

ET 301 Christian Theology 1



**Student Handbook
Leadership Institute of West Africa
Church of the Nazarene**

Note to students of this course:

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Please notify the editors via the addresses below of any errors or misprints
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Leadership Institute
Equatorial Field
Church of the Nazarene

ET101 Christian Theology 1

Syllabus

Diploma Level

Certificate Level

Location of the Course:

Course Dates:

Name of the Instructor:

Instructor's Contact Details:

Course Description

The first of two courses that could be called "practical theology." The first course emphasizes orthodox Christian doctrine while seeking to systematically identify those elements which are essential to the universal community of faith as well as identifying Wesleyan-Arminian distinctives.

Course Rationale

Everything that 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 most important topic so far as doing the work of a pastor, yet no other task as a minister 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 that 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 that 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. This course is not strictly speaking a course 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, meaning work clothes, and this 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.

Program Outcomes

This module contributes to the development of the following abilities as defined in the *Africa Region Sourcebook for Ministerial Development* with adaptations for the Course of Study in English-speaking Africa West Field.

- CN 5 Ability to identify and explain the main characteristics of the theological foundations of Christianity.
- CN 6 Ability to explain how the theological foundations of Christianity proceed from Scriptures
- CN 7 Ability to explain scriptural holiness from a Wesleyan perspective.
- CN 13 Ability to explain the Nazarene position on speaking in tongues.

- CP 3 Ability to communicate effectively orally with cultural relevance

- CP 4 Ability to teach the Word of God
- CP 5 Ability to plan, participate in and conduct others in worship

- CH 1 Ability to take responsibility for one's own spiritual growth with the goal of becoming like Christ.
- CH 8 Ability to model Christ-like personal relationships within family, church, and community.
- CH 13 Ability to demonstrate a realistic self-understanding and take responsibility for personal and spiritual development.

- CX 3 Ability to apply this information to the ministries of the church.
- CX 8 Ability to make an integrated presentation of divine creation.

The Distribution of the 4 Cs is:

Content 60% **Competency 20%** **Character 10%** **Context 10%**

Course Outcomes

- By the end of this course the learner will be able to:
1. Identify the foundations of Christian theology in the Scriptures, tradition, reason, and experience through detailed in-class overview (CN5, CN 6, CN 7)
 2. Reflect on the biblical view of divine creation through in-class Bible study (CN 6, CP 3, CX 8)
 3. Write a paraphrase of the "Nazarene Agreed Statement of Faith" in their maternal or local language. (CN 7, CN13, CP 3)
 4. Define key words in Christian theology through regular quizzes and homework. (CN 5)
 5. Participate in a role play situation in which a Nazarene pastor is expected to state simply and briefly the distinctive theological positions of the Church of the Nazarene to other pastors and laity from other denominations. (CN 7, CN 13, CP 3 CH 8)
 6. In assigned small groups, create and present a worship service based on the doctrine of the Trinity, including an order of service, sermon topic, songs, Bible readings, and prayer. Each group should submit the project in written form following the presentation (CN 5, CP 3, CP 5, CX 3)
 7. Write in journal format and participate in small and whole group discussions that relate the course content to your spiritual life and ministry (CN7, CH 1, CH 13)

Course Evaluation

Class attendance and Class Notes	10%	(100 points)
Role-play in Interdenominational Pastors' Meeting	10%	(100 points)
Paraphrase of Nazarene Belief Statement	10%	(100 points)
Small Group Project: Worship Service Planning	15%	(150 points)
Two to three page Response Paper	15%	(150 points)
Journal and/or Written Homework	5%	(50 points)
Vocabulary Quizzes	15%	(150 points)
Final Exam	20%	(200 points)
	100%	(1000 points)

Course Recommended Reading

Each course within the Course of Study is intended to be textbook independent. This does not imply that course are textbook irrelevant or that the content cannot be enriched by selecting and requiring that students study a textbook along with the lessons provided in this faculty guide. Since this course material is used outside of North America, a specific textbook may not be available for the students. Therefore, the course does not rely on a textbook. The instructor may use this material without a textbook and/or select any doctrinally sound textbook that is available to the students.

The following books by Nazarene authors are used extensively in this course on Christian Theology. They provide a rich understanding of theology as offered in this course.

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

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

Investigating Christian Theology 1. RIIIE Course of Study module. Kansas City: Clergy Development.

- Lodahl, Michael. *The Story of God: Wesleyan Theology and Biblical Narrative*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1994.
- Staples, Rob L. *Outward Sign and Inward Grace*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1991.
- Staples, Rob L. *Words of Faith: An Easy Reference to Theological Terms*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2001.
- Wynkoop, Mildred Bangs. *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 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 or two lessons are missed, the learning leader will require extra work before completion can be acknowledged. If more than one day is missed, the student will be required to repeat the whole module.

2. 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 many group explorations and discussion, including a debate on contemporary views of theology, developing a worship service, and reflecting on the divine origins of creation.

Small Group Project: Worship Service Planning

Create a worship service around the theme of the Trinity. Each worship service should include an opening prayer, Scripture readings, three or more songs and/or hymns, the church at prayer, a children's sermon, a sermon (title and biblical passage only), and a closing benediction. Use scripture references and themes we have discussed in class.

3. Assignments

Note for all Written Work: This course has written homework assignments that are to be submitted in written form. The assignments are important. Even if homework is not discussed in class, 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.

Response Paper: The Uniqueness of the Christian Confession by Al Truesdale

Read the paper entitled "The Uniqueness of the Christian Confession." Respond to the paper in two-three pages using the following question as a guide to your response: **How does the uniqueness of the Christian confession make a difference in my daily life and ministry?**

Recommended Course Outline

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

Monday

1. Introduction to Christian Theology (Paraphrase of Agreed Statement of Belief)
2. The Work of Theology
3. Scripture: "The Oracles of God"
4. Tradition: Passing It On

Tuesday

5. Reason: Thinking It Over
6. Experience: Living It Out (Vocabulary Quiz)
7. Five Theological Models of Revelation

Wednesday

8. The Creator: Sovereignty, Theodicy, the Problem of Evil, The Solution of Love
9. The Creature: The Universe and Humanity
10. The Tragedy of Sin (Vocabulary Quiz)

Thursday

11. The Doctrine of the Trinity: Vital Center or Antique Relic (Small Group Project Presentation)
12. Biblical Foundations of the Trinity
13. Talking about the Triune God
Friday
14. The Christian Life and the Trinity (Vocabulary Quiz; Final Exam—Written & Oral)
15. A Christian Response to Other Religions (Response Paper)
16. Christianity Engages Culture

Additional Notes:

Educational Assumptions

1. The work of the Holy Spirit of Christ 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 learning leader 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 that 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.

Learner's Ability to Complete Course Work

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 Qualities and Availability

The instructor has committed to preparing the content and being familiar with the objectives of the course. The instructor's life and attitude inside and outside of the course should reflect the lifestyle of Jesus Christ—the main subject of the New Testament story. Good faith efforts to serve the students both in and beyond the classroom will be made.

Small Group Activity Guidelines

Educational research demonstrates that shared-learning activities, such as small group projects and discussion groups, raise the student's ability to gain and retain knowledge for practice outside the teaching environment. Students are able to develop critical thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis as they work in small group. Assigning small group projects help students to:

1. Learn how to work together in a team environment through positive interdependence.
2. Understand group processes, including process management, conflict management, synergism, collaboration, resource utilization, individual accountability, shared knowledge, cooperation, planning and problem solving.
3. Effectively and efficiently develop oral and written presentation skills.
4. Be better prepared for social interaction at work.
5. Explore and integrate a broader range of ideas and expertise.
6. Respond to different learning styles.
7. Supplement the knowledge of the facilitator/teacher.
8. Develop a sensitivity to and awareness of cultural and gender diversity.

When engaged in small group activities, the following guidelines should be followed:

1. When considering the formation of groups, take into account that it is desirable to balance the small groups by gender, age, geographical origin, local language, and experience. Try to bring as much diversity as possible to the group.
2. Select a spokesperson(s)/Leader(s) for the group to keep the team on task and for reporting back to the rest of the class about the small group's findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The spokesperson(s) should also serve as the recorder(s) for the group.
3. Select a timekeeper for the group. Most small group activities should not exceed twenty minutes. The timekeeper's task is to keep the group moving forward and on task to complete the assignment within the allotted time frame.
4. During the course, students are encouraged to try to participate in as many small group roles as possible—spokesperson, recorder, timekeeper.
5. Solicit the facilitator/teacher's assistance at any time the small group is unable to stay on task.

Characteristics of Effective Writing for Students

(adapted from Avila University, Kansas City, Missouri)

Main Idea

The paper is focused on a major point. The writer arrives at the point through clearly explaining why and how the major idea is important. The reader has very little doubt that the main idea is really the writer's main idea. The main idea is present from the beginning to the end of the paper, instead of several unrelated ideas scattered throughout. The paper shows a clear sense of purpose.

Well-Organized

The paper is clearly developed. Transitions are clear from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph. In other words, the writer has not simply made a series of unrelated or vaguely related statements. Rather, each statement and paragraph carries the reader closer to an understanding or appreciation of the writer's goal—the main idea of the paper.

Support

The writer provides specific, concrete, and appropriate information from memory, observation, reading, interviewing, or other sources. The paper is well developed with examples, details, illustrations, and anecdotes.

Style

Sentences are varied, and word choices are accurate. There is an absence of "clutter" or "padding." Phrasing is clear and direct. Tone is handled consistently; sentence length and word choice are appropriate to the audience and purpose of the paper.

Mechanics

Punctuation, grammar, spelling, and aspects of format are correctly written. The writer has prepared the paper carefully with attention to appearance and other details. Opening paragraph, closing paragraph, and title are strong and contribute to the sense of purpose, focus, and unity of the writing assignment.

Proofreading

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. What is my major point of the paper?
2. Have I supported generalizations, opinions, and conclusions with specific examples from the course material, texts, or personal experience?
3. Have I avoided using unnecessary words and clichés?
4. Have I proofread for spelling, punctuation, and typographical errors?

Foreword

The following statements are from the course materials for *Investigating Christian Theology 1, from which much of the following course, is derived*, published by Resource Institute for International Education, Clergy Development, Church of the Nazarene International, Kansas City,

Overall Hopes for This Course

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 this course is intentionally *irenica* (leading to consensus and peace) rather than *polemical* (tending to seek conflict and emphasizing disagreement with other Christian traditions). To use a cliché, this means that we are more interested in building bridges than walls. Doctrines such as the trinity 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 linkages 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:

- 1) the grace of God, especially the Wesleyan view of prevenient grace.
- 2) 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 that both of these two "moments" need to be taken in the broader context of the entire drama of salvation.
- 3) 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 intellectualistic and rationalistic 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 completed.
- 4) Phineas F. Bresee, one of the founding pastors of the Church of the Nazarene, believed that 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*.

1. Introduction to Christian Theology

"On the Street" Scenario

You are walking down the street. Someone comes to you [a pastor or a lay person] and says, "I know you are a Christian. What I want to know is what you believe?"

How do you respond?

Gather in groups of 3-4. Discuss possible responses. Assign someone to take notes and report on your discussion.

Notes:

Agreed Statement of Belief: Church of the Nazarene

- We believe in one God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- We believe that the Old and New Testament Scriptures, given by plenary inspiration, contain all truth necessary to faith and Christian living.
- We believe that man is born with a fallen nature, and is, therefore, inclined to evil, and that continually.
- We believe that the finally impenitent are hopelessly and eternally lost.
- We believe that the atonement through Jesus Christ is for the whole human race; and that whosoever repents and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ is justified and regenerated and saved from the dominion of sin.
- We believe that believers are to be sanctified wholly, subsequent to regeneration, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- We believe that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the new birth, and also to the entire sanctification of believers.
- We believe that our Lord will return, the dead will be raised, and the final judgment will take place.”

Manual of the Church of the Nazarene, pp. 35-36, paragraph 26

Begin this project with the same group you were in earlier. Take time this evening and paraphrase the Agreement Statement of Belief into your maternal or local language.

2. The Work of Theology

Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God*, pp. 13-16

Key terms: theology

Theology (Gr., theos = God, logos = word, study)

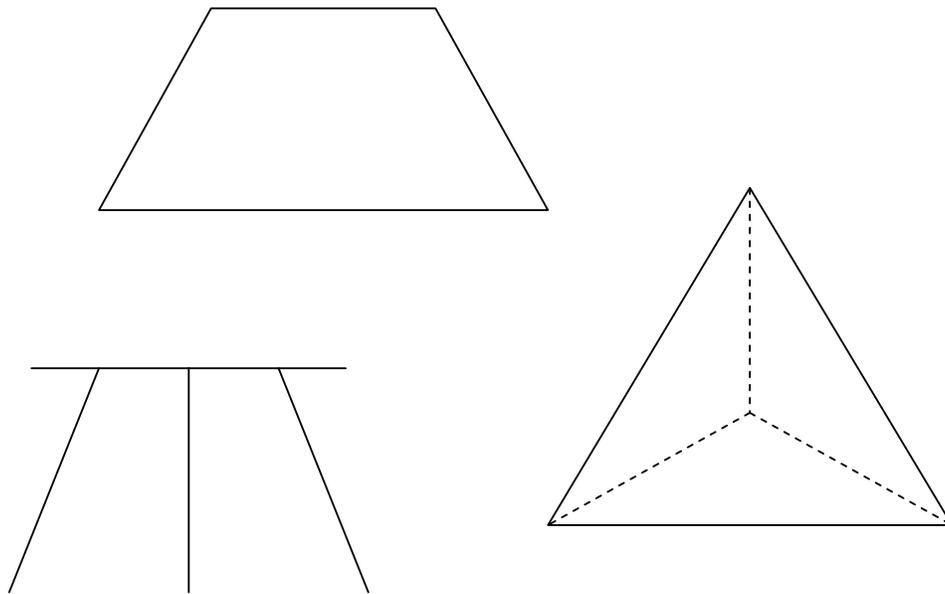
- The primary task of theology is to _____ of the biblical story, and to tell it again in today’s world.

The Story of God begins: "*In the beginning God . . .*"(Genesis 1:1)

Remember:

- 1) God is the primary Actor in the Bible and in Christian theology
- 2) God is active on a day-to-day, moment-by-moment basis
- 3) God’s people are also involved in God’s Story that began in the Bible

- To undertake the study of theology is to become a _____—that means, we will have questions and ask them in all seriousness.
- To study theology is not only an educational task, but an opportunity to _____ God as we learn more about Him
- We can organize the study of theology through the use of what is called the **Wesleyan quadrilateral**, a way to visualize the parts of how to think about theology.



Scripture is rightly interpreted in dialogue with the other sources, just as Scripture serves as the ultimate check of the other three. Wesley never wrote out this outline, but it was his “theological method”; it was his way of doing theology and biblical interpretation.

3. Scripture: "The Oracles of God"

Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God*, 13-24

Key words: history, covenant, event, interpretation, inspiration

Theology is _____ and difficult. There are no easy answers to life's hard questions.

Regardless of the struggle we have in working out an _____ of our theology, we have a common starting point as Christian theologians—the Bible.

The power of the Bible lies in its ability to offer encouragement, hope, and _____ to those who hear its message.

The basic _____ of the biblical writers is "God acts in—interacts with—human history to bring about His saving purposes."

The **Jewish biblical tradition**—known to Christians as the Old Testament—remembers God as the One who saved the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt through the Exodus and entered into a covenant with them on Mt. Sinai.

Covenant means "_____"

The **Christian biblical tradition**—the Old and New Testaments—focus on how the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ offers the hope of salvation not only for Israel, but for all who would believe (trust) in God.

The Bible tells the story of covenant relationship about a "_____."

History of God

According to John Wesley, the Bible is a "history of God" at work.

History is the _____ of events.

Example #1:

"Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided." (Exodus 14:21)

What was the event? (The actual fact):

How was the event interpreted? (How that fact is viewed later on):

Example #2: 1 Corinthians 15

Event: The Resurrection has been affirmed by Christians as an event that truly happened in first-century Palestine. The apostle Paul confirms this in 1 Cor 15:3-4.

Interpretation: The Early Christians saw God's raising to life of the crucified Jesus as the event in history **that brings salvation to all who believe** (1 Cor 15:14,17).

Therefore, God revealed Himself to humanity through Jesus Christ. God inspired the apostles and other biblical writers to tell the Story of God to future generations.

Inspiration of the Scriptures

"To be a Christian means to believe that the biblical interpretations of history are **inspired** (in-spire = breath into), that the human writers of the Scriptures were given _____ direction and insight by God in order to _____ correctly God's presence and activity in _____ events." – Michael Lodahl, 22

Nazarene Article of Faith: The Holy Scriptures

"We believe in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, by which we understand the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation, so that whatever is not contained therein is not to be enjoined as an article of faith." (*Manual*, p. 27 paragraph 4)

Inspiration does not mean _____ dictation by God to the biblical writer.

"Inspiration is the operation of the Holy Spirit upon the writers of the Bible in such a way that their writings become the expressions of God's will." A.E. Sanner

The Holy Scriptures are inerrant (without error) concerning "all things necessary for our salvation."

No other books or speeches can be said to be inspired other than the 66 books of the Bible found in the Old and New Testaments. To a lesser extent, God continues to inspire His people today to understand what has been written in the Bible.

John Wesley said, "The Spirit of God not only inspired those who wrote [the Bible], but continually inspires, supernaturally assists those that read it with earnest prayer."

– *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*

4. Tradition: Passing It On

Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God*, 25-30

Key terms: tradition, Christian perfection, sanctification, synoptic, holiness, catholicity

Tradition is the _____ of _____ on the Story of God to the next generation by providing a "lens" or **perspective** for reading, understandings, and applying the Scriptures to our lives.

We are not determined by our traditions, but we are deeply _____ by them.

There are three main streams of Christian tradition:

Roman Catholicism, Greek and Russian Orthodoxy, and Protestantism.

John Wesley (1703-1791) and his brother Charles were two important figures in the great evangelical revival that swept through 18th century England. John Wesley was a part of the Church of England throughout his life, though his followers were called Methodists. Their goal was to "spread scriptural holiness through the land." In the 19th century this revival continued to spread throughout North America in other groups that would eventually become the Church of the Nazarene in 1908.

What was unique about Wesley's approach to theology?

_____ or Christian perfection, meaning perfection in love that had nothing to do with abstract or legalistic ideas of absolute, sinless perfection, but with a relative perfection of relationships of relationships "perfected" by love.

In his own words, "_____...is nothing higher and nothing lower than this: the pure love of God and man—the loving God with all our hearts and soul and our neighbor as ourselves. It is love governing the heart and life, running through all our tempers [emotions], words and actions. I ask no more."

Wesley said nothing new, but _____ and re-emphasized the heart of the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ taught this emphasis on holiness from Moses' law on loving God and neighbor as found in each of the Synoptic Gospels (*syn*=together, *optic*=to see)
(See Matthew 22:34-40, Mark 12:28-24, Luke 10:25-37; Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Leviticus 19:18, 34)

Christian perfection is "_____." Sanctification is being made new in Christlikeness in order to love as God loves us and others. To be sanctified is to be made holy.

What is holiness?

- 1) Holiness is _____ and experiential (based in experience). Holiness is not a thing or an "it." Holiness is a relationship in which we can stand, by grace, before God. The apostle Paul taught that "the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." (Romans 8:16) Those in the Wesleyan tradition have been characterized by "an awareness of God's presence in human life is constantly to be expected and can actually be experienced." (1 John 3:24)

- 2) Holiness is _____. To be filled with God's love meant that there was no room for sinful attitudes or actions, for sin is essentially lovelessness, a lacking of love for God and others. God calls us to a perfection in love (1 John 4:18). "If God who is love created us to love Him and others, then we are perfect—we are being and doing what we were created to be and to do—when we love as God loves us—that is, wholly and sacrificially."

- 3) Holiness is _____. Wesleyan tradition holds firm in love for God and others, so it entails "an acceptance of, and openness toward, those of differing traditions within the Christian faith. Holiness was not, for Wesley, a narrow and constricting way of life that encourages a superiority complex. Holiness is not holier than thou. In fact, many Roman Catholics attended Wesley's preaching services. Wesley sought common ground with those in other Christian traditions. In his words, *"Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? . . . If it be, give me thine hand" (2 Kings 10:15 (KJV)). I do not mean, "Be of my opinion." You need not. Neither do I mean, "I will be of your opinion. I cannot . . . Keep your opinion; I, mine, and that as steadily as ever . . . Let all opinions alone on one side and the other: only, "give me thine hand." . . . "If thine heart is as my heart," if thou lovest God and all mankind, I ask no more: "Give me thine hand." . . . [and] love me with a very tender affection, as a friend that is closer than a brother, as a brother in Christ."*

In a letter to a Roman Catholic, Wesley wrote, "I hope to see you in heaven. And if I practice the religion above described, you dare not say I shall go to hell. You cannot think so. None can persuade you to it . . . Then if we cannot as yet think alike in all amiss. For of one point none can doubt a moment: God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him (1 John 4:16)."

The Wesleyan tradition encourages Nazarenes to be good Catholics, so to speak. In other words, we should be open or friendly to other Christian traditions, known as

_____.

This means we should have a desire to learn from and benefit from others, as well as to share our insights with others.

Preamble to the Manual of the Church of the Nazarene: "...that we may cooperate effectually with other branches of the Church of Jesus Christ in advancing God's kingdom..."

At the same time, being from the Wesleyan holiness tradition, makes us distinct from all other Christian traditions. Let's look at those distinctions.

Roman Catholics and Protestants

Roman Catholics	Protestants
Mediator between humans and Jesus is found in Mary	
Pope is authority over all of the church	
Seven sacraments: baptism, communion, confirmation, absolution, marriage/ordination of priests, last rites	

Protestants: Wesleyan and Reformed

	Reformed/Calvinism	Wesleyan holiness perspective
T	Total Depravity	
U	Unconditional Salvation	
L	Limited Atonement	
I	Irresistible Grace	
P	Perseverance of the Saints	

Holiness: Wesleyan and Charismatics

Wesleyans	Charismatics
Sign of Spirit-filled life is holy living	

Something to Think About:

- How does the Wesleyan understanding of holiness lead to catholicity (friendliness toward other Christian traditions)?
- You are in an interdenominational pastors' meeting. You are asked to introduce yourself as a pastor in the Church of the Nazarene. What will you say? (Think about the Wesleyan distinctives when compared to Roman Catholics, Calvinists, and Charismatics. How are these distinctives experienced in your local church?)

5. Reason: Thinking It Over

Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God*, pp. 31-48

Key Terms: reason, general revelation, specific revelation, argument, kosmos, telos, ontos

Reason is the

- The Bible assumes that God exists without a need to “_____” God’s existence.
- The Bible still hints that it is permissible to offer rational _____ for faith. (See Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:20).

_____ **revelation** is the belief that God the Creator and Sustainer of all the world purposely leaves evidences of His presence and power in the created order that are accessible to human observers.

_____ **revelation** is the belief that God the Redeemer and Savior is revealed through the historical acts found in testimony of the inspired Holy Scripture.

We can understand the revelation of God in this way:

General revelation (God’s existence revealed in creation)	is to→	_____ (human discourse about this God)
	as	
Special revelation (God’s character revealed in historical acts of Scripture)	is to→	_____ (human discourse about this God’s saving acts)

Arguments for God's Existence

Cosmological Argument (Greek, kosmos=world, universe)

- Plato, the Greek philosopher
- This argument centers on the first cause of all that exists. The question is: "Why is there anything at all, rather than nothing?" Martin Heidegger
- Why is there anything, what is the cause of all that exists? The answer is that there is a Creator of everything.
- The logic of the argument, according to critics, makes one think, "Well, who created God?"
- At the same time, the strength of this argument is that it defines God as something separate from the rest of creation. God is Creator, the reason for all existence.

Teleological Argument (Greek, telos=goal, aim)

- Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) that the order and design observable in our world speak of a Designer, rather than the alternative in which reality happened by accident and chance.
- Humans constantly ask questions of purpose: "Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?"—a mind probing for reasons, order, and design. Our amazement before creation points to a Creator

Cosmological and Teleological Arguments derive from _____, the second pair of arguments for God's existence arise from _____ thought and experience.

Ontological Argument (Greek, ontos=being)

- Anselm (1033-1109) that God is "a being that than which none greater can be thought."
- God must be since the greatest being that I can think of must also be a reality.
- Perfect being must be, or it is not perfect.
- This view is good meditation on the meaning of the word God.

Universal Sense of Ought, or Moral Conscience

- Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). He thought that the previous arguments were speculative and have no place in practice.
- Everyone has a conscience—or a concept of right and wrong, though this concept might change from person to person. But still, one's conscience tells when we act rightly or wrongly
- Three postulates:
 - 1) Freedom for human will (we can't be condemned for an action unless we could have done otherwise)
 - 2) Immortality for humans (there must be something beyond this life, since humans are sometimes punished in this life for doing right and applauded for doing wrong)
 - 3) There must be a God who can guarantee immortality and perfect justice.

Summary of the Arguments for God's Existence

None of these arguments actually proves the reality of God. If God could be "proven" then there would be no room for doubt. Without doubt, there would be no alternative for faith—and no room for a relationship with God.

John Wesley on Reason

"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."

John Wesley, "Sermon 70: The Case of Reason Impartially Considered," in *Works*, Vol. 2, 600.

As we live out our days, we stand upon which certainty?

"The certainty of proof" or "The certainty of faith"

"No piece of rational evidence can remove the risk of belief in the God whose story the Scriptures tell" – Michael Lodahl

6. Experience: Living It Out

Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God*, pp. 40-48

Key terms: assurance, prevenient grace, synergism

John Wesley went through a time of uncertainty and doubt concerning his relationship with God. The turning point came on May 24, 1738:

"In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given *me* that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death." From Wesley's journals

Wesley used _____ language to define the experience of assurance:

"The Spirit itself bore witness to my spirit that I was a child of God, gave me an evidence hereof, and I immediately cried, 'Abba, Father!'"

Read **Romans 8:14-17** & **Galatians 4:4-6**. Define **assurance** using these biblical references.

Religious _____ needs to be viewed in this biblical context to be properly understood.

The principle:

"Any so-called experience of God must always be judged in the light and the context of Scripture, because the Spirit who is working in our hearts and lives will not work contrarily to what is revealed in the Bible. Both our expectation and our experience of God's presence in our lives are, and ought to be, forged and formed by the biblical narratives of God's saving acts."

--Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God*, p. 44

What makes our experience Christian or human?

According to 16th-century Dutch theologian James Arminius (1560-1609), there is grace available in the lived experience of everyday life. John Wesley also held this view.

Prevenient grace (Latin, pre=before, vene=come)

Literally means: "grace that comes (or goes) before us"

Prevenient grace is simply "God not **giving** up on anyone...God is lovingly and graciously *present* and *active* in every human life." –Michael Lodahl

**God's prevenient grace works through the human conscience
to make us aware of His presence and work in our lives.**

Synergism (Greek, syn=together, erg=work)

"the idea that God is pleased to cooperate with human beings *where they are*—in all their humanity...as He begins to move them to where they *ought to be*." –Michael Lodahl

How do we approach other "religiously experienced" people?

Acts 10:34-35

³⁴Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

Acts 14:16-17

¹⁶In the past, he let all nations go their own way. ¹⁷Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills you hearts with joy.

Acts 17:26-28

²⁶From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

- Peter and Paul who preached these words moved "from recognition of God's gracious presence among all human beings and cultures to the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the decisive Revelation of that same God." –Michael Lodahl
- So a Wesleyan will not belittle another's conception or experience of the divine ("faith of a servant"), but will "lift up Christ' as the One through whom all religious beliefs, practices, and experiences are to be sifted and judged ('faith of a son')." –Ibid
- "In the Wesleyan tradition, then, there is a confidence in God's gracious presence to all life in its every dimension, and certain attentiveness to lived experience, an authentic openness to learning from the world around us." –Ibid

The Gospel, according to the Wesleyan tradition, says, "You are welcome to God's kingdom."

Prayer of St. Augustine

"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."

7. Five Theological Models of Revelation

Read the five theological models of revelation and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of revelation when viewed in terms of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, which necessarily includes personal experience.

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." (From *The God Who Is There* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 93) Faith would then be mental and moral assent to the propositions that can be clearly discovered in the Bible.

Advantages:

- 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:

- 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.

Advantages:

- 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:

- As suggested above, 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 two hundred 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." (From *Revelation Through History in the Old*

Testament and in Modern Theology, " in New Theology, No. 1, ed. Martin E. Marty and Dean Peerman (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 72)

Revelation as Inner Experience

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

Advantages:

- 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 followers of other religions

Weaknesses:

- Seems to assume that one is "spiritually gifted" in much the same way that 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 that 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.

Advantages:

- 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.

Weakness:

- The stress on Jesus Christ is to be praised, but this may lead to what is sometimes called "Christomonism," meaning that 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 in a more extreme or "radicalized" form. "New awareness" means cosmic consciousness in ways that mere inner experience does not. To hold the idea of revelation as 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.**

Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983).
Summary: © 2002, Nazarene Publishing House

Something to Think About

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

8. The Creator: Sovereignty, Theodicy, the Problem of Evil, the Solution of Love

Key words: creation ex nihilo, dualism, monotheism, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, moral evil, natural evil, theodicy, sovereignty, shalom, sin, original sin, responsibility, solidarity, predestination, prevenient grace

The God Who Creates

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 Creation

"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, Sermon: "The New Creation"

Dualism and Monotheism

In a dualistic worldview, good and evil are _____—God and Satan are co-conspirators in helping or hurting humankind. Evil is considered to have as much influence in the world as Good. This is not the case for Christians.

We believe in one God—_____—all other objects in the universe—the planet, humankind, the angels, even Satan are creatures not the Creator. God is one and only Good and His creation is Good. However, creation has been corrupted by evil and disobedience (more about this later).

Any dualism compromises the _____ of God—that God is truly God above and beyond all else.

Three safeguards that Christians use to protect God's sovereignty (as if God needed us to protect Him!). In any case, these safeguards are the "omni-" doctrines:

Omnipotent

"There is no other _____ against whom God must compete."

Extreme version—"everything that happens does so because God...causes, wills, or directly makes it happen." (Also, the Calvinistic view)

Omniscience

God " _____ all things."

Extreme version—God knows all even the details of the future (foreknowledge) so that God is never surprised. There is debate at this point between Calvinists and Arminians. Arminians believe in divine foreknowledge, but it did not cancel out a person's freedom to respond to God's grace. Calvinists would rather emphasize God's sovereignty rather than human freedom. Arminians affirm both—God's sovereignty and human freedom.

Omnipresence

"God is _____ to every point in the entire universe at every moment." There is no place where God is not.

Summary of the Omni- Doctrines

Many theologians have been suspect of the "omni" doctrines. They emphasize "abstract analysis and deductive logic" about what God "must be in order to be God," and less to the God encountered and described in the biblical story.

One issue that raises concerns about the "omni" doctrines is
the presence and problem of _____ in the world.

Problem of Evil and Theodicy

Theodicy (theos=God; dike=justification) is a method of justifying God's way in the world, specifically in the face of great human suffering.

The problem of evil asks this question,

"How can a good and loving God allow a world with so much senseless suffering?"

The problem of evil challenges the "omni" doctrines:

A omnipresent God would certainly be aware of the presence of evil

An omniscient God would certainly know how to overcome this evil

An omnipotent God would certainly be able to enforce victory over evil; and

A God of love presumably would desire to be rid of evil.

Yet evil does not disappear.

We must be honest in our theology and not ignore the presence of suffering around us.

The Difference Between Moral Evil & Natural Evil

- Moral evil suggests evil is the result of the human abuse of freedom by choosing sin that leads to evil.

The mystery of the divine-human relationship includes the notion that God might share His power with humanity to create (“go forth and multiply”) as well as to destroy (the Cain’s murder of Abel).

- Nature evil limits how much we can put against human decisions. There is evil and destruction in the natural world. Nature evil allows human lives to be at the mercy of unpredictable and destructive forces beyond our immediate control.

Job helps us understand the problem of evil and suffering

- Job is being afflicted by evil through Satan’s hand (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7), but we learn also of evil’s limitations.
- To blame our experiences of evil and destruction upon Satan only pushes the problem back one step, for God remains the sovereign source of all things—including the devil.
- When Job finally gets God’s attention in chapters 38-41—God does not hesitate to take responsibility for all the world’s joys and pains.

In Job 38-41:

“God speaks of the immensity of the oceans, light and darkness, snow and hail, floods and thunderbolts; God calls to Job’s mind dew and ice, constellations and clouds, and even clods of dirt. Also God speak of lions and ravens and mountain goats, of deer and donkeys. The ox is God’s, as well as the ostrich, and the horse and hawk and hippo. This majestic address from the whirlwind might inspired in us, as it did in Job, an awe in the presence of God’s creative imagination, for the created order is ... brimming with life and vitality that God alone can contain, sustain, and integrate its immense variety and precarious harmony. It seems, in fact at times to totter on the brink of chaos.” (Lodahl, 57)

In Job 41:8-33 God speaks of His handiwork in making the “Leviathan” or _____.

The crocodile was important in Canaanite mythology. The crocodile represented the _____ elements of creation that God overpowers as its Creator.

What if we what we call ‘natural evil’ could be interpreted as the occasional intrusions of ‘chaos’ into predictable, structured order of our lives? “This ‘monster’ is indeed God’s creation, but that does not stop it from threatening or injuring us.” (Lodahl, p. 59)

“God is Love”

Two perspectives on Creation:

Creatio ex nihilo (Creation out of nothing) & Creatio ex amore (Creation out of love)

--Paul van Buren

Jesus Christ was at the beginning (John 1:1, 14; Col. 1:15, 17).

“If Christ is at the very center of the Christian doctrine of creation, it will mean that God’s act of creation reflects the very self-giving, self-surrendering love embodied in the Crucifixion.”

--Michael Lodahl

- God's omnipotence is not with a ruling fist, but an open, bleeding hand. God does not hoard power, but shares it.
- God's omniscience is found in the intimacy of Creator with creation, not having an impersonal computer-like knowledge.
- God's omnipresence is does not force his presence but waits for our recognition of His presence.

Sovereignty of Love

Divine sovereignty is really a "sovereignty of love."

"The God revealed in Jesus' suffering with and for us is a God who is vulnerable, who shares in the pain of human suffering."

It is good thing that God knows our suffering, but we also seek a _____ from evil.

"If the Cross bespeaks [tells of] God's willingness to suffer at the hands of creation, to feel with us the pangs of chaos as it threatens and sometimes harms us, then the resurrection reminds us that God is the victorious Power."

God creates us with a purpose—_____, or "an all-embracing sense of well-being that will permeate all creation, a vision of peace that sustains God's own struggle against the destructive effects of our human freedom."

We do not celebrate the idea that God determines every event in our lives, but that "God's _____ for us is the one indestructible power in the universe." (See Romans 8:22-23, 37-39)

Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God*, pp. 51-62

Something to Think About:

Choose one of the following question and write a one-page response.

- Using the concepts of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, describe how does God eventually brings victory over evil?
- What imagery does the Bible use to illustrate beautiful order (creation) and destructive power (chaos) founding nature? How might God might be responsible for natural evil in the world? How is God victorious over the destructive forces found in nature? (see Job 38-41; Romans 8:22-23, 35-39)

9. Creature—The Universe and Humanity

The Universe as Creation

Lodahl, *Story of God*, pages 63-66

Other _____—sun, moon, animals—are merely the creation of the one God who is Creator of all

Themes found in the Creation narrative of Genesis 1

1) "_____ of creation"

2) All that God creates is _____ (1 Tim 4:4; 6:17)

John Wesley once wrote, "Love the creature as it leads to the _____"
The Plain Account of Creation Perfection

Humanity—The Creature in the Creator's Image

Michael Lodahl, *Story of God*, pp. 67-72

The question central to the idea of theological anthropology:

"_____?"
(anthropos, "man"; "logos," study or word)

Some observations on Genesis 1 & 2

- 1) The creation account suggests a progression in the creation processes of God, from simpler to more complex, from one "day" to the next;
- 2) The creation of human beings occurs on the same day as other land creatures—humans are "fellow creatures among and within all of God's created works."
- 3) Yet God addresses Adam (Hebrew, "land" "humanity") the male and female and gives us dominion over and responsibility for creation.
- 4) The crown of creation: humanity. Psalm 8:5-6: "*What is man?... Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God, and dost crown him with glory and majesty! Thou dost make him to rule over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet.*"
- 5) The creature is called into relationship and responsibility. Humanity made in the image of God.
- 6) John Wesley noted that humans were created "to exist and to love."
"Authentic relationship ('to love') cannot occur without a strong sense of selfhood/personal identity ('to exist')."
- 7) Humans are "finite creatures of dust, yet also creatures with whom God desires to maintain a covenantal relationship."
- 8) "We are those creatures clearly able to respond to Him, to answer His questions" in our relationship with Him (Genesis 3:9) and in our relationships with others (Genesis 4:9).
- 9) Humans are given the power to "name" the other creatures: to give order, meaning, and structure to creation—the power to create and to destroy.

To be created in God's image means that we have a "_____"-ability to Him and to all the creation that surrounds us.

10. The Tragedy: Doctrine of Sin

Human “Response-ability” and Sin

While the possibility of disobedience must be real in order for authentic responsibility (response-ability”) to thrive, Scripture never accepts sin as an unavoidable consequence of human freedom.

Sin is a _____ of God’s intentions and God’s creation.

Sin is at its root _____ in the face of God’s love for us.

Sin leads to giving up or turning away or hiding from God—to reject our need to answer for our actions.

Adam’s Story Is Our Story

Read Genesis 3. As a small group, read the story of the Fall. Respond to the questions:

What is the progression of events in this story? (What happens? Who says what?)

How does this story introduce the ideas of temptation, sin, guilt, and shame?

Sin a Many-Headed Monster

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.

From “Sin” in *Words of Faith*, 43-44.

Sin and Human Solidarity (Original Sin)

Genesis 2:18 says, " _____ "

No person is an _____, completely detached from the rest.

All of us are _____

This solidarity underlies the Christian doctrine of _____ .

"Sin is the distortion of our very being—the human self rejects authentic relationship to God and others and turns in upon itself, thus poisoning the very relationships without which we cannot truly live." (Lodahl, p. 80)

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all have sinned" and that "through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners." (Romans 5:12, 18)

So then, no human deed, word, thought, or even attitude occurs in _____."

The Story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4)

Read Genesis 4. Summarize the story in the space below.

Summary:

Where was God when Cain was making the fateful decision to murder his brother? God was right there trying to persuade Cain to do otherwise. (Lodahl)

Original Sin and Preventive Grace

The Ripple Effects of Original Sin

- To _____ ourselves as the center and lord of our worlds.
- God presented Cain with a choice, making Cain responsible, but it also shows how sin contaminated the relationship between creature and Created, and between humans.

Preventive grace

- God's loving presence at all times gives human beings a _____ to sin—allows us to choose against the chains and bondage of sin.

"Whether we like it or not, our lives are intertwined in such a way that the sin of one person exercises destructive effects throughout the human race, like the ripples of a pebble thrown in a pond." Michael Lodahl

The Shackles of Sin

Sin is an “_____ of human freedom” and “_____ from God’s love”. Humans are called to freedom *not to do as we please* but *to love and serve others*.

Martin Luther called sin “the self curved in upon itself” rather than turned outward in servanthood to God and others.

Original sin =

“_____”

“But if God creates us for, and toward, a life of self-giving love, it becomes clear that sin is not essentially an aspect of human nature as created and willed by Him. Sin is an intruder. Sin is not to be identified with natural human limitations, finitude, or shortcomings; rather, it is essentially the fundamental act of rebellion against the God who is Love. And that act of rejection is the basis of estrangement (of being a stranger) from God. This does not mean that God sees human beings as strangers, but that we can, through our rejection of His love, estrange ourselves from Him and turn Him into a stranger to ourselves. But if God craves human beings for fellowship with himself and with one another, then to make ourselves strangers to His love is ‘to miss the mark,’ the New Testament’s primary metaphor for sin. It is to ‘fall short of the glory of God’ (Rom. 3:23): to fall short of God’s likeness and image in our lives, to miss the mark of God’s ideal calling for us in Christ Jesus.” Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God*, page 83

The New Testament metaphor for sin = “_____”

Augustine & Pelagius—Solidarity or Solitary

We are in this together in solidarity toward sin—with an inclination to disobey God—and not our own Adam or Eve—wholly good being tempted to sin for the first time all over again. This was the point of the famous debate between Augustine (354-430) and the British monk Pelagius.

Augustine:

- Adam’s sin has resulted in humanity’s universal bondage to sin, while emphasizing human solidarity
- Human beings are incapable of choosing anything but sin, and only divine grace can save us
- He claimed that certain human beings are divinely favored and chose by God (predestination), since it cannot have been the human’s choice to believe and repent

Pelagius:

- Feared that many would dismiss responsibility for their own actions
- Adam’s sin does not negatively affect human freedom, except in giving us a poor example of how to behave
- Human freedom is not essentially hindered by Adam’s sin
- God’s grace is manifested quite naturally in our God-given freedom
- He claimed we are our own Adam and Eve and disregarded human solidarity toward sin

We wish Augustine realized that his view of predestination made humans “little more than enslaved pawns on a cosmic chessboard.” Augustine’s views were led into the extremes

by strict Calvinism which believes: God decrees certain individuals for salvation, since human beings, being enslaved to sin, can have no real choice in the matter.

We wish Pelagius realized that human beings live in solidarity, meaning that what I do affects what you do and vice versa; and none of us enters the world with a clean slate—we enter a history filled with sin and violence.

“We are born into a world dominated by the ‘me-first,’ self-centered orientation; we are members of one another, and thus the sin of our ancestors continues profoundly to affect, even to infect, us all. It is the reality, already there before us and into which we are thrown at birth, that Pelagius apparently failed to appreciate.” Michael Lodahl

Pelagius missed the biblical and experiential reality of human solidarity, and Augustine missed the biblical narrative’s emphasis upon human responsibility and the biblical call to human beings to cooperate willfully with God’s intentions for human life.

solidarity/sin ↔ individuality/responsibility = prevenient grace.

Prevenient grace = “God is ever present in our lives, enabling us, if we will, to desire and even choose His will for us. His gracious presence and Word can be resisted, but if yielded to, we can be liberated to the true freedom of loving servanthood toward God and neighbor.”

Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God*, pages 84-85

Something to Think About

- In what ways does the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4) teach us about original sin and human freedom?
- What were the major points of disagreement between Augustine and Pelagius? How do you think the Wesleyan doctrine prevenient grace helps to resolve this disagreement?

11. The Doctrine of the Trinity: Vital Center or Ancient Relic

Nicene Creed

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 Almighty

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!

Words: Reginald Heber, 1826. Music: 'Nicaea,' John B. Dykes, *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, 1861. Sing to the
Lord

Come, Thou Almighty King

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.

Words: Some as 'Anonymous'. Others credit Charles Wesley, 1757. Music: 'Italian Hymn,' Felice de Giardini, in
The Collection of Psalm and Hymn Tunes Sung at the Chapel of the Lock Hospital. Sing to the Lord

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. Lewis,
Mere Christianity (New
York: Collier Books, 1960),
127

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. Torrance

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."

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.

Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion: Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 311, 313, 315

Small Group Project: Worship Service Planning

Create a worship service around the theme of the Trinity. Each worship service should include an opening prayer, Scripture readings, three or more songs and/or hymns, the church at prayer, a children's sermon, a sermon (title and biblical passage only), and a closing benediction. Use scripture references and themes we have discussed in class.

Write your outline and be prepared to present it before the rest of the class.

12. The Biblical Foundations of the Trinity

A Classic Doctrine Biblically Rooted

Triunity of God developed best in the Gospel of John
John 10:30, "The Father and I are one" (See also John 14-17)

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 Pelikan, *Melody of Theology*, 257

Augustine believed the Holy Spirit to be the "bond of love" between Father and Son. God the Father is the Lover, God the Son the Beloved, God the Spirit the Love Itself

The God and Father of Jesus Christ, even in the Old Testament, was not necessarily a "solitary God" who kept to himself. While the Old Testament does not specifically develop a doctrine of the Trinity, we can observe that **God in the Old Testament is often accompanied by His Word, His Wisdom, and His Spirit.**

Old Testament Scriptures

Genesis 1:1-2, 26

Numbers 6:23-26

Isaiah 6:2-3, 48:16

New Testament Scriptures

2 Corinthians 13:14

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 linking the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit include the following 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.

13. Talking About the Trinity

The Triune God

The Nazarene Article of Faith: The Triune God

"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." (Manual, p. 26)

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.

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.

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.

14. Christian Life and the Trinity

Who Is a Person?

Old Definition of Person

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 old definition stresses _____,
_____, singularity, all of which are proven by our
_____ capacities.

New Definition of Person

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

_____, _____, and mutuality.

The Reality of Perichoresis

The Greek word *perichoresis* is one that every beginning student of trinitarian theology should learn. It 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.

Based on ideas from Greek theologian John of Damascus from Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1973), 270-278

Analogies of perichoresis

- Lamps in a house
- Perfume
- Three-dimensional object
- Flowing water: Source-stream river
- Tree: Root-trunk-branch
- "The Divine Dance" : equal fluidity, grace, and motion.

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.

From Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1973), 400-401

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?

List several scripture references that support what LaCugna is suggesting:

The Main Contributions of the Doctrine of the Trinity to Christian Ethics

- the idea of **COMMUNITY**
- regarding the other **BETTER** than oneself,
- willingness to give up one's own selfish ideas for the good of the **WHOLE**

A Note on Richard of Saint Victor

Richard of Saint Victor was a twelfth-century theologian of the school of Paris. He believed the idea of God must contain the idea of love, that love was God's truest expression.

Love is itself a social idea. For Richard, love that is isolated and keeps to itself is not true love at all. 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.

Richard believed the idea of love demonstrated or even proved the reality of the Triune God. Any two of the three divine Persons could experience mutual love back and forth between themselves, but for this love to be complete, that *mutual* love must be taken and *shared* with the third Person, hence completing the circle of divine love that means that God is One.

*From The Social God and the Relational Self
(Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 31.*

15. A Christian Response to Other Religions

Wesleyan Holiness Perspective on Reaching Others for Christ

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. Cunningham "Interreligious Dialogue: A Wesleyan Holiness Perspective,"
in *Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Resources for Responses to Religious Pluralism*,
ed. S. Mark Heim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 189

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. Cunningham, *Ibid.*, 191

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. Maddox, "Wesley and the Question of Truth or Salvation Through Other Religions,"
Wesleyan Theological Journal 27 (Spring-Fall, 1992), 19.

The Centrality of Grace

In Wesleyanism there is a continuity of grace . . . Prevenient 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. Prevenient 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. Cunningham, "Interreligious Dialogue," 193-94.

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*).

Response Paper: How does the uniqueness of the Christian confession make a difference in my daily life and ministry?

Is Jesus the Only Way? Three Views

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 Barth

- "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."

Karl Barth, "The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion," in *Christianity and Other Religions: Selected Readings*, ed. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 35, 43.

Do Judaism and Islam Constitute a Special Case?

16. Christianity Engages Culture

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* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1951), 32-39:

- 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.

In Culture and Imperialism (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), xii

The Five Paradigms of Christ and Culture

A synopsis of H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (1951)

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

Summary

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.