

# SITUATIONAL TOPICS

## PART 3

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### Overflow from Situational Topics Part 2: Learning in Community



**The Church as God’s “Plausibility Structure”**  
— 1 Timothy 3:15; John 13:34-35; 17:20-23  
(again)

**Community’s Power to Protect** (even from yourself) — Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 ...  
Lose touch with Christian fellowship, and you will lose sight of Christian truth.

**Deference & Disagreement:** the hermeneutical significance of “the brother for whom Christ died ... whom God has welcomed ... who will stand before his Lord”  
— 1 Corinthians 8 & 10; Rom 14

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### God’s Holy Society Our Historical Community

See the separate handout: **Notes on the Emergence of “The Great House” from Ignatius to Aquinas • Pre-Reformational Western Church History from 50,000 Feet**

#### What elements came to mark “Mere Christianity”?

- Trinity: There Is One & Only One God; Three Persons Are God; But They Are Not Three Separate Gods – an eternal communion of love – as G. K. Chesterton quipped, “God is a society.”
- Chalcedonian Christology: Jesus Christ is fully God (therefore strong enough so save) and fully human (therefore near enough to save)
- Creation, Fall, Redemption
- We don’t save ourselves
- We aren’t saved *by* ourselves

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## The Reformation of the Church

### — Reformers' Concerns:

**Displacement of God** — the Roman church was felt to have substituted her own grandeur for God's (from architecture to canon law) — the Mass had substituted our sacrifice for Christ's "once for all" sacrifice of himself for us



**Removal of Salvation as a Gift** — replaced by a subtle calculus of Christ's work on the cross + his merit at the Table + my faith + my works

**Loss of Christ "for Us" behind Christ "above and beyond Us"** — Christ's face had taken on more the countenance of a Judge — it was to his intermediaries (Mary and the saints) that people went for help — the saving intent of his incarnation (the 4<sup>th</sup> century incarnational axioms: "Only God can save the fallen race" & "Only that which God becomes is healed") had been forgotten

**Diminishing of the Authority of God's Word** behind an Aristotelian philosophical grid in combination with the accretion of church tradition — for a largely illiterate Christendom, an entirely pictorial (the Mass is a spectacle, and the Christian story is accessible only via stained glass and icons) approach to the faith had supplanted the biblical vision of "the knowledge of God covering the earth"

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**Relevant Existential Considerations** — I won't steal Frank James's thunder — ask him about Luther and the Jews; or Luther's love for Kate; or Calvin's health; or John Knox's being snubbed by Anglicans, or maybe about his (Knox's, not James's) issues with women.

### Larger Situational Considerations:

- **Economics** — emergence of capitalism & middle class
- **Communications** — printing press

- **Education** — rise of Humanism: what else was back in Antiquity besides Aristotle?
- **Politics** — Ottoman Empire in the East; turf wars in the West

## Four Principal Voices

### Martin Luther (German, 1483-1546)

- **The Gospel vs. the Law** ... first, justification by faith, not by works ... second, justification by faith, not by works ... third, justification by faith, not by works ... sanctification: get used to your justification
- **Scripture** — translator & commentator
- **Worship, Art, & Music** ... leaves the liturgy alone as much as possible, sacrament (God benefits us; Christ physically present in the sacraments), music (luteist and song-writer; adopts some existing tunes and composes others)
- **Politics** — accommodationist (conservative response to Peasants' War of 1524-25 — political authorities have their domain; church authorities have theirs)
- **Worldview: Christ & Culture in Tension<sup>i</sup>**

### Anabaptists — the Radical Reformation (e.g., Menno Simons [Dutch, 1496-1561] & Thomas Muentzer [German, 1490-1525])

- **Against a Worldly Church:** believed infant baptism had led to spiritual lethargy; (some) believed lack of continual revelation had led to a concentration of spiritual authority in the hands of a corrupt church (that happened to favor the rich, the powerful, the educated) — hard to find a consistent theology because of Anabaptists' distrust of intellectualism
- **Worldview: Christ Against Culture** (whether that leads to pacifism [as with Mennonites] or violent resistance [as in Muenster's Peasant Wars])

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<sup>i</sup> I borrow cautiously from H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* (Harper, 1956). Niebuhr outlines five historical paradigms for explaining the church's engagement (or lack thereof) with culture: 1) Christ Against Culture (e.g., Anabaptist); 2) Christ Above Culture (e.g., Catholic); 3) Christ & Culture in Tension (e.g., Lutheran); 4) Christ of Culture (e.g., Liberal); 5) Christ Transforming Culture (e.g., Calvinist).

## Ulrich Zwingli (Swiss, 1484-1531)

- **Worship, Art, & Music** ... bare liturgy, *lectio continua*, communion at table with congregants distributing elements to one another — the Table a memorial (only) of Christ's death; though the most gifted musically among the main Reformers, he banned music from worship altogether
- **Politics** — believed in a state church (Zwingli was chief pastor and political head of Zurich) — promoted the Reformation in Switzerland via civil war

## John Calvin (Swiss, 1509-1564)

- **The Gospel & the Law** ... grace consoles (justification by faith), then it transforms (sanctification by faith expressed in works) ... the "third use of the law"
- **Scripture** — commentator & systematizer (*The Institutes of the Christian Religion*)
- **Worship, Art, & Music** ... adjusts liturgy in the direction of Scripture and early church practice, sacrament (Christ is Spiritually present in the sacraments), music (encourages psalm-singing [mostly] via home-brewed music)
- **Politics** — cooperation between church & state — Calvin makes Geneva's social workers into church deacons (the city's poor becomes the church's concern); Calvin promotes a school system, works to restrict interest in loans to the poor, helps introduce manufacture of cloth, velvet, and watches to give work to the unemployed. Calvin "sought to make the whole of society, down to the smallest detail, a real expression of the royal dominion of Christ" (Ernst Troeltsch, 19<sup>th</sup> cent. sociologist).
- **Worldview: Christ Transforming Culture**

## Essential Protestant Emphases: The Five Solas (nowhere codified during the Reformation period, by the way)

- **Sola Scriptura: Scripture Alone** — there is no standard of truth above, beyond, or alongside God's Word (Psalm 119:105; 138:2; 2 Timothy 3:14-17)
- **Soli Deo Gloria: For the Glory of God Alone** — All life is to be lived to the glory of God ... as the Westminster Shorter Catechism will summarize: our chief end (purpose in life) is to glorify God and enjoy him forever (Isaiah 44-45; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Romans 11:36)

- **Solo Christo: By Christ's Work Alone** — Christ did all that was necessary for our salvation (1 Timothy 2:5-6; Colossians 1:13-18)
- **Sola Gratia: By Grace Alone** — Christ accomplished our salvation freely and provides it to us out of his own love for us (Ephesians 1:3-8)
- **Sola Fide: Justification by Faith Alone** — we receive the gift of life simply by opening the empty hands of faith to receive it — we add or contribute nothing (Ephesians 2:8-10)

<http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/topic/fivesolas.html>

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## The Catholic “Push Back” — The Council of Trent

### Ignatius of Loyola (Spanish, 1491-1556)

- Founder of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits)
- A voice of personal renewal and personal (but not institutional) reformation in the RCC

### Council of Trent (1545-1563)

- *Contra sola scriptura*: a) the “apostolic tradition” needs to be honored as much as Scripture (the concern is with “private interpretation”) — b) while the Reformers called for a return to the original languages, Trent asserted the authority of Jerome’s Latin *Vulgate*
  - *Contra sola gratia*: a) free human cooperation must augment God’s grace; b) justification involves an **infusion** of God’s grace into us so that God is actually pronouncing a true verdict about us (as opposed to the Reformers’ Pauline insistence that God **imputes** [or credits or reckons] to us Christ’s righteousness as our own — to a Catholic sensibility, this involved an unsatisfactory legal fiction); c) Christ’s substance is transferred to the bread and wine in Communion (reassertion of transubstantiation)
  - *Contra an emerging Reformed consensus to go lean on the aesthetics of worship*: if the Protestants don’t want art in worship, we will maximize art
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## The Pelagian “Push Back” — Jacob Arminius (Dutch, 1560-1609) & the “Remonstrants”

- We are not in such bad shape that we cannot muster up for ourselves the faith that saves
- Therefore, God predestines those he perceives beforehand will believe
- Jesus died for everybody — but only those who believe will enjoy the benefits.
- We do need rebirth by the Holy Spirit, but this regeneration is predicated upon our faith. We do need the power of the Holy Spirit to do any good, but that power is a power that we can resist.
- If we are in Christ, we have his power to fight for us — but we need to be “ready for the conflict” (what is left open is whether we can fall from the state of being “in Christ”)

## Synod of Dort (1618-1619) — Response to Arminius & the Remonstrants: generally summarized under “The Five Points of Calvinism” (The TULIP, with apologies to Roger Nicole)

**Please note:** 1) John Calvin was long dead when the “Five Points” were formulated; 2) “The Five Points” were a response to a reaction against a chief Reformational concern: that when it comes to salvation, “It’s all about God, not about us” — though the “Five Points” are often the first thing people think of when they think of Calvinism, the TULIP is not how you should define Calvinism.

- 1) We are radically lost (some call this teaching, “**total depravity**”). That is, while every person is not as bad as he or she could be, every one of us in all of our being is in total and utter rebellion against God. We are therefore unable to work or will our way back to God. Spiritually dead, blind, and dumb, we are unable even to believe the gospel in a saving way apart from God’s loving election and effectual call. (Ephesians 2:1-4)
- 2) When God chooses any of us to salvation, therefore, he does so without condition outside himself (popularly dubbed, “**unconditional election**”). God’s electing love is contingent solely on God’s electing love, not on anything intrinsic to or foreseen in us who are the objects of his love. It is to this effect that Paul the apostle says God foreknows (i.e., fore-loves) and predestines us to be conformed to the image of his Son. (Romans 8:29-30)
- 3) Christ’s atoning death was definite or bounded in scope (this notion is normally called, “**limited atonement**” — Roger Nicole suggests instead the more positive terms, “**particular redemption**” or “**definite atonement**”). Though Christ’s obedience, suffering, death, and resurrection were of infinite worth, their saving compass was determined by the will and design of God. Jesus’s death accomplished an altogether personal salvation for concrete, particular, actual people: those whom the Father had foreknown and predestined to be united to his Son. By his death and resurrection, Jesus did not create the mere possibility for a faceless, impersonal glob

of humanity to be saved. Jesus accomplished the full redemption of all his own. If Christ died for you, he died for **you**. (John 6:37,40; 10:22-31; Romans 8:31-33)

- 4) Even though we are radically fallen, if the Father has chosen us to salvation and if Christ has united us to himself in his saving work and if the Holy Spirit makes us alive in Christ, we cannot resist God's saving grace. Within the hearts of the elect, God's call to repentance and faith effects what it commands. (This is called "**irresistible grace**." ) (Acts 13:48; 18:27; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 1:29; 2 Timothy 2:25-26)
- 5) The saints persevere because God preserves us (the "**perseverance of the saints**"). (Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13)<sup>ii</sup>

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## Principal Summaries of the Reformed Faith

**Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*** (I don't care whether this gets assigned in toto or not — you need to read it cover to cover: get the 2 volume John T. McNeill translation [Westminster/John Knox Press, 1960])

**The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)** — the most warm hearted and pastorally intimate of the Reformed statements of belief

**The Belgic Confession (1561)** (Dutch, written under Catholic persecution) & **The Canons of Dort (1618-1619)** (Response to the Remonstrants)

**The Westminster Standards (Confession, Larger & Shorter Catechisms, and Directory of Worship — 1643-1652)** — there's a nice new edition: *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms: The WCF & Catechisms as adopted by The Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (OPC, 2005)

For the Heidelberg Catechism, The Belgic Confession, The Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Standards, see *The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible* (Zondervan, 2003)— it has all of them; plus, the Bible study notes include the proof texts — invaluable!!

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<sup>ii</sup> The summary here is mine. A thorough explanation and defense of the "Five Points" can be found in Steele, Thomas, Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (P&R, 2004 — 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1963)

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*“In the total expanse of human life  
there is not a square inch of which  
the Christ, who alone is sovereign,  
does not declare,  
‘That is mine!’”*

• Abraham Kuyper