

Congregationalism – Heritage & Future

Class #2 – The Reformed Tradition (or Calvinism)

September 23, 2020

The Queen’s Coronation Oath, 1953

Archbishop: Will you to the utmost of your power maintain the Laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel? Will you to the utmost of your power maintain in the United Kingdom the Protestant Reformed Religion established by law? Will you maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England, and the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government thereof, as by law established in England? And will you preserve unto the Bishops and Clergy of England, and to the Churches there committed to their charge, all such rights and privileges, as by law do or shall appertain to them or any of them?

Queen: All this I promise to do.

Introduction to the Reformed Tradition

- 1) The “Reformed Tradition” is also called “Calvinism” after its most famous theologian John Calvin (1509-64), though Calvin himself would have hated this term.
- 2) The Reformed tradition affirms the ancient creeds & traditional Protestantism.
 - a) Core of ancient orthodoxy:
 - i) **Trinity** (one God in three persons)
 - ii) **Hypostatic Union** (Jesus is fully God and fully man)
 - b) Core of Protestant orthodoxy:
 - i) ***sola Scriptura*** (“Scripture alone”)
 - ii) ***sola gratia*** (“grace alone”)
 - iii) ***sola fide*** (“Faith Alone”)
 - iv) ***solus Christus*** (“Christ alone”)
 - v) ***solus deo Gloria*** (“Glory to God alone”)
 - vi) **Priesthood of All Believers**
- 3) The two great early traditions of the Reformation were Lutheranism & the Reformed.
 - a) Lutheranism started with Luther in Germany and spread mainly to Scandinavia.
 - b) The Reformed Tradition was started by several theologians in central west Europe. (Switzerland, Holland, western Germany, eastern France.)
 - i) John Calvin, the most famous Reformed theologian was second generation.
 - ii) The Reformed Tradition spread quicker, was much more international, and more diverse than Lutheranism.
 - iii) For example: Traditional Lutheranism has one set collection of creeds called the Book of Concord.
 - iv) There are different Reformed creeds that disagree about some secondary issues (the nature of the Sacraments, the Sabbath, church/state issues, etc.)

- c) The Reformed Tradition tended to push the extent of the Reformation more than the Lutherans.

Examples of the Diversity in the Reformed Tradition

1) Famous Reformed Creeds:

| <i>name</i> | <i>date</i> | <i>tradition</i> | <i>nationality</i> |
|---|-------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Belgic Confession of Faith | 1561 | Continental Reformed | French/Dutch |
| Heidelberg Catechism | 1563 | Continental Reformed | German |
| Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion | 1563 | Anglican | English |
| Second Helvetic Confession | 1566 | Continental Reformed | Swiss |
| The Councils of Dort | 1618-19 | Continental Reformed | Dutch |
| Westminster Standards | 1646-49 | Puritan/Presbyterian | English |
| Confession of Faith | 1646 | (Congregationalist?) | |
| Longer Catechism | 1647 | | |
| Shorter Catechism | 1647 | | |
| Cambridge Platform | 1649 | Puritan/Congregationalist | American |
| Savoy Declaration | 1658 | Puritan/Congregationalist | English |
| 2 nd London Baptist Confession | 1689 | Puritan/Baptist | English |
| Saybrook Platform | 1708 | Puritan/Congregationalist | American |

2) Famous Reformed Theologians:

| <i>name</i> | <i>date</i> | <i>tradition</i> | <i>nationality</i> |
|-----------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| (<i>The Apostle Paul</i>) | | (<i>Apostle</i>) | Jewish |
| (<i>Augustine</i>) | 354-430 | (<i>Roman Catholic</i>) | Roman/African |
| Wolfgang Capito | c.1478-1541 | Continental Reformed | Alsace |
| Johannes Oecolampadius | 1482-1531 | Continental Reformed | German |
| (<i>Martin Luther</i>) | 1483-1546 | (<i>Lutheran</i>) | German |
| Ulrich Zwingli | 1484-1531 | Continental Reformed | Swiss |
| William Farel | 1489-1565 | Continental Reformed | Swiss |
| Thomas Cranmer | 1489-1556 | Anglican | English |
| Martin Bucer | 1491-1551 | Continental Reformed | German-Dutch |
| Peter Martyr Vermigli | 1499-1562 | Continental Reformed | Italian |
| Jan Łaski | 1499-1560 | Continental Reformed | Polish |
| Heinrich Bullinger | 1504-75 | Continental Reformed | Swiss |
| John Calvin | 1509-64 | Continental Reformed | French |
| John Knox | c.1510-72 | Presbyterian | Scottish |
| Theodore Beza | 1519-1605 | Continental Reformed | French |

| | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Jeremiah Burroughs | c.1600-46 | Congregationalist | English |
| John Owen | 1616-83 | Congregationalist | English |
| Francis Turretin | 1623-87 | Continental Reformed | Swiss-Italian |
| John Bunyan | 1628-88 | Baptist | English |
| Isaac Watts | 1674-1748 | Congregationalist | English |
| Jonathan Edwards | 1703-58 | Congregationalist | British (American) |
| John Newton | 1725-1807 | Anglican | English |
| Charles Hodge | 1797-1878 | Presbyterian | American |
| John Charles (J.C.) Ryle | 1816-1900 | Anglican | English |
| Abraham Kuyper | 1837-1920 | Dutch Reformed | Dutch |
| Charles Spurgeon | 1834-92 | Baptist | English |
| Benjamin B. Warfield | 1851-1921 | Presbyterian | American |
| John Gresham Machen | 1881-1937 | Presbyterian | American |
| R.C. Sproul | 1939-2017 | Presbyterian | American |
| David F. Wells | 1939 - | Congregationalist | American |

Distinct Emphases and Unique Doctrines of the Reformed Tradition

- 1) To describe the Reformed Tradition in one word it would be “theocentric”.
 - a) Strong focus on God’s Word, His free sovereign will and the desire to reform the church and society accord to His Word.
 - b) Reformed Christians are much more comfortable talking about God (what He is doing, grace, His free will, etc.) than about humanity (what we should do, human responsibility, human free will, etc.).
- 2) Very biblical focused piety / spirituality.
 - a) Primary place to find the Holy Spirit is in the Scriptures, not one’s feelings or experiences (as in the Charismatic/Pentecostal traditions).
 - b) The most important part of worship is the Sermon.
 - i) Strong focus on expository preaching (working through a book of the Bible) over topical preaching (dealing with a particular subject).
 - ii) Strong focus on “exegesis”, which is to read any text in its context so that the Scripture tells us what to believe instead of trying to read our traditions back into the text (i.e. “eisegesis”).
 - c) Strong desire to reform (purify) the church along biblical lines.
 - i) The Reformed call it the “**Regulative Principle of Worship**” – “whatever is not commanded is forbidden”.
 - ii) As oppose to the “Normative Principle of Worship” (i.e. Lutheran) – “whatever is not forbidden is allowed”.

- d) It is the job of every generation to reform the church along biblical lines (*semper reformanda*) because human traditions always creep in.
 - e) Strong desire to reform society along biblical lines.
 - i) The Puritan concept of a “Shining City on a Hill”.
 - ii) Its most extreme form is found in “**Theonomy**” which is held by a small minority of Reformed Christians. (Theonomy is the belief that the Old Testament law should be the basis of civil/political law.)
 - f) In many ways it gives birth to modern society, especially in the USA & UK.
 - i) Democracy = Priesthood of all believers & sanctity of all callings
Rule of law = Everyone equally under the law (Charles I executed in 1649)
Separation of powers, Checks and balances
Universal literacy = Everyone has to read their Bible.
 - ii) Education = Harvard, Yale & Princeton were founded to train Reformed clergy
 - iii) Capitalism = Protestant work ethic, money is neutral, frugality is good
 - iv) Military = England’s New Model Army
Professional soldiers based on merit.
 - f) Many Reformed Christians reject “Classical Apologetics” in favor of “**Presuppositional Apologetics**”.
 - i) *Classical Apologetics* – The through reason and evidence one can prove that Christianity is true without necessarily referring to the Bible.
 - ii) *Presuppositional Apologetics* – That there is no neutrality and Christian apologetics must hold to the Bible as the preeminent standard of thinking. Everyone has presuppositions and only biblical presuppositions make sense of reality. So the job of the apologist is to show how non-Christian world views are in the end illogical and inconsistent and then point to and defend biblical revelation.
- 3) Very strong focus on Covenant Theology as one of the primary ways to understand the Bible.
- a) Traditionally the major of Reformed thinks has seen 3 major covenants in the Bible:
 - i) **Covenant of Redemption** (*pactum salutis*) – An eternal pact between the persons of the Trinity to redeem God’s people. The Father decrees salvation, which is accomplished through the Son, and is applied through the Holy Spirit.
 - ii) **Covenant of Creation/Works** (*foederus naturae*) – A covenant between God and man that promises blessing based on obedience and curses upon transgression. Fallen man of course cannot keep this covenant so it brings only just condemnation.
 - iii) **Covenant of Grace** (*foederus gratiae*) – A covenant between Christ and man where Christ’s perfect obedience (both active, His perfectly keeping the Law & passive, dying on the cross for sins) are credited/imputed to those who trust in Him.
 - b) This focus on covenants will have theological implications:
 - i) A strong belief in infant baptism (except for Reformed Baptists).

- ii) A belief in the local body of the church being a “covenant community”, thus will come more “democratic” forms of church government such as Presbyterianism & Congregationalism (except for Reformed Anglicans).
 - iii) Tends to see more similarities, then differences, between OT Israel & NT Church.
 - Reformed Christians tend not to be “Dispensational” in theology, which has a strong focus on the national of Israel as part of end times prophecy with such beliefs in a rapture and future millennial kingdom.
 - Reformed eschatology (study of the end times) tends to focus more on the work of Christ as the fulfillment of prophecy, so many think we are in the millennium now, since we have perfect with God through Christ.
- 4) Salvation is viewed being solely of God and His grace.
- a) See Appendix 1 – A Reformed Ordo Salutis (Order of Salvation).
 - b) Thus the famous Calvinist mnemonic, “TULIP” or the “Doctrines of Grace”. See Appendix #2.
 - c) The Reformed Tradition alone affirms “**Double Predestination**”, that not only does God choose some unto life (election), but also willfully passes over others leading unto damnation (reprobation).

Appendix 1 – A Reformed *Ordo Salutis*

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Election | God choosing the elected before the being of time |
| ----- | |
| Effectual Calling | The beginning of conversion by the preaching of the Gospel |
| Regeneration | Or "new birth," the inner recreation of a fallen human nature |
| Adoption | To go from being an enemy of God, to being declared a child of God |
| Conversion | The turning from the world to Christ |
| Faith | The intellectual assent and heartfelt willful trust of the Gospel |
| Repentance | To confess one’s sinful state under the just wrath of God |
| Justification | To be declare right in a forensic (legal) sense by God |
| ----- | |
| Sanctification | The life long growth of holiness after conversion, to be more Christ like |
| Mortification | The life long dying to sin |
| Perseverance | The life long continuing in the faith |
| ----- | |
| Glorification | To receive a new sinless body & become perfect in all ways; heaven |

Appendix 2 – TULIP & Difference Views of Grace

| <u>Doctrine</u> | <u>Arminianism</u> | <u>Reformed Tradition</u> |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| <i>Sin</i> | All mankind is sinful and is incapable of turning to good but through grace. God, however has graciously allowed human will to choose between good and evil. | Total Depravity (or “Total Inability”) Humanity, by its fallen nature, is incapable by their own abilities to choose and follow God. The term “total” refers to how sin affects all aspects of a person, not that every person is as evil as they could be. |
| <i>Election</i> | God elects those whom He knew would believe by their own free will. Election is conditionally based on human response. | Unconditional Election – Fallen humans are chosen unto salvation (i.e. “elected”) not based on any human virtue, merit, faith or work (including anything foreseen) but solely, and unconditionally, on God’s mercy alone. |
| <i>Atonement</i> | Christ died for everyone. God has predestined those who are saved based on the condition that they choose Jesus based on their free will choice. Christ’s death, however, only works for those who believe in Him. This means the atonement doesn’t really save anyone but just makes them savable. | Limited Atonement (or “Particular Redemption” or “Definite Atonement”) – Christ’s atoning death is only effective for those whom God has chosen. Though the atonement is sufficient for all (if God so willed to save everyone) it is efficient only for the elect. So, on the negative side, Reformed Christians believe Christ didn’t die for everyone. On the positive side, Christ’s death actually saves everyone whom He died for. This is the most controversial doctrine of the Reformed Tradition. |
| <i>Grace</i> | God does give beginning (or prevenient) grace to allow human choice. God’s saving grace thus can be accepted or rejected by human free will. | Irresistible Grace (or “Efficacious Grace”) – God’s saving grace is irresistible. Those who God has called will be saved. In a broad sense fallen humans do resist the Holy Spirit by doing evil, however, those whom God has decreed to be saved will be saved. |
| <i>Perseverance</i> | Believers may turn from saving grace and lose their salvation. Most modern Evangelicals believe in the first 4 points of Arminianism, but reject this last point and affirm some form of the Reformed doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints. Usually called “once saved always saved.” | Perseverance of the Saints (or “Eternal Security”) – Since salvation is all by grace and God’s decrees cannot be thwarted all those whom God has called will not only have saving faith but remain in the faith until the end. Those who fall away from the faith either never had true saving faith or will return. So a believer can have full assurance of their salvation, not based on their own works, but on the promises of Christ. |

Appendix 3 - Famous Sections from Reformed Creeds

Westminster Shorter Catechism

Q#1: What is the chief end of man?

A: Man's chief end is to glorify God, (1Cor 10:31; Rom 11:36) and to enjoy him forever. (Ps 73:25-28)

Heidelberg Catechism

Q#1: What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A: That I am not my own,¹ but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—² to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.³

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood,⁴ and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.⁵ He also watches over me in such a way⁶ that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven:⁷ in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.⁸

Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life⁹ and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.¹⁰

¹ 1 Cor. 6:19-20 ² Rom. 14:7-9 ³ 1 Cor. 3:23; Titus 2:14 ⁴ 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 1 John 1:7-9; 2:2 ⁵ John 8:34-36; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 John 3:1-11 ⁶ John 6:39-40; 10:27-30; 2 Thess. 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:5 ⁷ Matt. 10:29-31; Luke 21:16-18 ⁸ Rom. 8:28 ⁹ Rom. 8:15-16; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14 ¹⁰ Rom. 8:1-17

Q#2: What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort?

A: Three things: first, how great my sin and misery are;¹ second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery;² third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.³

¹ Rom. 3:9-10; 1 John 1:10 ² John 17:3; Acts 4:12; 10:43 ³ Matt. 5:16; Rom. 6:13; Eph. 5:8-10; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 2:9-10

Westminster Confession of Faith

2.1 There is but one only, (Deut 6:4; 1Cor 8:4–6) living, and true God, (1Thes 1:9; Jer 10:10) who is infinite in being and perfection, (Job 11:7–9; 26:14) a most pure spirit, (John 4:24) invisible, (1Tim 1:17) without body, parts, (Deut 4:15–16; John 4:24; Luke 24:39) or passions; (Acts 14:11,15) immutable, (James 1:17; Mal 3:6) immense, (1Kgs 8:27; Jer 23:23–24) eternal, (Ps 90:2; 1Tim 1:17) incomprehensible, (Ps 145:3) almighty, (Gen 17:1; Rev. 4:8) most wise, (Rom 16:27) most holy, (Is 6:3; Rev. 4:8) most free, (Ps 115:3) most absolute; (Ex 3:14) working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, (Eph 1:11) for His own glory; (Prov 16:4; Rom. 11:36) most loving, (1John 4:8,16) gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; (Ex 34:6–7) the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him; (Heb 11:6) and withal, most just, and terrible in His judgments, (Neh 9:32–33) hating all sin, (Ps 5:5–6) and who will by no means clear the guilty. (Nah 1:2–3; Ex 34:7)

2. God hath all life, (John 5:26) glory, (Acts 7:2) goodness, (Ps. 119:68) blessedness, (1 Tim. 6:15, Rom. 9:5) in and of Himself; and is alone in and unto Himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which He hath made, (Acts 17:24–25) nor deriving any glory from them, (Job 22:2–3) but only manifesting His own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things (Rom. 11:36) and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever Himself pleaseth. (Rev. 4:11, 1 Tim. 6:15, Dan. 4:25,35) In His sight all things are open and manifest, (Heb. 4:13) His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, (Rom. 11:33–34, Ps. 147:5) so as nothing is to Him contingent, or uncertain. (Acts 15:18, Ezek. 11:5) He is most holy in all His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands. (Ps. 145:17, Rom. 7:12) To Him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience He is pleased to require of them. (Rev. 5:12–14)