

# How to Think Theologically

## Session 3

By Rev. Dr. Joshua Snyder

### **Introductions** (0-2 minutes)

#### **Goal:**

To help lay people to develop skills at theological reflection. This would enable us to consider anything, secular or sacred, in our culture or elsewhere, through a UU theological lens. This session focuses on theological resources.

### **Reflection – Interpretation of Scripture Homework** – 30 minutes

1. “How was the homework? Was it hard or easy?”
2. Please share an experience of something positive.
3. Please share an experience of something negative.
4. How has your Embedded Theology been shaped by these experiences?
5. What would you call your “Good News?” (Gospel) Which of the four sources do you find yourself drawn to the most?

### **Activity – Preaching the Good News**

On a piece of paper write the following:

1. The good news of your embedded theology.
2. If you were to create a new theological school out of this, what would you call it? Ex. “Parkerism”
3. What assumptions about human nature are implicit in your “Good News”?
4. How might you be different if you actually lived according to this Good News? How would the church be different if we all lived that way? How would the world be different?

## **Didactic** – The Threefold Method of Theological Reflection (15 minutes)

Theology is a creative process. While reason is a source of theological reflection, theology itself is more than merely rational deduction. It involves both halves of the brain. While theology is a creative enterprise, there are templates that can be used to help develop one's theology. Many such templates are available. Some of them are classic (Thomism), some are particular to a denomination or theologian (Tillich). This is a simple template that incorporates embedded theology and the four sources of reflection in a way that develops a discursive theology.

1. **The Human Condition.** Theology is a response to something. Some observation about the way human beings are, how we interact, and the challenges we face through our very existence. Traditional theology, especially Martin Luther, would always begin with an extended discourse on the nature of sin and how fallen we are as human beings. This “sin” creates an urgency that must be addressed. While Unitarian Universalists may not believe in sin, or not in the same way as other religions, we do have a perspective on human nature and the challenges we face. Think of all the social justice projects UUs get involved in. What does that activity imply about what we believe human nature to be?
2. **The Good News.** The good news, or Gospel, is the response to the challenges facing the human condition. If sin is the itch, then the gospel is the scratch. While Christians turn to the Bible as an exclusive source for finding the “good news,” in fact all four sources of theological reflection (reason, scripture, experience and tradition) can be utilized for developing the good news. By combining those four sources in creative ways, we develop a message that can address the human condition.
3. **Call to Transformation.** Simply stating the good news is not enough. Whatever it is that is the Gospel for us, it implies a wider vision of what the world should be like. If our good news is the inherent worth and dignity of all people, then what would it look like if you were to live your life that way? What if your family or church did? What if everyone in the world did? That vision for how the world would be different is a call to live a more spiritually rich life. Theology, when it is doing its job properly, is a key component to articulating that call, and possibly convincing others to live accordingly.

## **Theological Reflection** – Threefold Method of Theological Reflection in Media

Going to show you some clips from secular culture. We will watch it and then share some reflection together. Just react to what you see. These are about applying theology to real life. For each clip write down each of the three areas: what does it reveal about the human condition? What good news might you bring to bear to this situation? How is that good news a call to transformation?

1. **Unforgiven.** Existentialist Cowboys! The young man in this clip had been bragging to the elder cowboys about how tough he was.
2. **Chuck Pagano.** Pagano was diagnosed with leukemia and had to back away from his first head coaching position for most of the season. He made this appearance after an unexpected win by his team.
3. **Sara Barellis “King of Anything.”** This is for the feminists out there! Her song about being in a co-dependent relationship.

### **Homework** – Vignettes to Practice the Threefold Method of Theological Reflection

Here is your homework. Each vignette is followed by the three questions we have been using for theological reflection. Read each one and reflect on how you would answer the three questions. Share your responses next week.

See you two weeks from now.