verna.

Some good apparently came from this evil. Was the death of the toddler too high of a price to pay for this good?

Eight Affirmations Regarding the Problem of Evil
Affirmation Five: Suffering May Teach Us Many
Valuable Lessons

The true meaning of chastisement in the Bible, Oden instructs, is not vengeful and malicious punishment inflicted by God, but is rather aid, comfort, and help through cleansing. Hebrews 12:6 is an important verse to remember here: "The Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts."

Growth happens through opposition and trial.

Pastoral Scene: What's Wrong—or Right—with This Picture?

M. Craig Barnes was called to pastor the National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D. C. The board members knew exactly what kind of pastor they wanted. Barnes had a fine résumé. He was a man of talent, achievement, vision, and most of all hard work.

He accepted the call and plunged into the work. Then there was this lump on his neck. Cancer in the thyroid gland.

Three surgeries later the doctors were optimistic about having cut away all of the cancer. He wrote in his recent book, *When God Interrupts*, "I had always cherished my capacity for hard work. I had long assumed I got *every* academic degree, *every* promotion, *every* position because I was willing to work harder than anyone else.

"But that was an offense against God's grace. It was idolatry, and God set out to save me from it.

"I was ready for the greatest professional challenge of my life. All I was missing was my thyroid—the gland that regulates energy."³³

What lessons did Pastor Barnes learn from this?

Eight Affirmations Regarding the Problem of Evil
**Affirmation Six: Individual Suffering Is Socially
Rooted and Socially Redeemed**

Here Oden encourages those who suffer to look beyond their own personal circumstances of suffering. Do we ever suffer strictly as individuals? Is it not more true to say that both suffering and the release from it are socially rooted?

Pastoral Scene: What's Wrong—or Right—with This Picture?

Eight Affirmations Regarding the Problem of Evil
**Affirmation Seven: Suffering May Highlight the
Reality of Goodness**

The shadows of life will help us to appreciate ever more keenly the brilliance and promise life holds for us in Jesus Christ. We never know the mountaintops without first knowing the valleys and the climb to the summit.

This line of thinking is sometimes called “the aesthetic argument.” As a good example, consider black and white photography. The subtle shadings and variations present allow the viewer to appreciate fully the beauty of what is there. Likewise, for all of its manifold ugliness, evil may yet help us to discern the good ever more clearly and truly.

Pastoral Scene: What’s Wrong—or Right—with This Picture?

Eight Affirmations Regarding the Problem of Evil

Affirmation Eight: Providence Yes, Fate No

What are we to understand by the reality of providence? Providence is God's continuing intention of good for all He has made. Providence therefore begins with the reality of the divine action, to which we as humans are called to respond in faith and gratitude. The interplay of divine action and human reaction—which by definition can be fully comprehended only by God—is how providence works itself out in the real world.

The hymn listed in Resource 6-10 provides a poetic understanding of divine providence. In today's world, human freedom is highly valued, perhaps overly so. Many people would prefer to reverse the proper order, and speak instead of *human action* and *divine reaction*. We cannot squeeze God into our own convenient mold, but we should rather receive all of life from His hand as a gift.

Providence must be sharply contrasted with fate. Providence works to restore human freedom to its responsible potential, but fate intends to destroy human freedom. Reinhold Niebuhr was well known for asserting that the fall of humankind from original righteousness was "inevitable but not necessary." To say that Adam's fall was necessary is to say that Adam never had a chance *not to sin*. If we agree to that, then fate has overwhelmed God-bestowed freedom.

In today's presumably "enlightened" and scientific Western world, seemingly no one believes in fate any longer. Yet in much of the world fate is a very real force. For some it governs their everyday lives.

Christians must believe in the overall goodness of God, and so believing cancels out the power of fate. Life presents us with very real choices, and in the power of the Holy Spirit we can choose rightly, although Niebuhr is probably right to say that it is inevitable that at least some of the time we will make the wrong choices. Fate takes choice out of our hands and assigns it to a faceless, nameless, impersonal force that may sometimes wish us well, but not consistently so. The winds of fate blow treacherously as often as kindly.

Pastoral Scene: What's Wrong – or Right – with This Picture?

God Moves in a Mysterious Way³⁴

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform
He plants his footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill
He treasures up his bright designs
And works his sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense
But trust him for his grace
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan his work in vain
God is his own interpreter
And he will make it plain.

—William Cowper

Science and Religion: Three Opinions

1. Complete and total opposition, whether from the side of science or of religion. Here it seems that neither science nor religion is very much interested in appreciating what the other has to offer. The attitude is perpetually tense between the two, and conflict is expected and even desired.
2. Convergence between the two, so that science more or less "swallows up" religion, or the reverse.
3. Mutual respect between the two, recognizing that each discipline has valuable contributions to make as we try to make sense of the whole of reality. This recognizes that, to one degree or another, each of these is master over its own realm.

It is important to keep in mind that science answers the questions of "how, when, and where." Theology is concerned with "who" and to some extent "why."

Old Testament Considerations of Creation as Different from Science

- Difference in *process*: Genesis 1 presents creation as being rooted in the creative will of God. . . . From first to last, Israel viewed creation as the product of one God.

It contrasts mightily with a modern scientific definition of creation, which sees creation not as the result of the will of a personal God, but a mere emergence of impersonal forces.

- Difference in *what is produced*: biblical religion sees that God produces a physical world, but the primary focus is not the world as such, but how God's creatures and children will act upon the world He has given to them. . . . Science sees creation as sustained by laws, not by the grace of God.
- Difference in the *criteria of truth*: "The criteria for truth in biblical texts are the plausibility of the story and what it illumines about the God-human relationship. . . . The scientific-minded expect a creation theory that has empirical reference and that can explain all the data."³⁵

Lesson 7: Some Classic Approaches to Thinking about God's Power and Wisdom

Due This Lesson

Three-page book review **or** media collection
"Power" observation
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- survey briefly some of the classic approaches to thinking about God and in so doing, to become increasingly aware of the power and wisdom of God
- begin to see the relevance of these two traits for Christian ministry and worship
- appreciate how these qualities of God affect the rest of our theological thinking
- contrast a theological view of the power of God with the ways in which the general culture uses the concept of power

Homework Assignments

Using the information gathered in the hymn search activity, prepare a four-page paper summarizing the results of what you discovered. It will probably not be possible to survey rigorously all of the dozen hymns and readings selected. It is advisable to choose about six or eight, and conduct the analysis based on that selection.

Journal Prompt

Return to the wisest person you have ever known. Reflect in your journal **why** you found this person to be especially wise, and how this wisdom has molded and guided your own personal life.

Who Is God?

Some Jewish mystics have referred to God as *En Sof* or "without end."

While the teaching of divine revelation is meant to *deepen* and not *dispel* the mystery of God's essence, we can say with confidence that God has elected to make himself known to us.

There are many realities that set God apart from humankind and other creatures, but the root of all of these is the acknowledgment that God is "a se," which is also known as the divine "aseity." This simply means that God, and only God, can be and is the source of His own being.

Two Approaches to Thinking about God

Via negativa

One way is the way of negativity . . . God is *not* finite, limited in any way, bound by time, subject to death and corruption.

Via eminentiae

This is to look at the finite world around us and to magnify its qualities until they are fit to be associated with God.

Oden's degrees of excellence:³⁶

Better than the best we know

The best we know

Good

Not so good

Lacking good altogether

Classic Theologians

Barth said the Bible “is not interested in God’s power over everything,” but rather in how God directs His power toward the rescue of sinful humanity. God’s power is not “naked,” but rather has “a definite direction and content. It is both His power to will and His power not to will.”³⁷

Moltmann said if omnipotence is applied categorically and literally to God, this God would not be the God of the Bible, but rather a philosophical abstraction. God willingly imposes limits on His power precisely so there will be *no limits* to His vulnerability. A God of naked power cannot be a God who experiences “helplessness and powerlessness.”³⁸

Bonhoeffer wrote poetically and some would say prophetically about God’s powerlessness that is the exact scope and definition of His power.

“God allows himself to be edged out of the world and on to the cross. God is weak and powerless in the world, and that is exactly the way, the only way, in which he can be with us and help us.”³⁹

The Wisdom of God

Bloesch wisely reminds us that when thinking of God's wisdom we must always keep before us the Person of Jesus Christ, for He is the very embodiment of the Wisdom of God. He is "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24).

"Wisdom is an attribute of God, to be sure, but it is more than an attribute in the wider biblical witness: it is God himself in the person of Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit of God empowering Christians from within to believe, to rejoice, to bear public witness to the faith once delivered to the saints."⁴⁰

Hymn Study

Look in the back of the book, in the "Topical Index of Hymns and Readings." Find all of the headings under "God Our Father." Pick any dozen hymns and readings and examine what they say about the nature, quality, and character of God.

Be careful to note how these hymns and readings *agree* with each other as to their fundamental outlook and theology. Also note carefully any slight *differences* of interpretation that seem to appear.

The information found and gleaned should be saved, as it will tie in directly with the assignment given for this lesson.

Lesson 8: Some Classic Approaches to Thinking about God's Holiness and Love

Due This Lesson

Four-page hymn summary

Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- appreciate more fully the theological heritage of the Church of the Nazarene as a Holiness denomination
- compare and contrast Nazarene views with select views from other theologians
- consider the relation between God's intrinsic holiness and humanity's derived, dependent holiness
- reflect once again on God's great love for the creation and for humankind

Homework Assignments

Interview eight people. At least half of them should not be from the Church of the Nazarene. Ask the following questions, and prepare a four-page essay summarizing the answers, indicating where necessary your personal agreement or disagreement with the answers.

- What, for you, is the meaning of holy?
- Do sacred and holy mean the same thing to you?
- What is the meaning of profane?
- What for you is the holiest place on earth?
- When you contemplate what for you is the holiest place on earth, does your definition of holy or of holiness change at all? Why or why not?

Journal Prompts

Reflect on a time when the holiness of God penetrated to your innermost being.

Reflect on a time when the love of God surrounded you.

The Holiness of God

We may say then, that holiness belongs to the essential nature of God in a deeper and more profound sense than merely as one attribute among others.

—H. Orton Wiley⁴¹

The holiness of God “is the summation of what He is. . . . God’s holiness is a synonym of His deity, of himself.”

—J. Kenneth Grider⁴²

H. Ray Dunning’s three basic choices for how God’s holiness might be related to the rest of the divine attributes:

- One is to view holiness merely as one attribute among all of the others. But this is to trivialize God’s holiness.
- A second is to say that holiness is somehow the “sum total” of all of God’s attributes, but this is to say too much, although at times it appears that both Grider and Taylor may want to say this.
- The third option, “that holiness is the background for all the other attributes,” is the right choice to make.⁴³

God's Holiness

Wolfgang Pannenberg writes:

Beyond every threat of judgment the holiness of God also means hope of new and definitive salvation. In spite of human sin God is faithful to his election. His holiness finds expression here, the difference between his attitude and ours: 'For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come to destroy' (Hosea 11:9).⁴⁴

Langdon Gilkey writes:

Holiness is not primarily a moral attribute, as if it meant merely the perfect goodness of some superbeing with a white beard. Rather it refers to that absolute 'otherness' which distinguishes the divine from all that is creaturely, and so characterized every aspect of God. Holiness is the word that refers to the *divine* aspect of any attribute asserted of deity, the quality which makes any attribute essentially different in God than in other things, the quality that raises anything, be it power or love or anger, to the *nth* degree when it is applied to God.⁴⁵

The call to be holy is not a *mere suggestion*—it is a *divine command*. Yet what God commands He also enables us to accomplish, so that the drive toward holiness is always nurtured by divine grace.

The Love of God

John Wesley believed that so far as the Christian life was concerned, love was “the heaven of heavens.” When we are in heaven, there will be no more need for faith, because we will then see God directly, “face to face.” No longer will it be necessary to walk by faith and not by sight, for we shall behold the Triune God as he is.

The Wesleyan holds that God’s love is a manifestation of His nature, and consequently it is universal rather than selective. He extends His “arm” in mercy and reconciliation to all without discrimination. None is excluded, for this would involve a violation of God’s own nature. God, being who He is, “loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love” (Augustine). It is this aspect of the doctrine of God that provides the theological grounding for the Wesleyan doctrine of prevenient grace. That this love is “holy love” guards this fundamental truth against a perversion into actual rather than potential universalism.

—H. Ray Dunning⁴⁶

His holiness is infused by his incomparable love and is therefore a source of comfort as well as fear, of confidence as well as dread. God’s loving holiness uplifts us in the midst of divine affliction; it consoles us in the depths of gnawing despair. But all of these things remain incomprehensible apart from God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, for only there do we come to understand the unity of his mercy and holiness, the inseparability of his love and wrath.

—Donald Bloesch⁴⁷

Nygren's Agape and Eros Love⁴⁸

Eros is acquisitive desire and longing.

Agape is sacrificial giving.

Eros is an upward movement.

Agape comes down.

Eros is man's way to God.

Agape is God's way to man.

Eros is man's effort: it assumes that man's salvation is his own work.

Agape is God's grace: salvation is the work of divine love.

Eros is egocentric love, a form of self-assertion of the highest, noblest, sublimest kind.

Agape is unselfish love, it "seeketh not its own," it gives itself away.

Eros seeks to gain its life divine, immortalized.

Agape lives the life of God, therefore dares to "lose it."

Eros is the will to get and possess, which depends on want and need.

Agape is freedom in giving, which depends on wealth and plenty.

Eros is primarily *man's* love: God is the object of eros. Even when it is attributed to God, eros is patterned on human love.

Agape is primarily *God's* love: "God is agape." Even when it is attributed to man, agape is patterned on divine love.

Eros is determined by the quality, the beauty, and worth of its object; it is not spontaneous but "evoked," "motivated."

Agape is sovereign in relation to its object, and is directed to both "the evil and the good"; it is spontaneous, "overflowing," "unmotivated."

Eros *recognizes value* in its object—and loves it.

Agape loves—and *creates value* in its object.

Worship Service

The end product of this learning activity should be an order of worship that might be used in a local Church of the Nazarene. Coordinate call to worship, invocation, hymns, gospel songs, reading of the creed, responsive reading, Scripture reading(s), special music, sermon, blessing, and any other features around these two great related themes: God's love and God's holiness.

Lesson 9: Recent Ways of Speaking of God and Thinking Theologically

Due This Lesson

Four-page essay from interviews
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- survey some theological trends of the past 35 or 40 years, so our theological education is contemporary and up-to-date
- sharpen and develop our critical theological skills
- become more aware of current thought trends that impact theological thinking

Homework Assignments

Complete one of the following two assignments:

1. Interview one or two black pastors, and ask them to discuss their knowledge and understanding of black theology. Then write a three-page paper discussing your findings.
2. Do some research into early Nazarene concern for the poor, or John Wesley's work with the poor.
 - Carl Bangs' recent biography of Nazarene patriarch Phineas Bresee contains some relevant information. *Phineas F. Bresee: His Life in Methodism, the Holiness Movement, and the Church of the Nazarene*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1995.
 - For John Wesley, see Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.
 - Write a three- to four-page paper discussing what you have learned.

Visit an ethnic congregation for one of their services. We looked at only African-American and Asian but there are many others also. Enter into the service with an attitude of worship and participation, not an attitude of criticism.

Journal Prompts

All of the theological impulses discussed in this lesson might be described as being "from the outside" or "from the margins." Think of your own life in those terms: Are you an insider or an outsider? Probably you are some of both. But in what particular senses?

Liberation Theology

It started as a movement in the late 1960s in South America.

Liberationist thought, according to its advocates, revives and rescues a neglected theme prominent in the biblical record: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, is a God who favors the poor, marginalized, and oppressed of the world.

The whole population of the world tends to be divided by liberationists into two groups: *the oppressed* and *the oppressors*.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is seen as a political event.

Theories of the Atonement that emphasize that "Jesus died to save me from my sins" are seen as far too individualistic to satisfy liberation theology.

Most liberation theologians are opposed to free market capitalism as an economic system.

Liberation Theology Biblical Text

One of the key texts for liberation theology is Luke 4: 18-19; Jesus makes very explicit claims about himself and His ministry in these two verses. They are:

- The Spirit of the Lord is upon me
- He has anointed me
- To bring good news to the poor
- He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
- Recovery of sight to the blind
- To let the oppressed go free
- To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor

Who Are the Poor?

As liberation theology was being established as a new approach to Christian theology, two phrases were often spoken.

Preferential option for the poor

That means exactly what it says. The poor are God's preferred, and they should be our preferred option also.

Epistemological privilege of the poor

The poor are more insightful and better able to see reality as it really is.

Liberation theology stresses that spiritual problems often are caused by the physical circumstances of poverty, hunger, homelessness, and so forth.

Adjectives for the Poor

Collective, *conflictive*, and *alternative* are three adjectives that today may be used to describe the poor.

- *Collective* means, "Poverty today is a social, structural, massive problem. The poor make up whole classes, masses and peoples. They are found above all in the urban areas of the Third World."
- *Conflictive* suggests the poor have become poor through no choices of their own, but rather are victims of a plundering system. "The poor are poor because they are exploited or rejected by a perverse economic system." Numbered among these poor are the truly *wretched of the earth*: beggars, abandoned children, outcasts, prostitutes, etc.
- *Alternative* urges that these poor need a better future to inherit.

Basic Beliefs

Praxis and ***Orthopraxis*** are important concepts for all liberationists. These words mean “committed action.”

The Boff brothers list the following as important teachings of liberation theology:

1. Faith that is true and living will be faith that practices liberation.
2. The living God takes sides. He favors the oppressed in their struggles against the pharaohs of this world.
3. The reign or kingdom of God is something God intends to accomplish in history and eternity.
4. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, fully participates in the liberative work of God.
5. The Holy Spirit is the “Father of the poor” and is present in all of the struggles of the poor.
6. The Virgin Mary is uniquely positioned to be the “prophetic and liberating woman of the people.”
7. The church of Jesus Christ is the “advance guard” of liberation, and is the signpost pointing toward full liberation.
8. Since God is fully present in the poor, whatever rights the poor have are at the same time the rights of the poor.⁴⁹

Black Theology

James H. Cone, leading advocate for black theology, says:

To explicate the theological significance of the liberation motif, black theologians began to reread the Bible through the eyes of their slave grandparents and started to speak of God's solidarity with the wretched of the earth. As the political liberation of the poor emerged as the dominant motif, justice, love, and hope were reinterpreted in its light. For the biblical meaning of liberation, black theologians turned to the Exodus, while the message of the prophets provided the theological content for the theme of justice. The gospel story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus served as the biblical foundation for a reinterpretation of love, suffering, and hope in the context of the black struggle for liberation and justice.⁵⁰

Influences in the life of Martin Luther King, Jr.:

- Initially, King fused the American ideal of democratic freedom with the Old Testament prophetic impulse for justice, fairness, and liberation.
- He then joined both of these traditions with the New Testament ethic of love and hope as exemplified in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- This eventuated in King's belief in nonviolent protest, which was influenced by the Indian statesman Gandhi.

As a Christian whose faith derived from the cross of Jesus, King believed there could be no true liberation without suffering. Through nonviolent suffering, he contended, blacks would not only liberate themselves from the necessity of bitterness and feeling of inferiority toward whites, but would also prick the conscience of whites and liberate them from a feeling of superiority. The mutual liberation of blacks and whites lays the foundation for both to work together toward the creation of an entirely new world.

Asian Theology

Han is a Korean concept for which there is no real Western equivalent.

When a victim's pain expands beyond his or her capacity for perseverance, the soul collapses into a deep, dark abyss. That abysmal core of pain is **han**, and the collapsed, inner core swallows everything, dominating the victim's life-agenda. The hope that is the very foundation of our existence is frustrated, turning into psychosomatic writhing. Sadness, despair, resentment, and helplessness dominate. The gravitational pull of the wound that is created takes with it our sense of dignity and self-worth.⁵¹

Han is the root of bitterness that never quite goes away completely, because there is always suffering in the world, always one level of victimization or another.

Park explains:

But there is little in Christian theology that is addressed to the plight of the victim. The implications for our understanding of God are significant. We think of the cross of Jesus as the emblem of forgiveness and redemption, but we scarcely acknowledge its significance as the piercing suffering of God as victim. The cross in turn becomes the critical turning point in the salvific relation between God and humankind.⁵²

The truthfulness of God is much more meaningful than the traditional understanding of all-powerfulness or finite power in dealing with evil and suffering, because it speaks to our experience, exposing the power of injustice and evil.

Lesson 10: Continuing the Conversation about Contemporary Theology

Due This Lesson

Interview report **or** research report
Ethnic service visit
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- survey some theological trends of the past 35 or 40 years, so our theological education is contemporary and up-to-date
- sharpen and develop our critical theological skills
- become more aware of current thought trends that impact theological thinking

Homework Assignments

Feminine Response/Reaction

- Take the following three hymns, from *Sing to the Lord*:
 "Come Thou Almighty King," No. 3
 "God of Our Fathers," No. 758
 "Faith of Our Fathers," No. 639
- Show these lyrics to five women in your local Nazarene church. Try to pick a representative sample of women in terms of age, employment, level of education, etc.
- Ask the women if the lyrics in these hymns are an accurate expression and reflection of their experiences of God. Why or why not?
- Tabulate the results in a three-page essay.

Journal Prompt

Christian theology resolutely claims that God is beyond all gender. God has no sexual identity. And yet so much of our theological talk addresses God as "Father." How can God be a Father to us, and yet not at the same time male?

Feminist Theology

Feminism wishes to present us with a new vision of God as fair, open, and compassionate. In place of the perceived hierarchy of the Trinity, with its perceived "chain of command" from God the Father to God the Son and then on to God the Spirit, feminism would present us with a God characterized by "inter-relationality" or a "symbiotic web."

What is a hierarchy? Andrew Sung Park sees it this way:

In this religious system [where God is viewed as sovereign and impassible] God is at the top of the totem pole. Below God there are angels; below angels, white men; below white men, white women and children; below white women and children, ethnic minority men; below ethnic minority men, ethnic minority women and children; below ethnic minority women and children, animals; below animals, plants; below plants, dirt.⁵³

Three Moments for Feminist Theology

Protest and Critique

The hierarchy we mentioned before not only positions God on top, but sees this God as endowed with male qualities and attributes.

Anne Carr writes:

Christian feminist thought argues that theology has legitimated patterns of domination in relations between God and humankind, Christ and the church, men and women, adults and children, clergy and laity, rich nations and poor, whites and people of color, humankind and the earth.⁵⁴

Historical Revision

Historical concerns, say feminists, are all too often wrapped up in war and politics, two areas where men exert control, with little interest in the domestic concerns of childbearing and the education of the young.

Carr is asking us to look back again at the many contributions women have made to the ongoing history, spirituality, and theology of the Christian movement.

Theological Reconstruction

Feminist theology starts with the experience of women. For many women, to call God "Father" or "Lord" is painful and to be avoided.

Process Theology **A Natural Theology**

It develops not so much from any claim put forth by divine revelation or any other special appeal to faith, miracle, or religious authority, but from the sheer fact that the world as we know it, as science has described it, is a world in process.

Heraclitus—argued for a changing world

Permenides—argued for a changeless world

Process theology is known as a natural theology. The Bible itself contains some passages that can only be described as promoting a natural theology, chief among them Romans 1: 19-20.

Process theology seldom if ever makes an appeal to divine revelation as Christians have understood this classically.

Process theology believes nothing is stable in the conventional sense, not even God.

Process theology flatly denies the traditional view of God as being all-powerful.

The traditional idea of the divine aseity (that God's being comes only from God, and no one else) is discarded.

Five Qualities of God Process Theology Opposes⁵⁵

- God as a Cosmic Moralist
- God as the Unchanging and Passionless Absolute
- God as the Controlling Power
- God as the Sanctioner of the Status Quo
- God as Male

Panentheism

Process theology advocates what is known as panentheism. Unlike pantheism, where God and the world are more or less identical, where everything *is* God, panentheism teaches that everything is *in* God.

Evaluation of Process Theology

1. No real appreciation for the doctrine of the Trinity. In Whitehead's doctrine of God, God has two main natures:
 - the primordial nature (God in himself, more or less)
 - the consequent nature (God in His creation, related to the world)

Since the Trinity is not central for process theology, Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Word of God the Father is likewise not of great importance, or the idea of Incarnation is defined to meet the expectations of process theology.

2. A God of limited power, who therefore is not really "in control" of the world in any meaningful way.
3. The God of process theology may be sound in philosophical terms, but people have often asked, Would anyone want to worship this God? He seems to be very much "religiously unavailable."
4. Process theology has been accused of being "too sunny," that is, too optimistic, with no serious doctrine of sin and evil.

Lesson 11: The Doctrine of the Trinity: Vital Center or Antique Relic?

Due This Lesson

Feminine Response/Reaction paper
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- become aware as to why the doctrine of the Trinity is important for Christian theology
- consider the practical nature of this central Christian teaching, thinking of the difference it makes in our Christian lives
- understand some of the reasons why the doctrine of the Trinity has returned to theological prominence

Homework Assignments

Worship Service

- Working with one or two other classmates, plan an order of worship that takes full cognizance of the importance of centering Christian worship in the doctrine of the Trinity.
- The finished product should be an order of worship that could be followed on a Sunday morning in a local Church of the Nazarene.
- It should include all parts of the service from the opening comments to the closing blessing.

Journal Prompt

The doctrine of the Trinity is the Christian answer to the old problem in philosophy of "the one and the many." Think of your own family. How does your family structure reflect and even answer "the one and the many?" Think of other parts of your life where this dynamic of "the one and the many" is evident.

Nicene Creed⁵⁶

I believe in one God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten of His Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light,
very God of very God,
begotten, not made,
being of one substance with the Father,
by whom all things were made;
who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven,
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary,
and was made man,
and crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;
He suffered and was buried,
and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures,
and ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of the Father,
and He shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the
dead;
whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord and Giver of life,
who proceedeth from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified;
who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe in one holy universal and apostolic church;
I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins;
and I look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

Reasons for Revival of Trinitarian Theology

- To return to the riches of Christian antiquity and recover again the connection between Christian theology and Christian devotion/spirituality at the heart of trinitarian theology.
- To stress what all Christians have in common. The ecumenical power of the doctrine of the Trinity.
- To discern how the doctrine of the Trinity separates Christian doctrine and proclamation from the other religions of the world. For some, however, this conversation will also lead them to explore “points of contact” between the Christian Trinity and trinity-like features of other world religions.

Trinitarian Hymns

Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty⁵⁷

Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee
Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, Holy, Holy! All the saints adore Thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,
Which wert, and art, and ever more shalt be.

Holy, Holy, Holy! Tho' the darkness hide Thee.
Tho' the eye of sinful man Thy Glory may not see;
Only Thou art holy—there is none beside Thee
Perfect in pow'r, in love, in purity.

Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth, and sky, and sea.
Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Come, Thou Almighty King⁵⁸

Come, Thou Almighty King, Help us Thy name to sing.
Help us to praise. Father all glorious, O'er all victorious,
Come, and reign over us, Ancient of Days.

Come, Thou Incarnate Word, Gird on Thy mighty sword.
Our prayer attend. Come, and Thy people bless, And give Thy word success.
Spirit of holiness, On us descend.

Come, Holy Comforter, Thy sacred witness bear in this glad hour.
Thou, who almighty art, Now rule in ev'ry heart
And ne'er from us depart, Spirit of pow'r.

To Thee, great One in Three, Eternal praises be
Hence evermore. Thy sov'reign majesty May we in glory see,
And to eternity Love and adore.

Praying the Trinity

Origen believed all prayer should be directed **to** God the Father, **through** God the Son (for He is after all, the only mediator between God and humanity), **in the power** of God the Holy Spirit.

The Humble Act of Prayer

An ordinary simple Christian kneels down to say his prayers. He is trying to get into touch with God. But if he is a Christian he knows that what is prompting him to pray is also God: God, so to speak, inside him. But he also knows that all his real knowledge of God comes through Christ, the Man who was God—that Christ is standing beside him, helping him to pray, praying for him. You see what is happening. God is the thing to which he is praying—the goal he is trying to reach. God is also the thing inside him which is pushing him on—the motive power. God is also the road or bridge along which he is being pushed to that goal. So that the whole threefold life of the three-personal Being is actually going on in that ordinary little bedroom where an ordinary man is saying his prayers.

—C. S. Lewis⁵⁹

The Trinity and Worship

Our worship is the gift of participating, through the Spirit, in what Christ has done and is doing for us in his intercessions and communion with the Father.

—Alan J.
Torrance⁶⁰

If we understand worship within the doctrine of the Trinity, we escape human ritual, and worship in spirit and truth. Torrance writes:

It is precisely the theological insight that God's grace actually includes the provision of the very response demanded by it that distinguishes Christian worship from religious ritual. Christian worship becomes thus the free participation by the Spirit in something that God perfects on our behalf, whereas worship as religious ritual is a human task, namely one that ultimately can be little more than the vain attempt on the part of finite creatures to approach the "Transcendent."⁶¹

Again Torrance writes:

Christian worship shares in a human-Godward movement that belongs to God and which takes place *within* the divine life. It is precisely into and within *this* that we are brought by the Spirit to participate as a gift of grace. . . . Worship is not some valiant subjective response, therefore. It is a gift of grace which is realized vicariously in Christ and which is received and participated in by the Spirit.⁶²

Lesson 12: Biblical Foundations of the Trinity

Due This Lesson

An order of worship
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- explore the biblical rootedness of the doctrine of the Trinity
- begin to comprehend some of the typical analogies for understanding the Trinity

Homework Assignments

During these two lessons on the Trinity it has been our constant refrain that the Trinity must be relevant for the average Christian. This assignment is designed to test that hypothesis.

- Select some of the classic trinitarian hymns, and some of the leading scriptures that teach the Trinity. (Two of each would be sufficient.)
- Show them to four or five laypeople in your Nazarene congregation.
- Ask for reactions. How does the doctrine of the Trinity intersect with their lives?
- Ask about their prayer pattern. Whom do they usually address in their prayers? Does anyone engage in the practice of praying first to God the Father, and if that prayer seems not to work, then to God the Son, and finally ending with God the Spirit in desperation?
- If someone in the group you interview comes from a Pentecostal background, ask if the Pentecostal focus on the Holy Spirit pays attention to the Father and the Son.
- When you have compiled the data/evidence from these interviews, present the results in a four-page paper.

Journal Prompt

Reflect on three or four scriptures, which have meant the most to you personally, that we have studied in these lessons on the Trinity.

A Classic Doctrine Biblically Rooted

From its roots in the faith of Zion, the church received an unwavering commitment to monotheism, which nothing could be allowed to compromise or contradict. But regardless of how early we look, we also find the church using language about Jesus Christ that did appear to compromise or even contradict that monotheistic faith. Jesus at his death had said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46); but the first Christian martyr, Stephen, cried out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59).

—Jaroslav Pelikan⁶³

Old Testament Scriptures

Genesis 1:1-2, 26

Numbers 6:23-26

Isaiah 6:2-3, 48:16

New Testament Scriptures

2 Corinthians 13:13

Hebrews 9:14

Matthew 28:19

Furthering the Biblical Evidence

Group 1

These passages make the point of God's *oneness*. Remember the Trinity does not teach there are three Gods but rather One God *in Three Persons*. So the message of the unity of God is one we keep always in view. The belief in three gods is called the heresy of *tritheism*, picturing three thrones in heaven. People who pray *first* to God the Father, and *then* to God the Son, if the first prayer is unavailing, and *finally* to the Holy Spirit, may be engaging in a form of tritheism.

Study: Dt 6:4; Mt 23:9; Mk 10:18, 12:29; Rom 3:30; 1 Cor 8:4, 6; Gal 3:20; Eph 4:6; 1 Tim 1:17, 2:5; James 2:19, 4:12.

Group 2

There are also passages that are *dyadic* in nature, linking the Father and the Son, or the Son and the Holy Spirit. As mentioned before, whenever two of the three Persons are present, it can confidently be said that the third is there also.

These passages are Rom 1:4, 6:4, 8:11; 1 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 4:14; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:20; 1 Tim 1:2, 3:16; 1 Pet 1:21.

Group 3

Triadic passages include: Acts 2:32-33; 1 Cor 6:11, 12:4-5; 2 Cor 1:21-22; Gal 3:11-14; Eph 3:1-6, 4:4-6; 1 Thes 5:18-19; 2 Thes 2:13-14; Heb 10:29; 1 Pet 1:2, 3:18.

The Triune God

Vestigium trinitatis

controversy over the use of analogies

means the "vestiges of the Trinity"

"vestiges" has the meaning of "footprints"

Two Famous Trinitarian Analogies

Psychological Analogy

- Augustine developed what is often referred to as the “psychological” analogy of the Trinity
- Augustine famously declared that *each is in each, all are in each, each is in all, all are in all, and all are one.*
- Every human mind is characterized by *memory, understanding, and will.*

Social Analogy

- The Cappadocian fathers advanced what has come to be known sometimes as the “social” analogy of the Trinity.
- Typically started their thinking with *God the Father*, and from there moved to the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- Social analogy looks to the phenomenon of persons in relationship for a clue to the mystery of the divine life.

The Triune God **The Nazarene Article of Faith⁶⁴**

We believe in one eternally existent, infinite God, Sovereign of the universe; that He only is God, creative and administrative, holy in nature, attributes, and purpose, that He as God, is Triune in essential being, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Lesson 13: Who Is the Christian God?

Due This Lesson

Four-page paper
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- reconsider the God of theism, as contrasted with the Triune God
- ask in what the power of God truly consists
- become acquainted with the idea of the immanent Trinity and the economic trinity

Homework Assignments

Choose one of the following two assignments:

1. Write a two-page interpretive essay about the poem by John Donne on Resource 13-1.
2. If you know a follower of Jehovah's Witnesses, this person could be interviewed, with the views of the Jehovah's Witness explained and then refuted. This group does not affirm the doctrine of the Trinity.

Journal Prompt

Reflect on how your perspective of God has grown during the time spent studying the Trinity.

Holy Sonnet 10⁶⁵

Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like a usurped town, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but O, to no end.
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend.
But is captived and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy.
Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

—John Donne

The Difference between the Triune God and the God of Theism

A trinitarian metaphysic is illuminating in this regard. Beginning with a trinitarian God of love who enters into loving personal relations with his creatures gives some direction to the doctrine of providence. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit love one another. They are involved in a tripersonal community in which each member of the triune being gives and receives love from the others. Relationality is an *essential* aspect of God. The tripersonal God is the perfection of love and communion—the very antithesis of aloofness, isolation and domination. God is no solitary potentate forcing his will on others. The members of the Trinity mutually share and relate to one another. In this view personhood is the ultimate ontological category. Personhood, relationality and community—not power, independence, and control—become the center for understanding the nature of God. Whereas the main motif of the Neoplatonic God concept is that of distance and unrelatedness, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity asserts that to be God is to be related in love.

—John Sanders⁶⁶

Immanent and Economic Trinity

The Triune God has often been discussed under two aspects. These are the *immanent* Trinity and the *economic* Trinity.

The immanent Trinity has also sometimes been called the *essential* or the *ontological* Trinity, because the investigation into the immanent Trinity seeks to know the true inner nature of God.

Roughly speaking, the immanent Trinity is “who God is,” whereas the economic Trinity is “what God does,” because God flows out of himself into the economy of creation, grace, and redemption. We will return to this later.

The 5-4-3-2-1 God: The Aquinas Formula

God Is Five Notions (A notion is what distinguishes each divine Person from the other two)

- Innascibility or ingenerateness, referring to God the Father, who is the Source of His own being, hence ingenerate.
- Paternity, referring also to God the Father, how He fathers or generates the Word from all eternity. The Word does not come into existence in time, but is eternally generated. If this is not true, He would be a creature.
- Filiation, referring to the reality of the Son's being eternally generated from the Father.
- Spiration, referring to the reality of the Holy Spirit's being breathed out or spirated by God the Father and God the Son. This spiration is from the standpoint of the Father and the Son.
- Procession, referring to the Holy Spirit's perspective of being breathed forth by Father and Son.

God Is Four Relations

Begetter to Begotten (Father to Son)	Fatherhood
Begotten to Begetter (Son to Father)	Sonship
Spirator to Spirated (Father and Son to Holy Spirit)	Spiration
Spirated to Spirator (Holy Spirit to Father and Son)	Procession

God Is Three Persons

Three of these four relations constitute persons. They are paternity (the Father), filiation (the Son), and spiration (the Holy Spirit).

God Is Two Processions

The two processions are *being begotten* (Jesus said in John 8:42, "I came from God") and *being spirated*, the Holy Spirit being breathed forth by the Father and the Son.

God Is One in Nature

Monotheism must be seen in the light of the triune premise, such that God is one nature with three identities or in three Persons.

Study Guide

Match names and phrases in the first column with ideas and phrases in the second column.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. Donald Bloesch | _____Two-in-One God |
| 2. Karl Rahner | _____Three |
| 3. filioque | _____God-For-Us |
| 4. binity | _____5-4-3-2-1 formula |
| 5. God of theism | _____critic of freewill theism |
| 6. economic Trinity | _____from the Son |
| 7. immanent Trinity | _____One |
| 8. Persons | _____God-Within-Himself |
| 9. Nature | _____God of Philosophers |
| 10. Catherine Mowry LaCugna | _____Trinity is all about salvation |
| 11. Clark Pinnock | _____Advocate of freewill theism |
| 12. Thomas Aquinas | _____The economic Trinity is immanent Trinity, and vice versa. |

Lesson 14: The Christian Life and the Trinity

Due This Lesson

Two-page essay **or** interview report
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- appreciate the importance of viewing human nature in the light of the doctrine of the Trinity
- see the connections between Christian ethics and Trinity, and living the Christian life

Homework Assignments

We have devoted four lessons to the Trinity. This is fully 20 percent of Investigating Christian Theology 1.

- Has it been time well spent and invested?
- Write a summarizing essay of three or four pages, specifying what is now clear about the doctrine of the Trinity, and what may still remain as puzzling.

Bring to class an object, from the natural world, that could be used as an example of the design argument. (We will be looking at this argument in the next lesson.) The object should demonstrate God's loving and careful design of the created order.

Journal Prompt

If I could ask the Triune God one question about the Trinity, it would be . . .

A Person

The classic definition of a person is one given by Boethius:
a person is an individual substance of a rational nature.

Who Is a Person?

Old

For many centuries, the definition of a person given by the early medieval philosopher Boethius was widely accepted and rarely questioned. He believed a person is "an individual substance of a rational nature," substance here not meaning something solid, as a block of wood, but that which essentially characterizes something, and in which its reality coheres and "hangs together."

This definition stresses individuality, uniqueness, singularity, all of which are proven by our rational capacities.

New

Serious immersion in trinitarian theology offers the promise of a *new definition* of what it means to be a person. That new definition is simply this: *to be is to be related*. Here, relation is synonymous with community, fellowship, and mutuality.

Defining Personhood⁶⁷

Persons are in their very nature interpersonal and intersubjective.

A person is unique, concrete, unrepeatable, and ineffable (mysterious).

What is "natural" should be judged by what is "personal."

Truly to be a person requires a balance between self-love and self-gift.

Persons are to be catholic, that is, universal.

Personhood is achieved by self-discipline and "emptying out."

Person is an exponential and developmental concept.

To live as a person in communion is the true meaning of salvation.

Perichoresis⁶⁸

Refers to the mutual indwelling of Father, Son, and Spirit, each one in the other two.

Perichoresis means:

- the divine persons mutually inhere in one another, draw life from one another.
- being-in-one-another, permeation without confusion.
- to be a divine person is to be *by nature* in relation to other persons. Each divine person is irresistibly drawn to the other.
- While there is no blurring of the individuality of each person, there is also no separation. There is only the communion of love in which each person comes to be . . . entirely with reference to the other.
- Each person expresses both what He is (and, by implication, what the other two are), and at the same time expresses what God is: ecstatic, relational, dynamic, vital. *Perichoresis* provides a dynamic model of persons in communion based on mutuality and interdependence.

Richard of Saint Victor

Richard of Saint Victor believed the idea of God must contain the idea of love, that love was God's truest expression.

Stanley Grenz explains Richard's meaning here:

Supreme love requires another, equal to the lover, who is the recipient of that love; and because supreme love is received as well as given, it must be a shared love, in which each person loves and is loved by the other. Finally, because supreme love must desire that the love it experiences through giving and receiving be one that is shared with another, it is not merely mutual love between two but is a love fully present among three and only three.⁶⁹

Trinitarian Life from God, through Us, to Others

Regarding how the Trinity impacts our lives as Christians before God and in the company of one another, the summary statement from Catherine LaCugna is especially good.

Trinitarian faith means living God's life: living from and for God, from and for others. [It] means living as Jesus Christ lived: preaching the gospel; relying totally on God; offering healing and reconciliation; rejecting laws, customs, conventions that place persons beneath rules; resisting temptation; praying constantly; eating with modern-day lepers and other outcasts; embracing the enemy and the sinner; dying for the sake of the gospel if it is God's will. [It] means living according to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit: training the eyes of the heart on God's face and name . . . responding to God in faith, hope and love.⁷⁰

After reading the statement, make a list of all the virtues, gifts, expectations, and privileges she enumerates.

How can we accomplish all of these things?

Suggest several scriptures that back up what LaCugna is suggesting.

A Covenant Prayer⁷¹

I am no longer my own, but Yours.
Put me to what You will,
Rank me with whom You will.
Put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by You or laid aside for You,
Exalted for You or brought low by You.
Let me have all things,
Let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to Your pleasure and
disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
You are mine, and I am Yours.

—John Wesley

Lesson 15: The Convergence and Divergence of Philosophy and Christian Theology

Due This Lesson

Three- to four-page essay
Object from the natural world
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- learn something of how philosophy and theology are related disciplines, and yet distinct from one another
- examine briefly several of the classic arguments for the existence of God, noting both supporting arguments, as well as some of the criticisms raised
- appreciate some of the contributions philosophers have made to the tradition of Christian theology

Homework Assignments

Write a three-page essay indicating your agreement and disagreement with Barth, giving careful explanations as to why and how you agree and disagree.

- Karl Barth was famously opposed to the use of philosophy to buttress or support the claims of Christian theology. For him the Word of God was sufficient in and of itself.
- Barth is well known for his declaration that “belief cannot argue with unbelief: it can only preach to it.”

Part of the next lesson asks us to consider how the presence of beauty in the world might demonstrate that God is real.

To show this point, bring to class something that shows your idea of what is beautiful: a photograph, a song, a poem, a small statue, whatever it may be.

Journal Prompt

Consider the two arguments studied in this lesson. Which impacts your life the most? Why?

Prayers of Kierkegaard

And if Thou dost permit us to know the many magnificent secrets of science, do not let us forget the one thing necessary; and if Thou dost desire to extinguish our vigor of mind or if Thou dost let us grow old on earth so that our soul gets weary, one thing there is that can never be forgotten, even if we forget all else, that we are saved by Thy Son.⁷²

Thy love is beyond all proof: Whatever Thou doest to Thy subject it is infinite love. And when has there been greater truth in me than when I felt that Thou art infinite love? It was certainly not when I had proof, Oh no, it was when I felt it without proof, when it was not a dogma, which always needs demonstration, but had for me become an axiom which never needs such, Oh, but when my soul becomes weary, then Thou dost not leave me without proof.⁷³

Thoughts on Philosophy

Teach me, O God, not to torture myself, not to make a martyr out of myself through stifling reflection, but rather teach me to breathe deeply in faith.⁷⁴

The word "philosophy" means "the love of wisdom." If wisdom is *not* centered in Jesus Christ, in whom "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col 1:19), then it is not truly wise or truly loving either. The Christian's study of philosophy must always be *Christocentric*.

Father in Heaven!
What is a man without Thee!
What is all that he knows,
vast accumulation though it be,
but a chipped fragment
if he does not know Thee!

What is all his striving,
could it even encompass the world,
but a half-finished work
if he does not know Thee!

Thee, the One who art one thing and who art all!⁷⁵

Pascal's Experience of God⁷⁶

The year of grace 1654

Monday, 23 November, day of Saint Clement, pope and martyr, and of others in the martyrology.

Eve of Saint Chrysogonus, martyr, and others,

From about half past ten in the evening until about half past twelve,

-----**FIRE**-----

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and scholars.

Certitude, certitude, feeling, joy, peace.

God of Jesus Christ.

Thy God will be my God.

Forgetfulness of the world and of everything, except **GOD**.

He is to be found by the ways taught in the Gospel.

Greatness of the human soul.

O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee, but I have known thee.

Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.

I have been separated from him.

My God, wilt thou forsake me?

Let me not be separated from God eternally.

This is the eternal life, that they know thee as the only true God, and the one whom thou hast sent, Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ.

I have been separated from him; I have fled him, renounced him, crucified him.

Let me never be separated from him.

He is preserved only by the ways taught in the Gospel.

Renunciation, total and sweet.

Relevant or Irrelevant?

Donald Bloesch writes,

The traditional proofs for the existence of God can be helpful in clarifying the relation of God and the world, but only faith can identify the God of rational demonstration with the God of divine revelation.⁷⁷

Pseudo Dionysius the Areopagite:

God does not exist. Don't be afraid when I say that. It's simply that our concept of existence, our experience of existence, is so limited that it cannot possibly be applied to God. . . . God is not one of the things that "are." God is not one of the things that exist like this podium, or this Cathedral, or the atom. God is not something you can discover or prove.

Oden: "God does not come into being on the basis of the success or failure of our rational arguments."⁷⁸

Pascal's famous declaration is fitting here: *The heart has reasons, which the reason cannot fathom or understand.*

The rational arguments, says Oden,

corroborate what faith knows, rather than produce or establish faith. These are not independent, airtight, unchallengeable 'proofs,' but taken together, they tend to confirm and rationally to validate what faith already knows of God's existence and to corroborate faith's persistently intuited conviction that God exists.⁷⁹

The Design Argument

Oden states the teleological argument formally in this way:⁸⁰

- The world we see and experience is “an orderly unit whose order is constant, uniform, complex, and intrinsic.”
- Such a world cannot be explained but by recourse to an intelligent Designer. To conceive of such a universe demonstrates God’s *omniscience*, that God knows everything. To bring such a universe into existence demonstrates God’s *omnipotence*, because God must be able not only to conceive of, but also to create it.
- God necessarily exists as the intelligent cause of the ordered universe.

Criticisms of the Design Argument

The following criticisms have often been raised against the design argument:

- Is the world really so well designed after all? What about all of the evil, chaos, and uncertainty so evident in the world as we experience it?
- Because the world is in such a mess, the *most* the argument from design can show is that someone, not necessarily *infinitely good*, designed what we can observe, and certainly not that God created the world out of nothing. David Hume, the 18th century Scottish philosopher, argued in this way. Hume is often credited with “destroying” the argument from design, because he doubted that an absolutely good God could possibly have created a world that is far from good.

Arguments Based on Human Nature

Here are some of the underlying assumptions for the argument from the mind:

1. To the question "where did intelligence come from?" there is simply no suitable answer but that it must come from God. Oden writes, "it is implausible to hypothesize a spontaneous emergence of intelligibility for such a massive order of intelligible events and beings."⁸¹
2. Even scientific investigation can move forward only under the assumption that there must be a correspondence between our minds as knowing minds and the world the mind knows, grasps, and experiences.
3. It is conceivable that the world could continue to flourish without *any particular finite mind*, but not without some mind.
4. If we quest after certain values, which we undeniably do, there must be someone who inspires this search for the good life, and this someone is God.
5. We value persons above things. But what is the essential ingredient of personhood? What separates humans from animals? Most would agree it is the presence of mind within. God is the Supreme Mind from whom all finite minds derive.
6. The cumulative weight of all of this evidence points beyond itself to God.

Small-Group Study

Passages such as Genesis 1:26-27; Psalms 8, 19, 51; Romans 1-2, and Hebrews 2:6 tell of God's being within us and within the world.

Pause to consider how these scriptures support the general claim of the argument from the appearance of finite human minds to the reality of One, Infinite Mind, who is God.

Locate in the assigned passages some demonstrations of what has been discussed under the general heading of the appeal to human consent.

Consider also Paul's meeting with the Athenians in front of the Areopagus, as recorded in Acts 17:22-34, where Paul implies that God is present within all of them, perhaps closer to them than they are aware, and yet fully known to them only in the provision of Jesus Christ.

Three Points Regarding Human/Culture Consent

Regarding the appeal to human and cultural consent, three important points must be made:

- Consent does not mean unanimity. Some scoffers and disbelievers will remain.
- Overall, this argument appeals more to history, cultures, and societies than to strict logical reasoning.
- Throughout history, many thousands of people have been willing to die for their belief in God. People sometimes die for false beliefs, but the deaths of the martyrs cannot be conveniently explained away that simply. The burden of proof is upon those who discount this evidence.

John Wesley

Let reason do all that reason can: Employ it as far as it will go. But, at the same time, acknowledge it is utterly incapable of giving either faith, or hope, or love; and, consequently, of producing either real virtue, or substantial happiness. Expect these from a higher source, even from the Father of the spirits of all flesh. Seek and receive them, not as your own acquisition; but as the gift of God. Lift up your hearts to Him who "giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." He alone can give that faith which is "the evidence" and conviction "of things not seen." He alone can "beget unto you a lively hope" of an inheritance eternal in the heavens; and He alone can "shed his love abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost given unto you."⁸²

Lesson 16: Further Investigations into Demonstrations for the Existence of God

Due This Lesson

Karl Barth essay
Object of beauty
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- learn something of how philosophy and theology are related disciplines, and yet distinct from one another
- examine briefly several of the classic arguments for the existence of God, noting both supporting arguments, as well as some of the criticisms raised
- appreciate some of the contributions philosophers have made to the tradition of Christian theology

Homework Assignments

Complete Resource 16-6. Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

Journal Prompt

Does the average Christian layperson really care about all of these philosophical arguments for the existence of God? Why?

Cosmological Argument

These arguments for the existence of God are called cosmological because they invite people to reflect on the world or *cosmos* as it exists.

Overall these arguments are known as *a posteriori*, which simply means after or “posterior to” our human experience.

The Argument from Change

The Argument from Causality

The Argument from Contingency

The Argument from Degrees of Being or Grades of Perfection

Arguments from Morality, Religious Experience, and Beauty

Kant wanted to know only two things: “the starry skies above and the moral law within.” Kant believed the maintenance of morality was essential to prevent the social and intellectual fabric from unraveling.

The complex of arguments we briefly survey here has the weight of common sense and practicality on its side. God exists, these all say in one way or another, because certain observable facts about the world we live in demand God’s existence.

Experience

- God speaks to His people all of the time, and someone who has truly heard needs to say so.
- The fact that laypeople are welcome to give a testimony is one proof the Church of the Nazarene believes in the priesthood of all believers, and does not elevate clergy above the laity. No one's testimony is any more valid than that of any other.
- The "interior witness of the Holy Spirit" is one of the certain evidences of entire sanctification, and this interior witness needs to be shared publicly.
- It may well be that the Holy Spirit is speaking through the one who stands to testify, and that the remainder of the service will be blessed by the Spirit's presence in a special and evident way because of the effort made to testify.

Reckoning with Religious Experience

Answer the following questions, and then be prepared to share your answers with the rest of the class:

1. What for you is the most sacred place on earth?
2. Name the three most sacred times of your entire life.
3. If you have or had small children, what are/were their experiences of God?
4. Are your experiences of God more real and more vivid inside of church or outside of church?
5. Are your experiences of God more real and more vivid when you are by yourself, or with someone, whether with family members or with fellow worshipers in church?
6. Are there certain times of the day when you feel closer to God?
7. Finish this statement: "I _____, therefore I am." You might say: *think*, *believe*, *feel*, etc. Explain your answer.
8. Do you feel close to God when doing recreational activities such as travel, hobbies, dining out, vacations, athletics, etc.?
9. What would you say to someone who tells you that your religious experiences are no different from any other sort of experience?

The Ontological Argument **Anselm's Discovery**

The ontological argument is different from *posteriori* arguments. It is an *a priori* argument whose force depends on logic and deductive thinking.

Anselm began with a definition of God as *that than which nothing greater can be conceived*.

In Oden's explanatory phrase, "An absolutely perfect being must exist if it is to be absolutely perfect."⁸³

Augustine captured the intent of the ontological argument when he wrote, "God is more truly thought than He is described, and exists more truly than He is thought."

In Our Own Words

Listed below are the explanations Thomas C. Oden gives for the various demonstrations or proofs of God's reality.⁸⁴ After reading Oden, write your own understanding of what this argument says.

Order and Design: "If purpose exists there must be a Purposer, if order, an Orderer. If we see design in the world, we must hypothesize a Designer of sufficient intelligence to produce an intelligible world."

To me this means . . .

Humanity: "If mind exists in evolving history, some incomparable Mind must have enabled and created the possibility of our minds. If it is so difficult to be a human being without knowing something of God, then there must be a sufficient reason for this awareness being so persistent in human cultures and societies, even when suppressed. If such wide consent exists in history to the existence of God, that fact must be accounted for with a sufficient reason. If the idea of God is intrinsic to human consciousness, then God must exist."

To me this means . . .

Cosmological: "From the fact of change we must hypothesize a change agent. If anything moves, something must have first moved everything. There must be a being that causes all causes and that moves all movement. If contingent beings exist, there must be a necessary being."

To me this means . . .

Conscience and Beauty: "If we experience moral obligation as relentlessly as we do, even against parents, against society, against superego constraints, then we must hypothesize a ground of moral obligation calling us to the highest good and possessed of weightiest moral authority."

To me this means . . .

Perfect Being: "In addition to all this, it appears to be the case that the very idea of perfect being requires the existence of perfect being, otherwise that idea is less than the idea of perfect being."

To me this means . . .

Lesson 17: How Should We Regard Religions Other than Christianity?

Due This Lesson

Resource 16-6
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- learn to appreciate with greater depth and penetration the great faith traditions of the world other than Christianity
- become tolerant without at the same time becoming unprincipled
- appreciate the finality of the Christian gospel and revelation

Homework Assignments

Interview at least two Nazarene pastors and three Nazarene laypeople.

- Ask if they believe Christianity is superior to the other religions of the world. If they answer "yes," then ask what they mean by "superior." Work toward discerning what their attitude is toward other religions.
- Write a 2-page essay about your experience.

Do something to come to a greater awareness of one of the following religions: Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, or the New Age movement. You might also consider such Christian sects as Seventh Day Adventist, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witness.

- The goal of the study is to assess how the Church of the Nazarene differs from the religion you choose to study. You should also note any similarities and areas of common agreement you discover.
- Write a 2-page essay about what you learned.

Journal Prompt

For many years the missionary magazine of the Church of the Nazarene was called *The Other Sheep*, based on John 10:16. Read this verse in its context. What is the meaning of "the other sheep" to you personally?

Wesleyan Holiness Perspective

Holiness theology is filled with an optimism of grace that at its best elicits rather than thwarts compassion and empathy to those outside the reaches of the established church.

—Floyd T. Cunningham⁸⁵

Holiness churches may offer to interfaith dialogue the nuances they carry of Wesleyan theology: first, a dynamic understanding of Christ's prevenient grace, which reaches and is active within all human beings; second, an understanding that human beings may enjoy now full assurance of present salvation from sin, guilt, fear, and shame; third, a way of and emphasis upon discipleship.

—Floyd T. Cunningham⁸⁶

Particularly in Evangelical circles, suggestions of some truth existing in other religions, or of some possibility of salvation among those who have never heard of Christ, are typically charged with a lack of appreciation for the indispensable role of divine grace in salvation. But this cannot be said of [John] Wesley. He quite clearly grounds all salvation in God's grace. If he differs from other theologians who would rule out any possibility of salvation among the heathen, it is not in the *need* for grace, but in the *nature* of God's grace. In other words, the convictions that lead Wesley to suggest that a truly loving and just God would judge the heathen in terms of their response to the light of initial universal revelation are the same convictions that had led him earlier to reject unconditional predestination.

—Randy L. Maddox⁸⁷

The Centrality of Grace

In Wesleyanism there is a continuity of grace . . . Preventive grace is the beginning stage of that soteriologically motivated and christocentric flow. The next stage is “convincing” or convicting grace, by which the individual knows himself or herself to be a sinner. Without that self-knowledge there can be no onward progress toward God. By grace and the work of the Holy Spirit men and women come to know their true spiritual conditions. They are enabled to know whether or not they enjoy peace with God. Preventive grace provides this light. It shines through certain societal and religious conventions, as well as through individual consciences. The religions of the world are instruments of this light, since men and women come to know their moral failures or triumphs through them. Within them is an imprint and witness to the Truth, which, though not recognized as such, is Christ. Where this imprint and witness in other religions is, may be judged by Christians on the basis of biblical revelation.

—Floyd T. Cunningham⁸⁸

Hymn Analysis

Study the lyrics to the following hymns from *Sing to the Lord*:

No. 81 "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy"

No. 543 "Let Your Heart Be Broken"

No. 678 "In Christ There Is No East or West"

No. 712 "O Christians, Haste"

In what ways are all of these hymns about the mission of the Church?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What ethical and compassionate acts are required of Christians in these hymns?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What qualities and attributes are ascribed to God and Jesus Christ by these four hymns?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

What principles and standards of Wesleyan theology are found in these songs?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The Uniqueness of the Christian Confession

By Al Truesdale

The Gospel of John declares, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14, RSV). John is responding to and affirming what God did in His Son, Jesus Christ. When the Apostle Paul says, “If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation” and adds, “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself” (2 Cor. 5: 17, 18), he is bearing witness to God’s action in Christ. Through Christ God is reconciling the world to himself. When Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus responded, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 16:15-20, RSV). These are responses the Holy Spirit inspired. They are accounts men created.

The Christian faith is just that, a faithful response to what God has accomplished in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of his Son. Christians do not create that story; the eternal God does. So the Christian faith is not simply one world religion competing with other world religions. In the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, and the Son of God, Redeemer of the world. By faith they respond to what God has done. In obedient words and actions they repeat God’s great deed in Christ. The Father, the Holy Spirit, the inspired Scriptures, and the Church bear witness to Christ. For he is the true light that has shined in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it (see, Jn 1:1-13). Anyone who in any way attempts to compromise or back away from this witness pulls away from Christ and denies his or her faith.

If the Scriptures are true, as we certainly believe them to be, then no one comes to salvation, comes to know God, except through Jesus Christ. To all who will receive him, who will believe on his name, the Lord Christ will give “power to become children of God” (Jn 1:12, RSV). The world, the Apostle Paul says, did not know God through its own wisdom. Rather, in God’s own wisdom it pleased Him to make Christ Jesus “our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30, RSV). “We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:23-24, RSV).

When we study religions such as Islam or Buddhism we must leave absolutely no doubt—none—regarding Jesus Christ in whom the One eternal God became the incarnate Redeemer. Nevertheless, millions and millions of people around the world continue to practice religions that do not make the Christian confession regarding Christ. We must ask about the significance of those religions and about their relation to the Christian faith.

Let us remember that in the Wesleyan Tradition we believe that through the prevenient activity of the Holy Spirit, God is now working in all persons to draw them to Christ. After all, it is not God’s will that any persons should perish, but that all should come to eternal life (see, Jn 3:16-21). The Gospel of John tells us that Christ the True Light of God who came into the world “enlightens every man” (Jn 1:9, RSV). We believe that the Holy Spirit acts in many ways and through unexpected means to lead persons to become candidates for an enlightened and transforming encounter with Christ. How the Spirit accomplishes this, and the strange tools he sometimes uses, never ceases to amaze us.

Jesus said, “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd” (Jn 10:16, RSV). This verse certainly does not mean that non-Christian religions are suitable means of salvation. But it should tell us something about how we should approach persons of other religions when we are engaged in evangelization. If the Holy Spirit is already preveniently working in all persons, then no one is a total stranger to God. We should approach others “not as though they are *aliens*, *strangers*, *foreigners*, *oddities*, but rather as if they were indeed *other* or *potential sheep*. That one little difference in perspective and attitude—viewing them as potential sheep to be cultivated rather than wolves to be feared—may in fact make all of the difference” (Leupp, *Investigating Christian Theology 1*, 17-13).

Three-Way Analytical

Exclusivism

This is the tried and true position that Christianity is the only true religion.

Those who are fond of saying that Christianity is not a religion but is rather a relationship *with* God the Father, *through* God the Son, and *in the power* of God the Spirit are probably exclusivists.

Inclusivism

Inclusivism suggests that the truths of other religions can be found implicitly in Christianity. Whatever is of value in Hinduism, for example, may be found in a parallel form within Christianity. In that sense Christianity is inclusive of all religious value, worth, and virtue.

Pluralism

This word means, in essence, that all of the great faith paths are legitimate, true, redemptive, and salvific.

Statements from Karl Barth⁸⁹

“Religion is unbelief. It is a concern, indeed, we must say that it is the one great concern, of godless man.”

“We can speak of ‘true religion’ only in the sense in which we speak of a ‘justified sinner.’”

“No religion is true. It can only become true, i.e. according to that which it purports to be and for which it is upheld. . . . Like justified man, true religion is a creature of grace. But grace is the revelation of God. No religion can stand before it as true religion. No man is righteous in its presence.”

Lesson 18: Christianity Engages Culture

Due This Lesson

Two-page interview
Other religion study
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- define culture with some understanding
- reflect more adequately on how culture shapes theological formulation
- understand the student's own cultural "location" and place
- be increasingly cognizant of cultural realities that have shaped Nazarene practices

Homework Assignments

When we speak about culture, we are obviously speaking about personal stories. This is a good time for you to investigate some of your religious roots. In some cases, your roots in the Nazarene or related traditions may be very deep indeed. In other cases, not deep at all.

- Conduct "oral history" interviews with members of your extended family, finding out as much as possible about their respective religious (or even irreligious) roots.
- The following areas of investigation are appropriate:
 - conversion stories
 - acts of compassion carried forth in the name of the gospel
 - Christian vocations such as pastoring and missionary service
 - ethical transformations
 - witnessing to nonbelievers
 - theological change and growth over the years
 - the future of belief for those who are interviewed
- The results should be written up in a two-page paper.

Look through newspapers and magazines (both religious and secular) cutting out articles showing contemporary views of humankind and human nature. Bring these to class.

Journal Prompt

Which of H. Richard Niebuhr's five basic typologies is most characteristic of my personal life?

Defining Culture

Culture is a product; is historical; includes ideas, patterns, and values; is selective; is learned; is based on symbols; and is an abstraction from behavior and the products of behavior.

Christian ethicist H. Richard Niebuhr suggests several features of culture in his book *Christ and Culture*:⁹⁰

- culture is social
- culture is a human achievement
- one important way any culture expresses itself is through the values it promotes
- every culture is marked to one degree or another by pluralism

Intellectual historian Edward W. Said defines culture as follows:

First of all it means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy [freedom] from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic [related to the beautiful] forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure. Included, of course, are both the popular stock of lore about distant parts of the world and specialized knowledge available in such learned disciplines as ethnography, historiography, philology, sociology, and literary history.⁹¹

Christ and Culture

Niebuhr suggests some of the obvious ways in which we may approach the figure of Jesus Christ:

- A teacher for the ages who gives us moral wisdom and new truth and new law. Christianity is *new teaching*.
- The revelation of God in His very person. Christianity is *new life*.
- The founder of a new community, the church. Christianity is *new community*.⁹²

Small Groups **Coming to Cultural and Christian Awareness**

1. What is your personal definition of culture?
2. What activities do you engage in, and attitudes do you hold, that are "typical" of your understanding of culture? In other words, what actions and attitudes express your own cultural identity?
3. Define the following words and phrases, and give examples of how they work in the world:
 subculture, pluralism, popular culture, media culture, multiculturalism
4. How is your understanding of Jesus Christ affected by your understanding of culture? Which comes first, in your opinion: your theology of Jesus Christ, or your understanding of culture?
5. Are changes in worship practices and patterns shaped by changes in culture? For example: some churches no longer having Sunday evening services, less use of the hymnal and more use of choruses, fewer and shorter revival meetings, less concern about shopping or working on Sunday, etc.
6. What specific memories do you have of some of these common Nazarene practices, some of them no longer very much in evidence: the altar call, the district campmeeting, the visiting revivalist, testimony time, "shouting the glory down," etc. ?
7. What do the following two Nazarene congregations have in common?
 - A large, urban congregation in Los Angeles, New York, or Chicago that is attended by many peoples from many different lands, and offers a wide range of Christian ministries: literacy, work training, health care, day care, breakfast for the needy, in addition to more traditional ministries such as the preaching of the Word, a sacramental life, and Christian nurture and education.
 - A small-town congregation of 80 people, almost all of them Caucasian, offering more traditional ministries such as the preaching of the Word, Christian nurture and education, and the ministry of the sacraments.
8. Eventually the Church of the Nazarene will elect a female general superintendent, or one from a non-Western nation. When that happens, what will this say about cultural realities within the entire denomination?

Culture: Classicist or Empirical

For the classicist notion of culture, there really is only one culture, and it is both universal and permanent. Within this understanding of culture, one becomes “cultured,” and so listened to Bach and Beethoven, read Homer and Dickens and Flaubert, and appreciated Van Dyck, Michelangelo, and Rembrandt. The person of culture, in other words, nourished oneself on the great human achievements of the West. The empiricist notion of culture, however, defines culture as a set of meanings and values that informs a way of life—and there are obviously many such sets throughout the world. Within the parameters of this understanding of culture, one is “cultured” by being socialized within a particular society. Culture is not something ‘out there,’ but something that everyone participates in already.⁹³

The Five Paradigms of Christ and Culture⁹⁴

Christ against Culture—the Antagonists

The Christ of Culture—the Accommodationists

Christ above Culture—the Synthesists

Christ and Culture in Paradox—the Dualists

Christ the Transformer of Culture—the Conversionists

The antagonist would tend either to avoid or to criticize culture, and the dualist to despair of ever changing the ills of human society. The accommodationist would more or less accept the culture as it currently presented itself, and the synthesist would look for signs within existing social and cultural institutions that the grace and love of God were indeed present and active.

The conversionist believes humans can, with some success, work for the coming of the kingdom of God upon the face of the earth, while yet realizing that only God himself can give the Kingdom in its entirety.

The Christian Vision

The Christian vision of reality has the grounds for its own universal claim written into it. It pictures a single consistent Creator with a constant purpose for all humanity (and indeed for the whole universe). The divine purpose for humanity is growth into the likeness of God as self-giving love (and God's purpose for other parts of creation must match that in appropriately transposed forms). When God's purpose for humanity is thus simply expressed, it is hard to credit that it cannot be grasped by the simplest human spirit or intelligence. In the nature of the case (it is a matter of self-giving love), acceptance of that purpose can only be by free response.

—Geoffrey Wainwright⁹⁵

Lesson 19: Humanity Graciously Endowed: Theological Anthropology

Due This Lesson

Two-page roots report
Media articles
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- know the Christian teaching of humanity created in the image of God
- explore further some of the relational dynamics and presuppositions being created in God's image implies
- see the Christian view in a broader context of comparison with various other views

Homework Assignments

Watch at least two hours of talk shows on television. You should watch at least two different talk shows.

- What clues about the question "Who Is Man?" can be learned and viewed from these programs?
- Is there any evidence of humanity being made in the image of God? Or of humanity as fallen?
- Write a two-page essay detailing your findings.

Journal Prompt

The noted Roman Catholic monk and spiritual writer, Thomas Merton, was standing on a street corner in a busy Kentucky city in the 1960s. Suddenly he was overcome by the awareness that he was deeply in love with all of humanity. Has that ever happened to you? Do you expect it to?

Humanity

“The glory of God is man fully alive.”

—Irenaeus

Psalm 8

O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
All flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea.
O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth.

“Today, the one great mystery is man himself.”

—Mildred Bangs Wynkoop⁹⁶

“No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called ‘natural conscience’. But this is not natural; it is more properly termed ‘preventing grace’. Every man has a greater or less measure of this, which waiteth not for the call of man. . . . Everyone has some measure of that light, some faint glimmering ray, which sooner or later, more or less, enlightens every man that cometh into the world. And everyone, unless he be one of the small number whose conscience is seared as with a hot iron, feels more or less uneasy when he acts contrary to the light of his own conscience. So that no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath.”

—John Wesley⁹⁷

Humanity in the Image of God

Karl Barth once said we cannot speak of the divine simply by speaking about the human in a loud voice. If our theology begins with ourselves, by looking within, and magnifying and amplifying what we find there, and then calling that "God," we are practicing *anthropological theology*. Conversely, *theological anthropology* begins with God and then moves to humanity. We might call this "anthropology from above," whereas anthropological theology is "anthropology from below," from the human to the divine.

In support of the biblical position, G. C. Berkouwer writes, "Scripture is concerned with man in his relation to God, in which he can never be seen as man-in-himself, and surely not with man's 'essence' described as self or person."⁹⁸

H. Ray Dunning rightly believes the correct way of speaking is of the image of God within humankind, rather than humankind in the image of God:

Traditionally, efforts have been made to define the meaning of the *imago* by seeking to identify that in man which differentiates him from the rest of creation. That involved defining it from below. Under the influence of Greek thought this differentia has been classically identified as reason, freedom, and/or personality. When defined from below, it can be affirmed that man's essential form includes freedom, rationality, the capacity for self-transcendence and immortality. All these are created characteristics that differentiate him from the lower orders of creation. These qualities do indeed provide the irreducible requirements necessary for man to stand in relation to God, but within themselves they do not constitute that capacity. That is a God-given possibility, since all these "ontic" qualities may conceivably be present without any essential orientation toward the Divine.⁹⁹

In the Image of God

If we are convinced we have been created in the image of God, what more can we say? When speaking of *humanity in the image of God*, two choices present themselves. They are often referred to as the *relational* and the *substantial* or *substantival*.

Stanley Grenz helps us sort out the differences between the two:

The most commonly held recounting of theological history [of the *imago dei*] finds two basic approaches to the image of God within the tradition: the substantial or structural view, which understands the *imago dei* as consisting of certain attributes or capabilities lodged within the person, and the relational view, which sees the divine image as referring to a fundamental relationship between the human creature and the Creator.¹⁰⁰

Two images, credited to the Christian ethicist Paul Ramsey, help our understanding:

Substantial or Structural:	God shapes us as a sculptor shapes stone or an artist paints a painting.
Relational:	Humans reflect the divine image somewhat like a mirror. ¹⁰¹

Importance of Genesis 2

Finding deep symbolic importance in Genesis 2, Wynkoop believes it tells us this about the human condition:

Genesis 2 tells us in its symbolic way (1) that man was superior to the animals in intelligence, insight, self-understanding, purpose, and spirituality; (2) that he is essentially a social being, a society (male and female); and (3) that his world, the earth, is his home, his domain, his palace; but (4) that he himself is the very shrine of God (in this is his distinction from all other orders of creation, his glory, and then the bitterness of his shame); (5) that in mankind there is the constant poignant reminder of his fallibility.¹⁰²

Rational View Support

Michael Lodahl makes the following points in his book *The Story of God*.

1. Humans, and only humans, are capable of inquiring about their own selves.
2. The chief human end is not mere introspection or self-examination. "This [speaking] allows human beings an opportunity to *speak back* to God, to answer, to offer their own meaningful words to this great Story of God."
3. To live relationally is to live responsibly. "God sustains us in each moment precisely to 'stand forth.'"¹⁰³

For liberation theologian Leonardo Boff, the reality of God's triunity means we as humans are created to be in an "active web of relationships," because this is true of God himself:

In light of the Trinity, being a person in the image and likeness of the divine Persons means acting as a permanently active web of relationships: relating backwards and upwards to one's origin in the unfathomable mystery of the Father, relating outwards to one's fellow human beings by revealing oneself to them and welcoming the revelation of them in the mystery of the Son, relating inwards to the depths of one's own personality in the mystery of the Spirit.¹⁰⁴

Sharpening the Relational Focus

Mildred Bangs Wynkoop's 1972 book, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism*, advocates the relational perspective.

Answer the questions below.

1. Wynkoop describes humanity as "majestic, corruptible, redeemable, ignorant, fallible, creative, sinful" (p. 112). What seven words would you employ to describe the human situation?
2. Wynkoop quotes (p. 104) with approval the following statement from Nels Ferre: "Rebellion against God is necessary at some point in our lives if we are to become free sons [and daughters], glorifying [God] out of love and gratitude."
Do you agree with this idea? Why or why not?
3. Wynkoop believes human existence is marked by four features, which can be discovered through a careful reading of Genesis 2. Under each of the four features, list several examples to illustrate Wynkoop's point.

Embodiment:

Wynkoop writes, "man is a body. . . . One cannot think without a body. . . . By means of this body-thought-language complex, and only by this means, is the essential avenue established by which communication is possible between God and man" (p. 114).

Dynamic Intentionality:

Humanity's "most elementary sensations are active, not passive. Consciousness is 'intentional,' a breaking out toward the world" (p. 114).

Self-Transcendence:

"Fellowship must always respect the uniqueness and identity of the other—a guard against the loss of fellowship and the suffering of alienation" (p. 115).

Need for Human Fellowship:

"Man is a social being" (p. 115).

An Ancient Distinction with Contemporary Relevance

Irenaeus was influenced by the Greek philosopher Plato, who understood the human to be composed of body, soul, and spirit. Irenaeus taught that the body and the soul taken together constituted the natural human being. This is the image of God in humanity. The gift of the spirit is what separates humanity from beast and links the human with the divine, and hence this is the likeness of God in humanity.

Donald Bloesch explains the meaning of Irenaeus' distinction:

Through sin man has lost the likeness to God, which consists in the gift of supernatural communion with God and original righteousness, but not the image, which represents the freedom and rationality of his nature.¹⁰⁵

Wesley spoke of the moral image (what Irenaeus called the likeness to God) and the natural image (Irenaeus' image of God). The natural image was compromised and damaged in the Fall, and the moral image was totally destroyed. The goal of redemption is the complete restoration of God's moral image in us.

Humanity, Made in the Image of God

Wynkoop begins her chapter on “Man, Made in the Image of God” by reminding her readers of the crucial quality of this statement:

What man thinks of man determines in a large measure how he relates himself to his earth and to his fellows. Religious and social systems, governments and institutions, as well as technological manipulation and ‘fabrication’ of human genetics fall into the mold of man’s self-understanding, for better or for worse.¹⁰⁶

How does our view of the human (“Who Is Man?”) affect “for better” and “for worse” in each of the following?

	Better	Worse
The earth		
Our neighbors		
Religious systems		
Social systems		
Governments		
Institutions		
Technologies		

Who Am I?

Who am I? They often tell me
I would step from my cell's confinement
calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
like a squire from his country-house.

Who am I? They also tell me
I would talk to my warders
freely and friendly and clearly,
as though I were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me
I would bear the days of misfortune
equably, smilingly, proudly,
like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really all that which other men tell of?
Or am I only what I myself know of myself,
restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,
struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat,
yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds,
thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness,
trembling with anger at despotisms and petty humiliation,
tossing in expectation of great events,
powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,
weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,
faint, and ready to say farewell to it all?

Who am I? This or the other?
Am I one person today, and tomorrow another?
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,
and before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling?
Or is something within me still like a beaten army,
fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?
Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer¹⁰⁷

Turning Inward

The ancient Greeks lived under the motto of *Know Thyself*, and Socrates is famous for declaring, "the unexamined life is not worth living."

The self is "the individual as known to the individual." It is "that to which we refer when we say 'I.'" It is the "custodian of awareness"; it is the thing about a person which has awareness and alertness, "which notices what goes on . . . and notices what goes on in its own field."

—A. T. Jersild¹⁰⁸

Rollo May, known for advocating "existential psychotherapy," wrote, "the self is . . . not merely the sum of the various 'roles' one plays—it is the capacity by which one *knows* he plays these roles; it is the center from which one sees and is aware of these so-called different 'sides' of himself."¹⁰⁹

Rene Descartes (1596—1650) is famous for the statement, "*Cogito, Ergo Sum*," meaning "I think, therefore I am."

Augustine's method was to move "from things outward to inward, from lower to higher" or in the words of one of his interpreters, "from the exterior to the interior and from the interior to the superior."¹¹⁰

Lesson 20: The Element within Us, or Thinking about Sin

Due This Lesson

Two-page report on media/humanity
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- survey relevant aspects of the classical Christian doctrine of sin
- note some of the distinctive elements of the Wesleyan view of sin
- note points of contact between the doctrine of sin and the doctrine of entire sanctification
- note some of the criticisms of the Wesleyan understanding of sin

Homework Assignments

Read John 8: 1-11. Consider how this passage of Scripture impacts one's doctrine of sin.

Journal Prompt

- J. Kenneth Grider noted that famous neoorthodox theologian Emil Brunner believed he always lived in Romans 7, meaning he never got beyond the struggle against the flesh.
- Thoughtfully read Romans 7. What does this scripture say to us in light of human depravity, in light of the hope for heart holiness before God and among humanity?

Sin

“Sin, understood in the Christian sense, is the rent that cuts through the whole of existence.”

—Emil Brunner

“Vanity is so anchored in the heart of man that . . . those who write against it want to have the glory of having written well; and those who read it desire the glory of having read it.”

—Blaise Pascal

“I don’t need to fight
To prove I’m right
I don’t need to be forgiven.”

—The Who, British rock band

“The real trouble with our times is not the multiplication of sinners, it is the disappearance of sin.”

—Etienne Gilson

“All sins are so many spiritual diseases, which must be cured by the power of Christ before we can be capable of being happy, even though it were possible for us to be admitted into the kingdom of heaven hereafter.”

—Susanna Wesley,
in a letter to her son John Wesley

“Breathe, O breathe, thy loving Spirit
Into every troubled breast,
Let us all in thee inherit,
Let us find that second rest;
Take away our bent to sinning,
Alpha and Omega be,
End of faith, as its beginning,
Set our hearts at liberty.”

—Charles Wesley,
“Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”¹¹¹

“Indeed we are already bound hand and foot by the chains of our own sins. These, considered with regard to ourselves, are chains of iron and fetters of brass. They are wounds wherewith the world, the flesh, and the devil have gashed and mangled us all over. They are diseases that drink up our blood and spirits, that bring us down to the chambers of the grave. But, considered as they are here, with regard to God, they are debts immense and numberless. Well, therefore, seeing we have nothing to pay, may we cry unto Him, that He would frankly forgive us all!”

—John Wesley¹¹²

“All who deny this—call it ‘original sin’ or by any other title—are but heathens still in the fundamental point which differences heathenism from Christianity. They may indeed allow that men have many vices; that some are born with us; and that consequently we are not born altogether so wise or so virtuous as we should be; there being few that will roundly affirm we are born with as much propensity to good as to evil, and that every man is by nature as virtuous and wise as Adam was at his creation. But here is the shibboleth: Is man by nature filled with all manner of evil? Is he void of all good? Is he wholly fallen? Is his soul totally corrupted? Or, to come back to the text, is ‘every imagination of the thoughts of his heart evil continually’? Allow this, and you are so far a Christian. Deny it, and you are but an heathen still.”

—John Wesley¹¹³

Total Depravity

Four meanings, Bloesch believes, illumine the teaching of total depravity:

1. The very center of the human being has been corrupted.
2. This infection has spread to every segment of the human being.
3. Humankind has no innate ability to please God, and apart from grace we are not able to move toward God. Total depravity means the bondage of the will, at least so far as the will's being capable of moving itself toward God.
4. Human depravity also points to the "universal corruption of the human race, despite the fact that some peoples and cultures manifest this corruption much less than others."¹¹⁴

Definition of Sin

For Rob L. Staples, the biblical evidence (especially the story of the Fall in Genesis 3) shows sin to be a many-headed monster:

- Sin begins in a questioning of divine authority.
- Sin is essentially the attempt to become like God.
- Sin is not only an individual transgression against a holy God, but also has a social dimension.
- Sin involves the breaking of fellowship.
- Sin includes the denial of responsibility.
- Sin robs life of meaning and purpose.
- Sin always ends in our alienation from the Lord God.¹¹⁵

Willfully Ignoring God

Not only Nazarene writers have stressed the relational component of sin. Mainline Protestant writer Daniel L. Migliore expresses that “we misunderstand the depth of sin if we see it only as a violation of a moral code; it is, instead, primarily the disruption of our relationship with God.”

- One is to exalt ourselves in place of God.
- Second . . . “is the sin of self-rejection, and it frequently leads to a *passive and other-centered idolatry*.”¹¹⁶

Prevenient Grace and Original Sin

Leo G. Cox wisely reminds us that Wesley's view of prevenient grace affected his view of sin. Original sin, Cox writes,

accounts for the natural weaknesses and evils inherent in the human race. However the guilt for this sin is removed for all men [and women] in prevenient grace, though the unfortunate and evil results remain. From this fallen nature flow the corruptions and evil tendencies in the sons of Adam. But into this evil nature also flows the grace of God, which fact changed Wesley's definition of sin. Since man has grace, it is the refusal of this grace that becomes the condemning sin.¹¹⁷

Wesley's theology is a theology seeking to resolve the divine-human conflict. It is therefore a *soteriological* theology. To diagnose the human condition as fallen and alien from God is not the end of wisdom (because that end is Jesus Christ), but it is the beginning of wisdom. The claims of the gospel stumble and falter if the truth of human depravity is denied. "The universal corruption of human nature is for Wesley an essential Christian doctrine apart from which the whole gospel becomes meaningless" is John Cobb's wise statement.¹¹⁸

A Matter of Emphasis

1 John 1:9 reads, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Nazarene theologians have typically found in this passage an implicit witness to the reality of *two related and yet distinguishable types of sin*.

The sins we confess, the sins that are forgiven, are expunged by the first work of grace, which is variously called justification, the new birth, adoption, or regeneration, depending on what aspect is being emphasized. These are *acts of sin*.

But the *proclivity or tendency toward sin, called inbred corruption*, awaits a second work of grace. To be purified or cleansed of all unrighteousness is to be entirely sanctified. This is *the condition of sin* (Charles Wesley's "the bent toward sinning" or "the power of sinning") that admittedly gives rise to the various acts of sin.

Two Criticisms of the Wesleyan View of Sin

First Criticism

British Methodist theologian R. Newton Flew:

The word [sin] has too long a history behind it for such a limitation to be possible. Indeed the narrower sense is not even desirable. Our worst sins are often those of which we are unconscious. The stress on the consciousness and deliberate intention of the agent is the most formidable defect in Wesley's doctrine of the ideal. If only those transgressions are overcome which are recognized to be transgressions by the agent, the degree of sanctification attained by him will depend on his previous moral development, on his own insight into motive, and on his knowledge of himself.¹¹⁹

Sin is not a mere *thing*. From a mere bundle on the back however burdensome a man may be delivered in an instant. How can he be delivered in an instant from that which he himself is? The man himself must be changed; and we are changed by the companionship of the Indwelling Spirit of God.¹²⁰

Second Criticism

The Reformed theologian Anthony A. Hoekema is typical of this view, and writes,

I do not believe that the Bible allows for the possibility of living without sin, even without 'willful sin,' in this life. I do not accept the Wesleyan teaching about entire sanctification. . . . I must reject the possibility of sinless living on this side of glory. . . . We are *genuinely* new but not yet *totally* new.¹²¹

Small Groups

Compare/Contrast the Wesleyan View of Sin with Others

Paul Tillich was a Lutheran theologian, and this statement, taken from one of his sermons, is typical, both of his own thought, and of that of classical Protestantism in general.

Have the men of our time still a feeling of the meaning of sin? Do they, and do we, still realize that sin does *not* mean an immoral act, that "sin" should never be used in the plural, and that not our sins, but rather our *sin* is the great, all-pervading problem of our life? Do we still know that it is arrogant and erroneous to divide men by calling some "sinners" and others "righteous"? For by way of such a division, we can usually discover that we ourselves do not *quite* belong to the "sinners, since we have avoided heavy sins, have made some progress in the control of this or that sin, and have been even humble enough not to call ourselves "righteous". Are we still able to realize that this kind of thinking and feeling about sin is far removed from what the great religious tradition, both within and outside the Bible, has meant when it speaks of sin?¹²²

In what ways can Nazarenes agree with this statement?

What are points of disagreement?

Three Tensions¹²³

The Universal and the Particular

Sin is pervasive and thus a universal problem, yet we are responsible for it because of our choices.

Sin Is Pervasive, and for That Reason Ambiguous

Migliore writes:

sin insinuates itself into all human action, including not only what is widely condemned as *evil* but also what is commonly praised as *good*. . . . Sin may be most seductively and demonically at work under the guise of doing good.

The Individual and the Corporate

Migliore's comment is again worth noting:

In modern society there is an increasing tendency to privatize sin and to restrict it to the behavior of individuals. Against this tendency stands the biblical witness with its emphasis on an encompassing reign of evil and the solidarity of all humanity in the old 'Adam' of sin and alienation.

Bible Study: Prophetic Solidarity

The Hebrew prophets and the Wisdom literature had a keen sense of God's justice and a powerful awareness of social sin. Look up the following verses, and from them put together a picture of social solidarity, care for the poor, and the promises and expectations of God.

Proverbs 14:31

Amos 6:12

Isaiah 3:14-15

Isaiah 1:17

Isaiah 29:13

Jeremiah 4:3-4

Isaiah 32:6

Jeremiah 22:15-16

Amos 5:21-24

Job 42:6

Isaiah 33:1

Proverbs 17:5

Amos 5:7

Jeremiah 5:4-5

2 Samuel 12:1-6

Hosea 10:2

Amos 6:6

Jeremiah 31:32

Jeremiah 17:5-8

Isaiah 5:16

Isaiah 25:4

Three Closing Thoughts

Reinhold Niebuhr (1892—1971)

Niebuhr is widely acclaimed as one of the leading social thinkers and Christian ethicists of the 20th century. Among his many contributions to Christian theology, perhaps none is as great as his insistence on the tragic fallenness of humanity and the shattering ambiguity of life. By its very nature, life produces anxiety. Niebuhr believed, “anxiety is an inevitable concomitant of human freedom, and is the root of the inevitable sin which expresses itself in every human activity and creativity.”¹²⁴

Paul Tillich (1886—1965)

Like Niebuhr, with whom he taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, Tillich saw the human condition as fraught with anxiety. Unlike Niebuhr, Tillich developed his thought in more philosophical and less historical ways. Tillich was also very influenced by depth psychology, and hence saw sin in terms of alienation and estrangement.

Donald Bloesch simply writes, “the fall is not the transition from essence to existence (as in Tillich), but a turning away from God in the life of every person within history.”¹²⁵

Contemporary Trends

Rosemary Radford Ruether believes, “sin, therefore, has to be seen both in the capacity to set up prideful, antagonistic relations to others and in the passivity of men and women who acquiesce to the group ego.”¹²⁶

Process theology values freedom so highly that any failure on our parts to use our freedom to its fullest extent is likely to be sin. Blocking others from their greatest fulfillment might be social sin.

Endnotes

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- ¹⁶ Ibid., 46.
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