

Knowledge Base

Theology: Soteriology, Doctrine of God, Nature of Mankind, Ecclesiology
Presented by:

I. Soteriology: The Doctrine of Salvation in Christ

A. Definitions

Salvation: not necessarily a Christian term.

Secular Usage: It can also be used in a purely secular sense when it is concerned with political emancipation or the general human quest for liberation (McGrath).

Religious Usage: Other religions of the world have concepts of Salvation.

Christian Usage: The distinctiveness in the Christian approach to salvation lies in the following two facts. 1) Christian salvation is grounded in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. 2) Christ becomes the paradigm for the redeemed life, whereas he becomes the ideal model of the ideal relationship to God and others. Therefore the Christian life is in a process of Spiritual formation in which the outward facets of the believer's life are "brought in line with the inward relationship to Christ" (McGrath, p. 389).

B.) Questions

- ✓ *Is salvation something, which has already happened to the believer, currently happening, or a future event?*
 - a) Justification – past event with present implications
 - b) Sanctification (Initial and Entire) – a present event which is dependent upon a past event (justification), which has future implications (glorification).
 - c) Glorification – a future event, already anticipated and partially experienced in the past event of justification and the present event of sanctification, and dependent upon them.
- ✓ *What are the benefits of the Atonement and what are its implications?*
- ✓ *What is restored in the work of salvation and what is still marred by sin?*
- ✓ *How does our doctrine of salvation affect our philosophy of religious education?*
- ✓ *What role does Christian Education play in Salvation or Entire Sanctification?*

II. The Doctrine of God

A. Definitions

God is personal

- ⇒ Love
- ⇒ Father image of God
- ⇒ Prayer is modeled on relationship such as that between a child and a parent.
- ⇒ Reconciliation is modeled on human personal relationships.
- ⇒ Anthropomorphic language usage in the Genesis 2 account of creation.

Limitations of the Analogy

- ⇒ God is not a human being
- ⇒ The doctrine of the Trinity speaks of God as three persons.
- ⇒ God is not located at a specific point in the universe

God Almighty (Omnipotence)

“If God were good, he would wish to make his creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty he would be able to do what he wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either the goodness, or power, or both.” This is the problem of pain, in its simplest form (C.S. Lewis – The Problem of Pain).

Once God has opted to do certain things, or to behave in a certain way, then other possibilities are excluded (McGrath).

- ⇒ *God cannot do anything that is logically impossible.*
- ⇒ *God cannot do anything that is inconsistent with his nature.*

B.) Questions

- ✓ *Is God male?*
- ✓ *Can God suffer?*
- ✓ *Can God die?*
- ✓ *Can God do anything (omnipotence)?*
- ✓ *If God is good and omnipotent then why does suffering and evil exist?*
- ✓ *How does our doctrine of God affect our approach to Christian Education?*

III. The Doctrine of Human Nature

Theological Meaning of Human Creation

- ⇒ Humans do not have independent existence.
- ⇒ Humankind is a part of the creation.
- ⇒ Humanity has a unique place in creation (Imago Dei)
- ⇒ There is a common bond among human beings (positive and negative aspects).
- ⇒ Humanity are finite creatures and therefore have limitations.
- ⇒ Humans are the hallmark of Gods creation since they have been created in His image.

Implications

- ⇒ We belong to God, which means our commitment; devotion, love, loyalty, and service are proper responses for those who bear his image.
- ⇒ Christ is our pattern since he is the complete revelation of what the image of God is.
- ⇒ We can only experience full humanity when we are in a proper relationship to God (redemption).
- ⇒ There is goodness in learning and work since it is a part of God's plan.
- ⇒ Human beings are valuable, therefore all of life is sacred.
- ⇒ The image of God is universal to all of humankind, which means that there is a dignity to being human.
- ⇒ Humanity has been universally affected by sin as a result of the fall and is in need of redemption that by his grace God has been made available through Jesus Christ.

B.) Questions

- ✓ *How has sin affected the capacity of human beings to learn and to reason?*
- ✓ *How does one's doctrine of the nature of man affect his/her approach to Christian Education?*
- ✓ *How should we as Christians approach education differently than secular educators?*
- ✓ *What limitations does our theological understanding of the various doctrines place on education that may not be found in secular philosophies of education?*

IV. Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

Definition: *“Ecclesiology is that area of theology which seeks to give theoretical justification to an institution which has undergone development and change down the centuries, set against an altering social and political context”* (McGrath, 461).

Early Understandings of the Church (McGrath, 462)

1. The church is a spiritual society, which replaces Israel as the people of God in the world.
2. All Christians are made one in Christ, despite their different origins and backgrounds.
3. The church is the repository of true Christian teaching.
4. The church gathers the faithful throughout the world together, in order to enable them to grow in faith and holiness.

The Notes of the Church (or four defining characteristics as found in the creeds)

1) One: the unity of the church has been of central importance to Christian thinking. At the same time there is the realization of many denominations. Outside of the bounds of the church there is no salvation.

Various approaches to the “One Church” but many denominations dichotomy.

1. Imperialist Approach: there is only one true church and other churches are fraudulent.
2. Platonic approach: draws a fundamental distinction between the visible church and the ideal church (little support exists for this approach in mainstream Christianity).
3. Eschatological Approach: suggests that the present disunity of the church will be abolished on the last day (Calvin).
4. Biological Approach: likens the development of the church to that of a tree with many branches. This allows for the different Churches to be seen as a unity despite their differences.

Contemporary theologians argue that the true basis for “unity” is found in Christ rather than any cultural or historical factor. The diversity of local churches does not compromise the unity of the Church. The church already possesses unity as the result of its common call in God and expresses itself in different communities, cultures and situations. “Unity” is therefore to be understood theologically rather than sociologically or organizationally. It is grounded in the saving work of God in Christ.

2) Holy: the church is at present as sinful as its members, nevertheless it will finally be purified on the last day. To speak of the church as “holy” is primarily to speak of the holiness of the one who called out the church and its members (McGrath).

3) Catholic: this term is not to be confused with Roman Catholic. "Catholic" comes from a Greek word which is in reference to "the whole", which means "universal" or "general".

4) Apostolic: the fundamental idea is that it originated with the apostles or it has a direct link to them. In other words the church was established on their testimony and witness. It emphasizes the continuity between the church and Christ through the Apostles he chose. It also emphasizes the continuing task of the church to evangelize the world and make disciples.

What sort of body is the church?

How can anyone speak of one church when there are dozens of denominations?

How can the church be holy when it is full of sinners?

What is the role of religious education in the church?

Where should religious education in the church take place?

In what way can religious education add to the unity of the church?

How can religious education aid the church in fulfilling the great commission?

Are the early creeds of the church a form of religious education that need to be recovered?

How did the early church accomplish religious education?

Contemporary Issues Related to the Key Doctrines

- a) Technology: internet, communication capabilities
- b) Science: cloning, test tube babies, stem cell research
- c) Ecumenicalism
- d) Postmodernism

Resources on Doctrinal Issues

Dunning, H. Ray. 1988. *Grace, Faith and Holiness*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press.
Holiness =

Erickson, Millard J. 2001. *Introducing Christian Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
Reformed

Lawson, John. 1986. *Introduction to Christian Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press.

McGrath, Allister E. 1997. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. Padstow, Cornwall, Great Britain: Blackwell Publishers.

Comprehensive, easy to understand

Rice, Richard, Reign of God