

Creation and Providence

- Creation
- Providence
- The sovereignty of God
- The problem of evil

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Creation

- Doctrine of creation explores the relationship between God and the world.
- This is expressed as “creator” and “creation.”
- Doctrine of creation isn’t deism.
- Doctrine of providence contradicts deism.
- Creation shows that God is relational.

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Creation

- Important elements of a doctrine of creation?
 - Creation is a free act.
 - God created *ex nihilo* (out of nothing).
 - Creation is an act of God’s love.
 - God created by his word.
 - God created everything.
 - Creation is the work of the Trinity.
 - Creation is for God’s glory.
 - Involves both immanence and transcendence.
 - Includes original creation and new creation.

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Creation

- Theological significance of creation?

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Creation

- Views of creation and evolution:
 - Young-earth creationism (6,000 years)
 - Intelligent design
 - Old-earth creationism (including “gap” theory)
 - Progressive creationism (creation *de novo*)
 - Microevolution vs. macroevolution
 - Theistic evolution

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Providence

- Eschatological understanding of creation leads naturally into doctrine of providence.
- Providence = God’s governance of creation.
- God directs creation toward his purposes.
- General providence = natural laws.
- Randomness?
- Special providence = special revelation, miracles, etc.

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Providence

- Theological significance of providence?

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The Sovereignty of God

- Views of God's sovereignty differ between Calvinists and Arminians.
 - Both affirm that God is sovereign.
 - They differ on how God exercises that sovereignty.

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The Sovereignty of God

- "He is accounted omnipotent, not because he is able to act, yet sits down in idleness, or continues by a general instinct the order of nature originally appointed by him; but because he regulates all things in such a manner that nothing happens but according to his counsel." (John Calvin)
- God causes everything that happens.
- If God does not cause everything, God is not sovereign.
- God's power is his most important attribute.

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The Sovereignty of God

- Divine Providence is “that solicitous, continued, and universally present inspection and oversight of God, according to which he exercises a general care over the whole world, but evinces a particular concern for all his [intelligent] creatures without any exception, with the design of preserving and governing them in their own essence, qualities, actions and passions, in a manner that is at once worthy of Himself and suitable to them, to the praise of his name and the salvation of believers.”

(James Arminius)

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The Sovereignty of God

- Providence is concerned with God’s care for the world, not with causation.
- Emphasis on God’s love rather than God’s power.
- His intention is “preserving and governing them in their own essence, qualities, actions and passions.” Suggests that God respects the natures and actions of his creatures.
- He does so “in a manner that is at once worthy of Himself and suitable to them.” Suggests a partnership in causality.

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The Sovereignty of God

- “God is a God of order and not of disorder, and he has firmly united his own omnipotence to his will and order. It is not as the predestinarians and other say, without any discrimination, that God has the right to all salvation and damnation. He has, certainly, but not outside of his order and will, to which his power is subordinated.... [One should not] preach the power and omnipotence of God outside the order of God’s Word.... For God himself is the wisest order in and through his Word, that is, Jesus Christ his only begotten from eternity.”

(Pilgram Marpeck)

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The Sovereignty of God

- God’s power is subordinated to the order he has established.
- That order is revealed in Scripture.
- It is revealed most completely in Jesus Christ.

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The Sovereignty of God

- “For Wesley, the sovereignty of God is not God’s unrestricted and coercive strength, but the sovereignty of his love.”
(Alan F. Johnson and Robert E. Webber, *What Christians Believe*)

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The Sovereignty of God

- What do you think of these positions?

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The Problem of Evil

- Creation raises the problem of evil.
 - God is good. God is all-powerful. Evil exists.
 - Theodicy = defense of God's justice, given the evil in creation. Options:
 - Deny or diminish the power of God.
 - Deny or diminish the goodness of God.
 - Deny or diminish the existence of evil.

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The Problem of Evil

- Most common response: free will defense.
 - Free will requires the possibility of evil.
 - Evil exists through the free choice of creatures.
- Important to remember:
 - God has acted in Christ to defeat evil.
 - God identifies with us in our experience of evil.
 - God will meet us and will see us through.
 - God's answer is Jesus.

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