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**Introduction to Systematic Theology**  
**Lecture 4 – The Doctrines of Creation and Providence**  
**First Presbyterian Church of Orlando**  
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**I) Introduction**

- A) Augustine on God’s *motive* in creation and providence:** “God *loves* his creation: in order that it should *be*, and in order that it should *abide*” (*On Genesis*, 173).
- B) God’s *end* in creation and providence:** the world is a **theatre for Jesus’ glory** (Heb 1:2; Col 1:16: “through him and for him”)
- C) Overview**

**II) The Doctrine of Creation**

**Creation defined:** Creation is that work of the blessed Trinity by which he alone *produces* all things out of nothing by his own power, in accordance with his own wisdom and goodness, for his own glory and for the creature’s flourishing in his presence.

**A) The *agent* of creation**

**1) Creation is the work of the blessed Trinity (and he alone).**

- (a) **The *blessed, internally productive* Trinity:** The blessed/happy Trinity did not *need* to create us. The blessed Trinity created us because he loves his own goodness and desires to manifest his glory by sharing his supreme goodness with us (Acts 17:25; Rom 11:33-35). This purpose lies at the heart of everything
- (b) **Creation is the work of God *alone*:** Isa 40:12-14; 44:24; Rom 11:33-36
- (c) **The *triune* God alone:** Ps 33:6; John 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6; Heb 1:2

**2) God’s *goodness* is the impulsive cause or motive of creation.**

- (a) James 1:17ff; Rev 4:11
- (b) “God *loves* his creation: in order that it should *be*, and in order that it should *abide*” (Augustine, *On Genesis*, 173). **It was not “out of the compulsion of his needs that God loved the things which were to**

**be made,” but rather “out of the abundance of his generosity”**  
(Augustine, *On Genesis*, 173). God is **without envy**: “*Let there be ...*”

**3) God’s *wisdom* is the directing cause of creation.**

- (a) “The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens” (Prov 3:19; 8:22ff; see also Jer 10:12; 51:15; Ps 104:24; Eph 1:11)
- (b) Thus, while creation is a ***free act*** (spontaneous and undetermined), it is **also a *purposive act***, determined by the one “who works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Eph 1.11; see also 1.10: a Christological purpose).

**4) God’s *power* is the executive cause of creation.**

- (a) “It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens” (Jer 10.12; with Gen 1.3ff; Ps 33.9)
- (b) Creation is a work of **divine omnipotence *without effort*** (Isa 40.28; Ps 8.3: “the work of your fingers”). “No clash of Titans here. . . This God in Genesis creates **not through conquest but command**” (William Brown), contra *Enuma elish*
- (c) Creation is a work of **divine omnipotence therefore creation is *stable and secure*** (Ps 33.9; Jer 31.35-36).
- (d) Creation is a work of **divine omnipotence through which creatures not only come to *exist* but also by which they are *empowered to act***—i.e., to flourish through the enactment and realization of their natures to the glory of God.

Divine omnipotence is ***not tyranny*** but ***empowerment*** (Kathryn Tanner)

Omnicausality vs. monocausality: God’s power causes *all* things; but God’s power is not the *only* cause of all things

**5) God’s *glory* is the ultimate end or purpose of creation.**

- (a) Rom 11.36; 1 Cor 8.6; Col 1.16: “through him and for him”; Rev 4.11
- (b) **Not *adding* but *manifesting*** God’s glory

(c) **Johann Gerhard:** The revelation of God's *power* in creation causes us to stand in awe of him. The revelation of God's *wisdom* in creation causes us to trust him. The revelation of God's *goodness* in creation causes us to adore him "so that in all things God will be praised and blessed forever."

**6) A secondary end or purpose of creation is the use and benefit of human beings (Gerhard).**

(a) Ps 104.14-15; Mark 2.27

### **B) The act of creation**

**1) Creation is the work of the triune God by which *he alone produces all things out of nothing*:** Rom 4.17; Heb 11.3; Isa 44.24; John 1.3; Col 1.16 (visible and invisible); Rom 11.36.

God's work of creation has **no "material cause"**

**2) Creation is the work of the triune God by which he gives *being, order, and fullness to creation*:** Genesis 1.1-2; 1.3ff; Psalm 104.

### **C) The character of creation**

**1) There is a wonderful *diversity of God's creatures*:** Psalm 104.24

(a) Animate, inanimate, rational, non-rational

(b) Creatures *flourish* as they enact their *various natures* and realize their *various ends* (contra "ethics of authenticity")

**2) The *infinite* perfection of God is *refracted* in the multitude of *finite* creatures.**

(a) The Logos and the logoi

Thomas Aquinas: "Because it was not possible for his goodness to be represented through any single creature, he produced many different ones, so that what was wanting in one expression of the divine goodness might be supplied by another; for goodness, which in God is single and united, in creatures is multiple and divided. Hence the whole universe shares and represents his goodness less incompletely than any one creature by itself" (*ST* 1.47.1, cited by McFarland)

(b) **Creatures are tutors** who direct us to the fullness of God's perfection

**Jesus' predicate "I am" sayings**

**D) God's creation of *human beings***

- 1) **Human beings are the *pinnacle* of God's creative work:** on the sixth day; Psalm 8
- 2) **Adam and Eve, our first parents (human origins)**
- 3) **The image of God (human nature):** made *of* the earth, but not merely *for* the earth: created to know and love God, to behold and reflect his glory
- 4) **The vocation of human beings (human calling): a royal priesthood**

**III) The Doctrine of Providence**

**Providence defined:** Providence is that work of the blessed Trinity whereby he *preserves* his creatures in existence, *empowers* them to act in accordance with their various natures, and *directs* them to their various ends for his own glory and for their good.

**A) The *agent* of providence**

**B) The *act* of providence**

- 1) **Providence is that work of the blessed Trinity whereby** (a) God *preserves* his creatures in existence (Neh 9.6; Pss 36.6; 145.16; Col 1.17; Heb 1.3), (b) God *empowers* creatures to act in accordance with their various natures (Acts 17.28; Phil 2.12-13), (c) and God *directs* creatures to their various ends for his own glory and for their good (Ps 33.9; Isa 46.9-10; Rom 8.28-29; 11.33-36; Eph 1.9-11).

The Bible affirms the existence of both **primary** and **secondary** causes

- 2) **2. The Christian doctrine of providence rests upon biblical teaching about the triune God "who works all things according to the counsel of his will, . . . to the praise of his glory"** (Eph 1.11, 12).

(a) **Providence is a divine "work" . . .**

God is no spectator deity; "providence is in the act"

(b) **The scope of God's work of providence extends to "all things" . . .**

- (i) All places (Ps 135.6)

- (ii) Over all things, good or bad (Deut 32.39; Lam 3.37-38)
- (iii) From beginning to end (Isa 46.9-10; cf. 44.6-8)
- (iv) The free decisions of human beings (Prov 21.1-2), including sinful human beings (Gen 45.5-8; 50.20)
- (v) The rise and fall of rulers (Isa 40.23-24)
- (vi) The operations of demonic spirits (Job 1; 2 Chr 18.18-22)

Texts like Acts 17.25, 28; Heb 1.3; Matt 10.29-30 teach that God's providence concerns "not just the heavenly and incorruptible things." But "that no thing, whether it be of a higher or lower nature, should be excepted; but rather, with an unwavering faith one must hold and maintain the position that in God resides the providence for all things, both singly as well as together; things that are subject to decay and contingent (or fortuitous, as they call them) as well as things incorruptible and necessary; things that are humble and lowly, as well as of those which have received a more lofty nature" (*SPT* 11.6).

**(c) God's work of providence is determined solely by "*the counsel of his will*" . . .**

Eph 1.9-11 (purpose, good pleasure, counsel, will, etc.); Rom 11.33-35; Isa 46.9-10; etc.

**(d) God's work of providence ultimately aims at *the manifestation of God's glory and the flourishing of God's creatures* (Ps 148; Rom 11.36), *supremely in Jesus Christ and in his church* (Eph 1.9-11, 20-23; Rom 8.28-29). General vs. special providence**

- 3) **The Christian doctrine of providence is *a source of joy* for all creatures who know, trust, and love the triune God: Ps 97.1; Rev 19.6**
- 4) **The Christian doctrine of providence, far from undermining creaturely action, *establishes, enables, and directs confident creaturely action and cooperation with the triune God in the unfolding of his kingdom purpose for his glory and our good*: Matt 6.9-13, 25-34; 28.18-20**

**C) God's providence toward *human beings***

- 1) **God *moves* various creatures in accordance with their various *natures*.**

- 2) God *moves* human beings, not only internally, in accordance with their animal natures, but also externally, *by means of his Word*, in accordance with their rational natures. Psalm 95

#### IV) Conclusion

**HC 27-28** well summarize the doctrine and its practical significance.

**Question 27.** What do you understand by the providence of God?

**Answer.** The almighty and ever present power by which God upholds heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaves and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and unfruitful years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, and everything else, come to us not by chance but from God's sustaining hand.

**Question 28.** How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us?

**Answer.** We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from God's love. All creatures are so completely in God's hand that without the divine will they can neither move nor be moved.