

**THE CHRISTIAN
UNDERSTANDING
OF GOD**

THEO 331 – week 11

RECAP: THREE WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING “UNDERSTANDING”

- 1. Who God is, in his nature**
- 2. Who God is, in his actions outside himself**
- 3. How we properly respond to those actions**

KARL RAHNER'S RULE

- **The Rule: The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and vice versa.**
- **The term “immanent Trinity” refers to the inner life of God. The term “economic Trinity” refers to God acting outside himself.**
- **When discussing God’s inner life, we examine the distinctions between the three Persons. But when God acts outside himself, the three are always united.**
- **While one can attribute some form of external action to one Person or another in the Trinity, all three are always involved.**

GOD THE CREATOR

- **The primordial external act of God is to create, i.e. to give existence to something that is not-God**
- **Creation is not merely a reshaping of pre-existing material, but a true creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing).**
- **Creation also means the sustaining in existence of everything which is not-God.**
- **To say that God is the creator is to say that God is the “first cause” of everything.**

GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND PREDESTINATION

- **The term “predestination” does not mean that God has determined in advance everything that will occur, but that God has set forth a goal/purpose for creation.**
 - **God has created out of love, and in love has offered a share in his glory to his creation.**
- **“Providence” refers to how God guides creation to achieve this goal.**
 - **As the ultimate gift is the ability to love, God's providence respects the free will of his creatures.**

GOD'S GOVERNMENT

- **The term “government” refers to how God applies his guidance to creation. While God is the first cause of everything, he acts through “secondary causes” which possess their own nature (and in the case of angels and humans, free will).**
- **God associates creatures with his government of the cosmos for their benefit, so that they may be causes of goodness in their own right and thus become more perfect themselves.**
- **God’s will can be resisted, but only as it is put into practice by secondary causes. God’s plan cannot be ultimately thwarted, because God can draw good out of evil. Nothing is outside of God’s providence.**

THE INCARNATION AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

- **In the Incarnation, we see the Word of God (first cause) becoming flesh (i.e. becoming part of, and subject to, secondary causes).**
- **In other words, in the Incarnation we see God respecting his providential plan for creation and at the same time entering into that plan to affect it from within.**
- **By receiving and living by the Holy Spirit, human beings become more perfect “secondary cause collaborators” with “God-the-first-cause”.**
- **In other words, we are not simply left to our own devices: it is truly God who carries out his work, but with and through us.**

MIRACLES

- **All change is subject to its causes, of which there are two types: efficient cause (agent of change) and final cause (goal of change).**
 - Efficient causes are the answer the question “how”; final causes are the answer to the question “why”.
- **As the “first cause”, God provides the ultimate goal of all creation: to share in his glory. However, as seen, God chooses to see this goal come to fruition through the action of secondary causes.**
 - God, the first cause of creation, gives it its final cause (a share in its glory). He moves creation to this final cause by allowing the actual creatures to be secondary causes, i.e. efficient causes of the working out of providence.

MIRACLES

- **Miracles are interventions by God by which he produces the effects of secondary causes without them (more common), or by producing effects to which those secondary causes do not extend (rarer).**
- **The physical sciences exist to determine the full extent of the functioning of secondary causes, but by definition science can never say that it yet has the complete picture of how secondary causes work. This always leaves a bit of room to be agnostic about whether a particular intervention is miraculous or not.**
 - **That being said, certain interventions seem so outside the functioning of the natural order that it would be extremely hard to even imagine a non-miraculous origin. There are usually criticized based on credibility, not explanation.**

WHY NOT LOTS OF MIRACLES?

- **Recall that God chooses to give secondary causes a certain independence of initiative, so that they have the potential to contribute to goodness through love.**
- **In situations where the overall success of his plan, i.e. its orientation to the good, is at stake, God may providentially determine to intervene more directly. Again, however, there is an order to this:**
 - **First, by inspiring other secondary causes to act.**
 - **Next, by acting in the place of secondary causes.**
 - **Finally, by a dramatic intervention that goes beyond typical secondary causes.**

WHY NOT LOTS OF MIRACLES?

- **As the ultimate goal of existence (i.e. the ultimate final cause) is eternal loving relationship and not material ease, miracles seem to happen more frequently in contexts where faith is already present. The Bible confirms this view.**
 - **Of course, sceptics simply state that this is because people see what they want to see!**
- **It is entirely possible that lots of little miracles are happening all the time, but from within the network of secondary causes, such that they are not “scientifically noticeable”. Some call these “Godincidences”.**