Hamblen Park Presbyterian Church

Local Ecumenism Training

Session Three

**First Doctrinal Training: Salvation and Predestination**

1. **Review of Ecumenical Assumptions (always)**

Especially:

* A unified Christian community is the will of Christ for us
* A unified Christian community would be more effective in the mission of proclamation (saving souls) and in social justice (the peace and safety of human beings)
* Ecumenism does not belong either to “liberals” or to “conservatives”—it belongs to all Christians
* Theology belongs to the church, and not to academics, who are stewards not owners of church teachings
* In fact, ecumenical dialogue training is not only excellent **adult education** (RC: catechesis) but also provides skills training in solving problems alongside those who are different than us.
* Ecumenism may also lead to a spiritual transformation that is unique and powerful and which some ecumenists call a “conversion” or a return to the initial experience of Christian conversion
1. **Check-in: Theology Compendium**

In our doctrinal work today we will be touching indirectly on:

**“Maker of Heaven and Earth”: Different understandings of the relationship between Nature and (supernatural) Grace**

* Roman Catholic: Human nature retains more integrity after the Fall of Humanity. The effect of supernatural grace is to heal and elevate nature, so that it might be restored to original righteousness.
* Reformed: Human nature was more damaged in the Fall of Humanity. The effect of supernatural Grace is to replace or reanimate our fallen nature with a new nature in union with that of Christ.

**“Baptism”: Different understanding of what happens in the sacraments**

* Roman Catholic: Scripture/Tradition has handed down seven sacraments, by which sin can be cleansed from the soul so that believers can be strengthened in holiness and can merit glory (by God’s grace)
* Reformed:Jesus instituted only two sacraments in Scripture. The sacraments make the Word of the Gospel tangible so that those who are destined to persevere until the end can be strengthened in holiness (by God’s grace).
1. **Karen, Are you Crazy? (Probably)**
* **Predestination** is one of the most difficult topics in Reformed/Calvinist/Presbyterian theology. It’s a bit like diving into the deep end of the swimming pool. Definition:
* **Predestination** is a more precise version of **election.**
	+ **Election is the teaching, very biblical, that God chooses some for salvation and not others** [either God passes them by or actively selects them for reprobation/wrath, depending on one’s interpretation. This choice is up to God alone.
	+ **Predestination** simply means that election happens “before time,” before anyone has a chance to “earn” salvation by merit. **Predestination is THE biblical and theological way of ensuring that salvation is truly by grace and not by works**
	+ **Romans 8:30**: And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.
* **Together, predestination and election** cause the traditions to answer a whole host of questions about salvation, such as: “What happened to human nature when Adam and Eve sinned? Does the human will have a role to play in faith, or is it all God’s work? What is grace and how does it come to us? We can’t merit grace, but could we merit eternal life?”
* **In other words, this** topic highlights, all at once and in a connected and meaningful way, the deep difference between a Reformed view of salvation and a Roman Catholic view of salvation
* **And, it is surrounded by myths and confusions.** Predestination is heavily associated with John Calvin (which is accurate) but often in a caricatured way (which is not necessarily accurate)
* And were you aware that **Thomas Aquinas**, the most influential by far of Catholic theologians since the 13th century, also taught predestination?I was not aware of this for years and years.
* Here’s what I think can happen if we approach predestination in an ecumenical perspective, in a way that is accessible for church people both Presbyterian and Catholic. We can
	+ Learn a lot, quickly, about our respective traditions: the similarities and the differences;
	+ **Ask about the meaning of the differences, which is a way of moving slowly toward making new judgments together;**
	+ Dispel many myths; and
	+ **Get a clearer sense of where our Presbyterian-Catholic dialogues might need to focus on next.**
1. **Stories of Salvation**
2. Telling the Stories (Two Handouts)
3. Working with the Stories
* Similarities in blue; Differences in Red
* **When you look at the similarities** do you have any insights about them, such as **patterns** that you notice?
* **When you look at the differences** do you have any insights about them, such as any **patterns** that you notice?
* Can you think of an over-arching Christian idea that might be able to encompass a single set of two differences?
1. **A Surprise**
* Now take a green pen for the influence of Augustine (4th century)
	+ In the Reformed story, highlight the following:
	+ In the Catholic story, highlight the following:
* Augustine is a major theologian of the 4th century who articulated that the beginning of faith must always be God’s work and not ours. **Both the Catholic and the Reformed traditions are retrieving Augustine’s works according to their different emphases.**
* From *These Living Waters: Common Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Baptism A Report of the Catholic Reformed Dialogue in United States* (2003): “Indeed, the reconciliation of approaches to the reading of Augustine may open a path for exchange and understanding between both churches in a way never before achieved” (46).
* **In the meantime, look at your green marks and see if you see any patterns!**
1. **Conclusion: Key Takeaways**
* Remember that ecumenism is not about ignoring differences but about **finding the meaning of the differences**, and then deciding if that meaning can be shared in a way that leads toward a common and comprehensive viewpoint: our best presentation of the Gospel
* **There is work to be done in tracing post-Reformation theological positions back to their common roots in the early theologians, such as in Augustine**
* Something that you might not have been able to see in the stories: The work of the **Holy Spirit** in creating faith, communicating grace and transforming us is remarkably stable across both traditions. This also needs to be studied
* From John M.G. Barclay: Both Thomas and Calvin teach that grace has **priority, incongruity and efficacy**. (Define) That is a strong foundation. Can we allow each other to achieve those goals in different ways?
* **What can we do together now?** We can grow in holiness. This is why a common understanding of baptism and the Lord’s Supper MUST BE TOP PRIORITY for ecumenical dialogue both local and international
* **Finally, in a culture of entitlement, both Catholics and Protestants teach that no one is entitled to grace.** Grace is a free gift from a sovereign God no matter how you tell the rest of the story.