

ESSENTIAL TENETS OF THE REFORMED FAITH

(As Identified by Dr. Jack Rogers¹ – See Chapter 2 in The Book of Order)

CATHOLIC – SHARED WITH THE WHOLE CHURCH

1. The Mystery of the **TRINITY** – most Christians are Trinitarian. That is, we believe in One God who is mysteriously revealed to us in three different persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
2. The **INCARNATION** of the eternal Word of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus was the Son of God in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Jesus was fully God and fully human in some mysterious way that we humans may never understand, but can only accept by faith. Having said that, we also affirm that not only was Jesus fully human, but also Jesus was fully a man of his time. For him to have been otherwise would be to suggest that he was beyond fully human and would deny the mystery of the incarnation.

PROTESTANT – SHARED WITH THE OTHER PROTESTANT TRADITIONS

3. **JUSTIFICATION** (Grace alone, Faith alone) – The word grace refers very specifically to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and cannot really be understood apart from him. It refers not to something God gives us, but to the way in which God gives himself to us.

Some relationships are built on **merit**. For example a football player is a welcome member of the team only as long as he can do the job better than someone else. He merits his place by this athletic ability.

Some relationships are built on **need**. When my car won't start, I build a relationship with a mechanic.

Some relationships are based on **appeal**, such as when a woman and a man find each other appealing. None of those are relationships based on grace, although all may give evidence of grace at one time or another.

God relates to us, not on the basis of our ability, or of need or of appeal, but on the basis of God's love for us. What we can for God has no influence on the relationship at all. Our relationship with God is based purely on God's desire to be in relation with us. Thus God determines to make our relationship right with God, not because we have done anything to deserve that, but because that's who God is.

4. **SCRIPTURE** as the final authority for salvation and the life of faith. Scripture is not a scientific textbook. It would be better to describe it as a love letter. Just as you would never read a love letter like a textbook, you should not read scripture like one.

Calvin used the metaphor of spectacles to describe scripture. It is through the scriptures that we see the world. One problem today is that most of us want to reverse that metaphor, reading the scripture through the world's eyes. As Christians we are called to read the world with scriptural glasses.

REFORMED – GENERALLY IDENTIFIED WITH REFORMED THEOLOGY

5. God's **SOVEREIGNTY** – God's sovereign power is exercised in history, God's sovereign grace is experienced in redemption, and God's sovereign will is revealed in Scripture. Sovereignty includes: God's freedom, God's providence, God as Creator.
- 5a. **FREEDOM** – God is free. God is not bound to act the way we want. God is not bound by scripture. God is not bound by what we call nature. God is free to be who God is regardless

of what we desire. This does not mean that God is capricious. Why? Because God has revealed God's self to us as one who loves. To believe in God's sovereignty is to believe that ultimately, in every aspect of history, God's love will remain steadfast.

- 5b. **PROVIDENCE** – God by his power nourishes and maintains the world created by him, and rules its several parts by his providence. There is no such thing as fortune or change. God's providence governs all.

Special Providence

God's providence also directs the individual. God's providence especially relates to mankind. God's providence also regulates "natural" occurrences.

God's providence does not relieve us from responsibility. The doctrine of providence is no Stoic belief in fate! The true causes of events are hidden to us. God's providence does not excuse us from due prudence. God's providence does not exculpate our wickedness.

God's providence as solace of believers. Certainty about God's providence helps us in all adversities. No disregard of intermediate causes! Without certainty about God's providence life would be unbearable. Certainty about God's providence puts joyous trust toward God in our hearts.

- 5c. **CREATOR** – God created the universe "ex nihilo" (from nothing).

6. God's **ELECTION** of people for salvation and service. Election means, very simply, that those who have come to a saving faith in Christ, have done so because God has claimed them as his own, and has firmly grasped them in the palm of God's hand. Thus they ought have no fear of anything, since there is nothing in all creation that can strip them from God's grasp.
7. **COVENANT** life of the church, marked by a disciplined concern for order in the Church according to the Word of God.
8. A faithful **STEWARDSHIP** of God's creation that shuns ostentation and seeks proper use of the gifts of God's creation. Stewardship is not simply the giving of money, it is a way of life that has its roots in faith. God has placed us here as God's stewards. We do not have the right to use the earth and that which is in it for our own purposes. The earth is the Lord's; it does not belong to us. We must care for the earth as we would care for the possession of another who has entrusted it to us for safe-keeping. All of life belongs to God. There is no aspect of life – NONE – that does not properly come under God's rule.
9. The sin of **IDOLATRY**. The chief sin with which the reformed tradition is concerned is the sin of idolatry. Calvin: "[Human] nature . . . is a perpetual factory of idols." Bluntly, if we don't worship the one, true God who is revealed to us in Christ, we will worship something else, an idea, a power, a person, even ourselves. All sinful behavior grows out of the sin of idolatry.
10. Seeking justice and living in **OBEDIENCE** to the Word of God. The first word we hear from God is I love you. The second is go and do justice. We must obey God before we obey any lesser authority. And we are bound to work for the transformation of society, by Christ's incarnation.

¹Rogers, Jack. 1989. *Essential Tenets of the Reformed Faith*. Essential Media Services, 629 Garfield Place, Arroyo Grande, California 93420.