

Questions to Make Pastors Squirm

A friend of mine who is on the search committee for a new rector asked me for a list of questions that might help sort out a potential candidate's theology, what was their churchmanship, whether they were Calvinist, Arminian, Evangelical or Anglo-Catholic. I thought the following might be interesting questions to address to interviewees. I wish my parish had asked some of these of a couple of "stealth" candidates who surprised the congregation with their real theology only after they had been called.

1. Who is Jesus? What does it mean to say "Jesus saves"? How do you interpret John 14:6?
2. Why is it important to believe in the doctrine of the Trinity? Why is it important that Jesus rose from the dead? If the bones of Jesus were found in a grave in Palestine, would that make any difference to Christian faith?
3. What is the central message of the gospel?
4. What is justification? Sanctification? How are they related?
5. What does God contribute to salvation, and what do we contribute? How are they related?
6. How do you understand divine sovereignty and providence? Can anything happen outside God's will? Can human beings thwart God's will?
7. Why do Christians pray if God already knows everything that will happen and exercises divine providence over the world?
8. For whom did Jesus die? If Jesus died for everyone, why isn't everyone saved? Why do you think some people believe in

Christ, and some don't?

9. If someone told you that they had done something so sinful that God could never forgive them, what would you tell them? If a parishioner continued to commit the same sin over and over, and told you that no matter how hard they tried, they just couldn't stop, what would you say? If someone said that Christians are "just a bunch of hypocrites," how would you respond?

10. How would you respond to someone who said they could not believe in God because of all the suffering and evil in the world? Why is there evil? What does God do about evil?

11. What are the sacraments, and why are they important? What kind of liturgical or sacramental practices do you think are important, or would you like to see in the church? Should the church baptize infants? Why or why not? What is your understanding of eucharistic theology? Should the sacrament be reserved? Why or why not?

12. What is your churchmanship? Would you describe yourself as Evangelical or Anglo-Catholic? Arminian or Calvinist? Low church or high church? Do you find these distinctions helpful? Why or why not?

13. Anglicanism is sometimes described as the Via Media, and sometimes as Reformed Catholicism? Are you happy with these descriptions? Why or why not?

14. Why are you an Anglican? If there were no such thing as Anglicanism, which denomination or church tradition would you find most attractive?

15. Was the Reformation mostly a good thing or mostly a bad thing, or a little of both?

16. What is the relation between Scripture and tradition? Anglicans and Episcopalians have sometimes talked about

Hooker's "three-legged" stool? Do you think this is an accurate or helpful illustration of the Anglican understanding of authority? Why or why not?

17. What do you believe about the Creeds and Ecumenical Councils of the Church? Which are most important and why? How do Creeds and Councils relate to the authority of Scripture?

18. Outside the modern era, which area of church history has most influenced your theology? Patristic? Medieval? Reformation? Which (non-modern) theologians do you admire? Which contemporary theologians?

19. Which theologians have most influenced your theology? Whom do you still read?

20. What role does the lectionary play in your preaching? Would you describe your preaching as expository or topical, or in some other way? How do you go about writing a sermon?

21. Do you believe in the ordination of women? Why or why not?

22. Aside from the Bible, the Prayer Book, hymnal, and standard reference works like Bible commentaries or church histories, which five books would you want to have in your office library if you and your congregation were stranded on a desert island?