

# Appendix A—Protestant Christian Traditions Takeaways

## Part 1 Takeaways

### Introduction

*Shared commitments.*—Before we begin examining Protestant distinctives, we would do well to consider the significant number of shared theological commitments among the various Protestant traditions:

- Theistic God as Trinitarian reality—God is the one Creator and Lord over all, immanent in His creation and yet transcendent over it, existing eternally as a Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit);
- Humans created in the image of God as well as sinners in need of salvation. That image is damaged but not destroyed in the Fall of humanity into sin;
- Humanity and deity of Jesus Christ, manifested in human history—Jesus is the eternal Son incarnate, fully God and fully human, conceived and born of the Virgin Mary;
- Saving work of Christ; Jesus died on the cross for human sin, rose bodily from the grave, ascended into heaven, and will return in glory and power to judge us all;
- Accompanying work of the Holy Spirit;
- Importance of the existence and work of the church;
- Certainty of God's ultimate victorious reign in and through Jesus Christ.

*Apostle's Creed: brief summary of meaning and significance.*—

| <i>Creed's statement</i>   | <i>Summary of meaning/significance</i>   |
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| I believe in   | Credo=I believe. The apostles did not write this statement. What the statement seeks to do is to preserve their teaching for the ages.   |
| God, the Father almighty,  | God is all-powerful, but also described as a personal and loving father.   |
| Maker of heaven and earth,   | God created the universe and is its rightful ruler. This powerful and personal being is the creator who is distinct from His creation. We will see how important this distinction is as we navigate the vicissitudes of faith through the ages.  |
| And in Jesus Christ, His only Son,                                 | Believing in God also entails believing in Jesus, the Father's unique Son. Jesus is not just another human being. The God-man is unique and that reality goes to the essence of the Christian faith.   |
| Our Lord;  | Only Jesus is Lord, not another king or ruler. The early Christians got into hot water for holding to this belief. As Lord, He deserves our worship and praise, our allegiance and devotion.   |
| Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary. | Jesus' miraculous birth was brought about by the Spirit in a manner that in no way compromised His full humanity. This belief is often attacked by moderns and seen as something a rational person cannot accept. However, Jesus as the God-man goes to the heart of the historic Christian faith. |

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| Suffered under Pontius Pilate   | Pilate is mentioned but not as a way to place the blame for Jesus' death on the Romans, but rather to date a definite historical event. The early Christians vigorously proclaimed the historicity of the events of Jesus's life. They would have looked askance at distinctions between the “Christ of faith” and the “historical Jesus”.  |
| Was crucified, died, and buried                                       | The Creed then moves immediately to His sacrificial death on our behalf as the centerpiece of His earthly ministry. These events really happened. They were not staged or made up by the fearful apostles who later died for their visions/hallucinations. Jesus' death was an horrific necessity for our sins.   |
| He descended into hell;   | A reference to an event cited in 1 Pt. 3:18-19? The meaning of this phrase is debated.  |
| On the third day He arose from the dead;                              | Jesus' Resurrection is asserted to be a foundational belief. It points to the fulfillment of God's gracious activity for humanity and a hope for all believers to be likewise raised. The Christian faith is rooted in space and time. To dismiss its historical rootedness is not a matter of discarding the husk and keeping the essential part of the faith, but of losing the essential part of faith altogether. Jesus actually did rise. He conquered death, the first-fruits of those of us, His brethren, who will rise again and by grace are destined for a glory we will share with Him. |
| He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father | The right hand is a position of authority and a locale of advocacy for His own. We have an advocate who can and does sympathize with our weaknesses and the vicissitudes of our human condition.  |
| From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.           | The cross precedes the crown in God's saving purpose. The First Coming is as a suffering servant; the Second Coming is as creation's rightful ruler and judge.  |
| I believe in the Holy Spirit,   | The promised Spirit is God's come-along-side presence in our midst. He comes as comforter, guide, teacher, equipper, and advocate. The ministry of the Holy Spirit has been a subject of debate among God's earthly pilgrims.   |
| The holy, catholic church   | This is the called out people of God. It is a set apart people from the whole world (catholic=universal) and throughout time. There is an against-the-world, for-the-world aspect to this called out people that will be a subject of debate through the ages.  |
| The communion of saints   | There's a oneness to this group: the same Spirit; the same Lord; the same faith; the same initiation into this one group. The multifaceted manifestation of this communion in our modern world has been a continuing matter of concern.   |
| The forgiveness of sins   | Jesus has reconciled us to God, freeing us from the penalty of sin and death.<br>“What language can I borrow to thank Thee dearest Friend;<br>For this Thy dying sorrow, Thy mercy without end.<br>Oh make me Thine forever, and should I fainting be;<br>Let me never, oh no, never, outlive my love for Thee.”  |
| The resurrection of the body and the life                             | A new life, a new body, a new creation, a new forever reality. Our faith informs us that the grave is not our destination, albeit part of the journey for the vast  |

### **Sources of fragmentation**

- Monergist-synergist debate reflected in the Calvinist-Arminian divide
- Scholastic rationalism and Pietism
- Revivalism—Puritans and Methodists seek to revive Anglicanism
- “Enlightened” natural religion becomes the precursor of classical liberalism
- Modernist-fundamentalist divide
- Contextual theologies in a postmodern environment

## **Lutherans**

**Lutheran orthodoxy; the solas**—These principles are embodied in the “solas” of Lutheran theology—*sola scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *solus Christus*, and *solus deo gloria*. .

**Justification by faith alone.**—This includes within it the three of the four solas listed above: *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and (implicitly) *solus Christus*.

**Sanctification.**—The idea of “at once justified and a sinner” is central to Lutheran understanding of sanctification. Lutherans disavow any form of perfectionism. The moral life of an individual is a life lived *coram deo* (before or in the presence of God).

**Priesthood of the believer.**—Lutherans have historically promoted the idea of the priesthood of the believer. All believers are priests before God and fellow ministers to one another.

**Baptismal regeneration and justification by faith.**—For how can an infant have saving faith? The baptismal practice seems to make the church or other individuals mediators of salvation in a way that is directly comparable to Roman Catholic practice.

**Eucharist and the “real presence” of Christ.**—Lutheran insistence on the “real presence” of Christ “under, with, and in” the elements seems a mere half-step away from the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. Non-Lutheran Protestants look askance at this doctrine.

## **Anabaptists**

**The Schleitheim Confession** reflected emphases that have characterized Anabaptism ever since:

- Believers’ baptism and the strong objection to infant baptism as undermining the true church of repenting believers.
- Church discipline to be exercised for those backsliding believers.
- Congregationalism – Decision-making authority rested with the local congregation.
- Communion was only to be offered to the baptized.
- Believers must separate from all that is not united with God in Christ.
- Separation of church and state – The Church is distinct from society.

- Opposition to the Christian use of the sword is to characterize the group.
- Opposition to oaths and vows—a literal obedience to Christ’s admonition to “let your yes be yes and your no, no. Anything beyond this is evil.”

**Church.**—This community provides a wholesome witness of life as God intends it to the world. It is in this community of discipleship that the “habits of heaven” are practiced and acquired. Biblical interpretation is best carried in the context of Christian community. This seeks to ward off the tyranny of individualistic interpretation, but in so doing this tends to insulate community conformity from biblical critique.

**Separation from the world; community discipline.**—Following Jesus is synonymous with obedience in a community setting, which will lead to a separation from the world. The concern for committed community birthed practices of banning and shunning and an insistence on lockstep community obedience that led to many divisions over the tiniest differences in community practices.

**Pacifists and nonresistance.**—This landed Anabaptists in hot water in Reformation times and beyond.

**Forerunners of modern ideas:**

- Voluntary church membership and believer's baptism;
- Freedom of religion and liberty of conscience;
- Separation of Church and State;
- Separation from and nonconformity with the world;
- Nonresistance or pacifism;
- Priesthood of all believers.
- Early Anabaptists were radical egalitarians; women had the same rights as men and, in theory at least, the rich and poor were treated similarly.

**Christocentric and counter-worldly challenge.**—Query whether their insistence on community conformity and obedience has trumped their Christocentricity and whether their posture of being against-the-world (in separation) has trumped their for-the-world witness.

## Reformed

**Sovereignty of God**—Reformed theology is constructed around the central theme of the sovereignty of God. The whole of reality falls under the supreme rule of God. God is sovereign.

The Reformed tradition seeks to be centered on God, submitted to Scripture, living and serving in a properly ordered church, committed to a transformed and edifying lifestyle, and guided by a thoroughly biblical worldview. Reformed thought seeks to be God-centered, focused on His sovereign rule and redemptive work, Word-based, with Scripture as the theological norm, salvation focused, on God' redemptive work, and comprehensive, in articulating “a faith of a grand design”, encompassing state and culture, nature and cosmos.

For the Reformed tradition, the doctrine of God is the doctrine of doctrines. The Reformed tradition has rejected the notion, so common in the contextual theologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that human experience

constitutes a source, guiding norm, or proper starting place for theology.

**Scripture**—Reformed theological method is one in which Scripture is the uniquely supreme source and authority. That authority is fundamentally established through the witness of the Holy Spirit. It is a matter of Spirit and Word. Reformed biblical interpretation utilizes the principle of the analogy of faith, that is that Scripture is used to interpret Scripture. In addition, the Reformed tradition has long been a confessional one, but reads the Scripture under the tutelage, but never the tyranny of confessional tradition. Confessional statements are open to being modified, giving real meaning to the Reformed motto – *reformata et semper reformanda* – reformed and always reforming.

**Grace**—Reformed faith has emphasized God's grace. Salvation is in Christ alone and by grace alone. Reformed thinking encompasses God's common grace and His saving grace. By virtue of common grace, the full consequence of our human rebellion is restrained and life, though corrupted, is livable. Saving grace is both special because it saves us and is efficacious because it unerringly saves us.

**Election and predestination.**— God in eternity past chose a number of fallen creatures to be reconciled to Himself. In due time, Christ came to save the chosen. The Holy Spirit enlightens and enables the elect to believe the gospel and receive salvation. The elect cannot resist the work of the Holy Spirit nor fall away after receiving salvation. Salvation doctrine has been summarized in high Calvinistic Reformed circles by the acrostic T-U-L-I-P:

- T otal depravity;
- U nconditional election;
- L imited atonement;
- I rresistible grace;
- P erseverance of the saints

**Covenant theology.**—Reformed theologians use the concept of covenant to describe the way God enters fellowship with people in history. This framework orders God's life with people primarily in two covenants: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

**Spirit and Word, but light on the Spirit.**—There is a commendable emphasis on the life of the mind in the Reformed tradition. This will often take the form of worldview discussion in its quest to bring all reality into the focus of the life of faith and thinking about that faith. What isn't as apparent, or rather, who isn't as apparent, is the Spirit in this endeavor.

**Realistic assessment of human nature.**—The Reformed emphasis on the true human condition is a salutary feature of this tradition. Our lost condition is certainly not the stuff of pleasant press copy, but it is a needful emphasis in an age lost in Pollyanna assessment of human nature or the machinations of secular denials of genuine evil in our midst.

**Challenge of practical theology.**—Within the Reformed tradition, especially in America, there is a tendency to substitute correct doctrine and adherence to it as the answer to an array of spiritual issues connected with practical Christian living.

## Anglicans

**Method or ethos rather than system.**—Instead of referring to doctrines, many Anglican theologians use terms like “attitudes” or “spirit” to describe the distinctives of their tradition. This ethos can be characterized as follows:

- Anglicanism is episcopal. Its polity is a central feature.
- Liturgical. “Anglicans do their theology to the sound of church bells.”
- Tolerant. There is a willingness to tolerate for the time being at least, what appears to be error.
- Comprehensive, encompassing a wide variety of perspectives.
- Two central points of reference—the church and the sacraments.

**Liturgy as central.**—For Anglicans, the earliest theological documents are its prayer books. The *Book of Common Prayer* not only shapes Anglican piety but theology as well. A liturgically informed theology is a Scripturally based one. The principle of looking to the prayer books as a guide to the parameters of belief and practice is called by the Latin name *lex orandi, lex credendi* (the law of prayer is the law of belief).

**Scripture, tradition, and reason.**—Anglican authority has been described as a “three-legged stool”, derived primarily from Scripture, informed by tradition (the practices and beliefs of the historical church), and structured by reason (the intellect and the experience of God).

**Church and sacraments.**—The church is of the utmost importance because it provides the corporate or social context for the life of faith. This group is a mixed bag, but this mixed state does not render the church unworthy or incapable of its God-given functions. The visible signs of this God-given function include the sacraments (Baptism is the sign for incorporation into the body of Christ and the Eucharist is the sign of abiding in the body of Christ), teaching (the sign of the gospel ministry of the Church), and apostolic ministry (the sign that the Church is the continuation of the ministry of the apostles).

Anglicans teach that there are three God-appointed orders of ministry: bishops, priests or presbyters, and deacons. Bishops, and only bishops, ordain priests and deacons. This is the embodiment of the Anglican belief in the historic episcopate or apostolic succession. The bishop is the living sign of the continuity of the Church and of its unity.

**Unity and catholicity.**—This is largely done by embracing ambiguity and comprehensiveness and by emphasizing its liturgy. Their emphasis on unity and their tendency to a studied doctrinal ambiguity, sometimes makes their ecumenical focus seem unprincipled.

**Worship environment.**—Their worship patterns are where the Anglicans vest and the Book of Common Prayer have nourished and inspired many a worship experience. Many also prize the Anglican aesthetic in Christian spirituality and in worship environments.

## Baptists

**Staunchly biblical.**—Baptists attempt to formulate their theology based on Scripture alone and approach the text in its most obvious or literal sense. They rely on the grammatical-historical method

of interpretation with two tendencies:

- New Testament priority over the Old Testament;
- Affirmation of the believers' right and obligation to read and interpret the Bible directly, free from restraints by ecclesial or secular authorities.

***No creed but Christ.***—Baptists are stoutly anti-creedal, but care deeply about theology. No creed but Christ may echo in their halls, but the theological enterprise is a real and earnest quest for truth. Baptists place special emphasis on the role of truth (and thus theology) in the transformation of human beings.

***Characteristic beliefs.***—The Baptists emphasis on an individual's soul competency and the freedom and autonomy of the local church. With Scripture as the authoritative guide, Baptists emphasize particular doctrines:

- Sufficiency and supreme authority of the Bible;
- Autonomy of the local church from ecclesial and civil authorities;
- Regenerate church membership;
- Democratic form of church governance;
- Observance of the ordinances of believer's baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper.
- Emphasis on evangelism and missions.
- Separation of Church and state

***Church local and universal; local autonomy.***—The church is not the sum of the local churches; rather the whole is present in each particular locale. There is no governance structure over or between churches. Each are on an equal footing.

***Believer's baptism as foundational.***—Believer's baptism follows logically from the conviction that the church consists of regenerate believers only. Baptism is a sign, a symbolic act of obedience. It does not in any way convey God's saving grace to an individual.

***Individualistic spirit***—Baptists stand for individualism above institutionalism, for the reforming prophet more than the conforming priest, for a pietism that is private and personal before it can properly become public and social. The Baptist tendency to cultivate an individualistic spirit is troubling. This manifests itself both in the way individual believers view their local church and in the way Baptist congregations view their relationship with the greater body of Christ.

***Personal over confessional or ritualistic.***—Baptist emphasis on a personal relationship with Christ in contrast to some groups stressing ritualistic Christianity is to be commended. Conservative Baptist churches are quite unapologetic in insisting that God does not have spiritual grandchildren.

***Priesthood of the believer.***—Baptists affirm and attempt to give play to the Reformation idea of the priesthood of the believer in their church life. In governance and in other arenas of service, Baptist laity sometimes have greater freedom and opportunities for service than laity in other denominations.

***Resistance to ecclesiastical hierarchy: pros and cons.***—There is a degree of wisdom in refusing to subject the local church to ecclesiastical hierarchies. A casual observer can easily see enough of ecclesiastical politics to place value in local church independence. However, that same

observer can easily discern local conflicts begging for discerning help in their resolution by seasoned believers not embroiled in the heat of the conflict.

## **Wesleyan-Arminians**

***Practical focus***—The Wesleyan tradition has been primarily concerned with preaching the message of salvation and with teaching the principles of holy Christian living.

***Quadrilateral--sources and norms for theology***.—Wesleyans appeal to the “quadrilateral”: Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Wesleyan preaching and teaching intends to be grounded in Scripture, informed by Christian tradition, enlivened by experience, and tested by reason.

***Anthropology***.—Reformed theology is driven by its theocentricity—the sovereign activity of God, who glorifies Himself by sending Jesus Christ to redeem His elect. Wesleyan-Arminianism is anthropocentric—God is viewed primarily as love. God in Christ extends His love to all people and each person must accept the personal responsibility for their response or lack thereof to that love.

***Justification by faith and entire sanctification***.—The center of Wesley's theological thought was justification by faith and entire sanctification. Perhaps his greatest influence on Christian thought and practice was his emphasis on a crisis experience in regeneration and in sanctification.

Salvation is a three step process of grace: prevenient grace (God's grace that goes before and enables fallen people to respond to His offer of salvation), justifying grace (the grace that saves), and sanctifying grace (the grace that completes or perfects one in the love of God). The believer should seek this sanctifying grace, or what Wesleyans describe as entire sanctification. The call to sanctified holiness is also a characteristic of the Wesleyan tradition. Imputed righteousness in justification must become imparted righteousness in sanctification.

***Prevenient grace***.—Prevenient grace is universal benefit of the atonement, available to every human being. People are fallen and corrupt in their nature and therefore morally helpless in themselves. However, they are also recipients of this helping grace in Christ whereby they are made capable of responding to the gospel, assuring the salvation of infants and those beneath the age of reason, and restoring a sufficient degree of moral ability to permit moral action in real freedom.

***Problem of assurance***.—Assurance of salvation was/is a major pastoral concern. The Arminian understanding allows for the possibility of a final apostasy and that has loomed large in Wesleyan thought and pastoral concern.

***Tendency to theological drift***.—Arminianism was born in reaction to Reformed scholasticism and as a movement drifted in many ways into Socinianism, unitarianism, and legalistic moralism. Arminius' emphasis on inductive exegesis was not continued by his successors in a full-orbed way. They drank deep of the rationalism of the Enlightenment and progressively abandoned the supernaturalism of Christianity and developed an undue optimism concerning human nature.

***Earnestness for holy living***.—The Wesleyan holiness doctrine of entire sanctification is problematical.

On the one hand, it has inspired an earnestness for holy living in generations of believers. On the other hand, it leads to an understanding of sin as conscious acts of willful disobedience to known law falls far short of the biblical picture and tends to treat sin as isolated acts rather than as a condition of radical fallenness. This idea of Christian perfection, flawed as it is, also produced an even more flawed concept that the sanctified person never sins.

***Forefront on issues of social engagement.***—The genius of the Wesleyan revivals was this tradition's ability to meet people where they were. That led them to be engaged in the practical issues of people's lives in a far more effective than with the Anglican tradition generally. It has also tended to lead them to a reductionism, where the gospel was reduced to people's immediate socials needs and issues.

## *Part 2 Takeaways*

*[To be distributed [TBD] at the conclusion of the course]*