

EDUCATION FOR MINISTRY

Reading and Reflection Guide

Volume A, 2017–2018



# Living Faithfully in Your World



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Volume A, 2017–2018



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# Contents

ix	Acknowledgments
x	About the Authors
xi	Overview of the Year: Reading Assignments for Volume A
xv	About Online Resources

## PART I: THE GUIDE

3	Week One: Orientation and Organization
---	--

### Unit One: Spiritual Autobiography and Listening

16	Week Two: Faithful Living is Contextual
25	Week Three
31	Week Four
36	Week Five
39	Week Six
42	Week Seven

### Unit Two: Theological Reflection as a Life Skill

46	Week Eight: Theological Reflection Is a Life Skill
56	Week Nine
59	Week Ten
63	Week Eleven
66	Week Twelve
68	Week Thirteen

### First Interlude Unit: Dialogue and the Bible

72	Week Fourteen
76	Week Fifteen

### Unit Three: Developing a Sustaining Spirituality

78	Week Sixteen: The Spiritual Person
94	Week Seventeen
97	Week Eighteen
101	Week Nineteen
105	Week Twenty
112	Week Twenty-one

## Unit Four: Integrating Belief, Behavior, and Doctrine in Everyday Life

- 118 Week Twenty-two: “Doing” Theology
- 126 Week Twenty-three
- 131 Week Twenty-four
- 135 Week Twenty-five
- 138 Week Twenty-six
- 142 Week Twenty-seven

## Second Interlude: Ministry and the Church

- 146 Week Twenty-eight
- 148 Week Twenty-nine

## Unit Five: Vocation

- 152 Week Thirty: Mission, Vocation, and Gifts
- 163 Week Thirty-one
- 168 Week Thirty-two
- 171 Week Thirty-three
- 175 Week Thirty-four
- 179 Week Thirty-five
  
- 182 Week Thirty-six: Closing the Year

## PART II: RESOURCES

### Supplemental Readings in the Christian Tradition

- 190 Week Three, Reading Assignment for Year Four  
On Being Theologically Literate
- 199 Week Five, Reading Assignment for Year One  
The Priestly Creation Story
- 217 Week Thirteen, Reading Assignment for Year Four  
God as Trinity
- 229 Week Twenty, Reading Assignment for Year One  
Micah

### Resources for Listening and Spiritual Autobiography

- 234 Spiritual Autobiographies: Some Guidelines
- 236 Listening Skills
- 237 Types of Listening
- 238 Practice for Developing Effective Listening Skills

## 240 The Art of Framing Questions

240 Helpful Questions

241 Unhelpful Questions

## Resources for Reflecting Theologically

## 244 Primary Aspects of Theological Reflection

245 The EfM Four-Source Model

## 246 Theological Reflection in EfM

246 Select Bibliography for Theological Reflection

247 The Basic Structure of EfM Theological Reflection  
in Four Movements

## 248 Theological Reflection Process Chart

## 249 Four Phases of Movement in Theological Reflection

## 250 Framework for Theological Reflections

251 Unpacking the Framework for Theological Reflections

252 Other Comments on Framework Application

## 254 Theological Reflection in a Group

## 257 Theological Reflection in Motion

## Examples of Theological Reflection

## 262 The Action Source

262 Theological Reflection Beginning with a Personal Experience (1)

263 Theological Reflection Beginning with a Personal Experience (2)

264 Theological Reflection Beginning with a Personal Experience (3)

266 Theological Reflection Beginning with a Personal Experience (4)

268 Theological Reflection Beginning with a Personal Experience (5)

270 Theological Reflection Beginning with a Dilemma  
(Action Source) (1)272 Theological Reflection Beginning with a Dilemma  
(Action Source) (2)275 Theological Reflection Beginning with a Wide-angle Lens  
(Action Source)

## 278 The Tradition Source

278 Theological Reflection Beginning with Christian Tradition  
(Scripture) (1)281 Theological Reflection Beginning with the Christian Tradition  
(Scripture) (2)283 Theological Reflection Beginning with the Christian Tradition  
(3)284 Theological Reflection Beginning with a Wide-angle Lens  
(Tradition Source)

287	Theological Reflection Beginning with a Mind Map (Tradition Source)
289	Theological Reflection Beginning with a Provocative Word (Tradition Source)
290	The Culture Source
290	Theological Reflection Beginning with a Social Concern (Culture Source) (1)
292	Theological Reflection Beginning with a Social Concern (Culture Source) (2)
295	Theological Reflection Beginning with the Culture Source
296	Theological Reflection Beginning with a Wide-angle Lens (Culture Source)
299	Theological Reflection Beginning with a Provocative Word (Culture Source)
300	The Position Source
300	Theological Reflection Beginning with a Personal Position (1)
302	Theological Reflection Beginning with a Personal Position (2)
304	Theological Reflection Beginning with Multiple Personal Positions

## Resources for Community Life

308	Group Life: The Seminar
311	Issues in the Life of a Seminar Group
315	Activities that Nurture Group Life
316	Tools from the Kaleidoscope Institute
316	The Cycle of Gospel Living
318	Mutual Invitation
319	Respectful Communications Guidelines



# Acknowledgments

A revision by definition is not *sui generis*. Although this series of *Reading and Reflection Guides* may look different from previous editions of EfM materials, although it may be organized differently, it is nonetheless built on a framework that has evolved over more than forty years of Education for Ministry. Those who have some years of acquaintance with the program will recognize what the new format owes to components developed for its predecessors, among them parallel guides, common lessons, and the many variations of EfM's central discipline of theological reflection.

The developers of those foundational components are by now nearly legion and include not only founder Charles Winters and succeeding leaders like John de Beer and Edward de Bary but also the many EfM coordinators and trainers whose work with mentors all over the globe and over time has shaped the program.

Education for Ministry has been from its inception an experiential and collaborative project. The principal author in this series is Richard E. Brewer, who has a long history of writing and curriculum design in EfM. Significant contributions also were made by Angela Hock Brewer and Karen M. Meridith, the managing editor for the series. In addition, several of the essays and resources, some adapted, others left as originally published in the previous edition, have long been a part of the EfM program, designed, written, and refined by a number of contributors over the years. We are grateful for their work and know that we can look to the future of EfM only because we stand on the shoulders of giants.

Karen M. Meridith, series editor  
Executive Director of Education for Ministry  
Sewanee, Tennessee  
March, 2017

# About the Authors

**Richard E. Brewer** (Rick) is a retired Episcopal priest who served in parochial ministry and in adult Christian formation for forty years. A graduate of The University of the South and The General Theological Seminary, he has lived in Oklahoma most of his life and served as priest and educator in Tulsa and Stillwater Episcopal churches. Additionally, he developed and directed the Deacon Formation Program for the Episcopal Diocese of Oklahoma.

Rick first learned about EfM in 1975 from Dr. Charles Winters, the originator and first director of the program. He has been an EfM trainer since 1978, and a diocesan coordinator, a mentor, and interim assistant director for the EfM program. He conceived and edited the Common Lesson series for the first revision of the EfM materials. He coauthored the Parallel Guides and numerous common lessons with the Reverend John de Beer.

**Angela Hock-Brewer** considers herself a lifelong Episcopalian, although she spent her first twelve years in the Roman Catholic Church. A graduate of the University of Oklahoma, she has served as the Oklahoma Diocesan Chair for Lay Ministry and on the Diocese of Northwest Texas Commission on Ministry for Lay Ministry. Angela is a graduate of Education for Ministry and has served the program for many years as an EfM mentor and trainer.

In addition to their work together on the EfM Reading and Reflection Guides, Rick and Angela co-wrote *Practically Christian: A Guide to Practical Christian Prayer, Action, and Reflection*. They co-directed *Opportunities for Adult Christian Education and Spirituality* (OACES), Inc., which developed a variety of adult Christian formation learning guides and a comprehensive ministry formation program for the Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska.

**Karen M. Meridith** is the Executive Director of Education for Ministry and Associate Director of the Beecken Center at the School of Theology of the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. She was called to her position in 2010 with the charge to re-envision and redesign the Education for Ministry curriculum. Karen is the managing editor for the four-volume EfM Reading and Reflection Guide series, a contributing writer, and responsible for selecting the textbooks used in the curriculum. A graduate of the University of South Carolina and Episcopal Divinity School, she is also a graduate of Education for Ministry and served as a mentor in the Diocese of Southern Virginia. Karen is an experienced educator and administrator, and has developed curricula and programming for Christian formation at local, diocesan, and national levels of the Episcopal Church.

# Overview of the Year: Reading Assignments for Volume A

## Notes

1. Common readings at the beginning of each unit are read by all years.
2. Assignments for years one and two marked with an asterisk are readings in the Bible. Chapters in the survey texts are numbered. When both are assigned, it is suggested that the Bible be read before the survey text chapters. Supplemental essays for individual years are in Part II of the Reading and Reflection Guide.
3. Readings in the interludes and in each of the texts for Year Four are indicated by name of the author(s).

WEEK	UNIT	YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE	YEAR FOUR
		Collins	Powell	MacCulloch	Ford, McIntosh, Sedgwick, Peace
1	<b>Introductory Meeting</b>	Orientation and Organization	Orientation and Organization	Orientation and Organization	Orientation and Organization
2	<b>Unit One</b> Spiritual Autobiography and Listening	Common Reading: Context and Ministry	Common Reading: Context and Ministry	Common Reading: Context and Ministry	Common Reading: Context and Ministry
3		Preface, Introduction 1 The Near Eastern Context 2 The Nature of the Pentateuchal Narrative	Preface 1 The New Testament World 2 The New Testament Writings	Acknowledgements, Introduction 1 Greece and Rome	Ballard essay: On Being Theologically Literate, RRG Pt II, 190–198 Ford: 1 Introduction
4		* Genesis 1–11 3 The Primeval History	3 Jesus 4 The Gospels	2 Israel	Ford: 2 Theology and religious studies
5		The Priestly Creation Story RRG Pt II 199–216	* Matthew	3 A Crucified Messiah	Ford: 3 Thinking of God
6		* Genesis 12–50 4 The Patriarchs	5 Matthew	4 Boundaries Defined	4 Living before God
7		* Exodus 1–15 5 The Exodus from Egypt	* Mark 6 Mark	5 The Prince: Ally or Enemy?	Ford: 5 Facing evil

OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR: READING ASSIGNMENTS FOR VOLUME A

WEEK	UNIT	YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE	YEAR FOUR
8	<b>Unit Two</b> Theological Reflection as a Life Skill	Common Reading: Theological Reflection as a Life Skill	Common Reading: Theological Reflection as a Life Skill	Common Reading: Theological Reflection as a Life Skill	Common Reading: Theological Reflection as a Life Skill
9		* Exodus 16–40 6 Revelation at Sinai	* Luke	6 The Imperial Church	Ford: 6 Jesus Christ
10		* Leviticus * Numbers 7 Priestly Theology: Exodus 25–40, Leviticus and Numbers	7 Luke	7 Defying Chalcedon: Asia and Africa	Ford: 7 Salvation
11		* Deuteronomy 8 Deuteronomy	* John	8 Islam: The Great Realignment	Ford: 8 Through the past to the present
12		* Joshua * Judges	8 John	9 The Making of Latin Christianity	Ford: 9 Experience, knowledge, wisdom 10 Theology for the third millennium
13		9 Joshua 10 Judges	* The Acts of the Apostles 9 Acts	10 Latin Christendom: New Frontiers	Coakley essay: God as Trinity, RRG Pt II, 217–228
14	<b>First Interlude</b> Dialogue and the Bible	Common Reading: Morgan ix–66	Common Reading: Morgan ix–66	Common Reading: Morgan ix–66	Common Reading: Morgan ix–66
15	<b>First Interlude</b> Dialogue and the Bible	Common Reading: Morgan 67–113	Common Reading: Morgan 67–113	Common Reading: Morgan 67–113	Common Readings Morgan 67–113
16	<b>Unit Three</b> Developing a Sustaining Spirituality	Common Reading: The Spiritual Person	Common Reading: The Spiritual Person	Common Reading: The Spiritual Person	Common Readings The Spiritual Person:
17		* 1 Samuel * 2 Samuel 11 First Samuel 12 Second Samuel	10 New Testament Letters 11 Paul	11 The West: Universal Emperor or Universal Pope?	McIntosh: 1 Mysteries of Faith 2 The New Encounter with God
18		* 1 Kings * 2 Kings 13 First Kings 1–16 14 First Kings 17–2 Kings 25	* Romans	12 A Church for All People?	McIntosh: 3 The splendor of God 4 The Voice of God
19		* Amos * Hosea 15 Amos and Hosea	12 Romans	13 Faith in a New Rome	McIntosh: 5 The Humanity of God
20		* Micah * Isaiah 1–39 Micah, Pt II 229–232 16 Isaiah	* 1 Corinthians * 2 Corinthians 13 1 Corinthians 14 2 Corinthians	14 Orthodoxy: More Than an Empire	McIntosh: 6 The Glory of Humanity
21		* Jeremiah * Lamentations 17 The Babylonian Era	* Galatians 15 Galatians	15 Russia: The Third Rome	McIntosh: 7 The Drama of the Cosmos

WEEK	UNIT	YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE	YEAR FOUR
22	<b>Unit Four</b> Integrating Belief, Behavior, and Doctrine	Common Reading:	Common Reading:	Common Reading:	Common Reading:
23		* Ezekiel 18 Ezekiel	* Ephesians 16 Ephesians	16 Perspectives on the True Church	Sedgwick: Preface, Introduction, 1 Describing the Christian Life
24		* Isaiah 40–66 19 Additions to the Book of Isaiah 20 Postexilic Prophecy	* Philippians * Colossians 17 Philippians 18 Colossians	17 A House Divided	Sedgwick: 2 An Anglican Perspective
25		* Ezra * Nehemiah 21 Ezra and Nehemiah	* 1 Thessalonians * 2 Thessalonians 19 1 Thessalonians 20 2 Thessalonians	18 Rome's Renewal	Sedgwick: 3 Incarnate Love
26		* 1 Chronicles * 2 Chronicles 22 The Books of Chronicles	* 1 Timothy * 2 Timothy * Titus * Philemon 21 The Pastoral Letters 22 Philemon	19 A Worldwide Faith	Sedgwick: 4 Love and Justice
27		* Psalms * Song of Songs 23 Psalms and Song of Songs	* Hebrews 23 Hebrews	20 Protestant Awakenings	Sedgwick: 5 The Practices of Faith 6 The Call of God Appendix
28	<b>Second Interlude</b> Ministry and the Church	Common Reading: Dozier 1–64	Common Reading: Dozier 1–64	Common Reading: Dozier 1–64	Common Reading: Dozier 1–64
29	<b>Second Interlude</b> Ministry and the Church	Common Reading: Dozier 65–114	Common Reading: Dozier 65–114	Common Reading: Dozier 65–114	Common Reading: Dozier 65–114
30	<b>Unit Five</b> Vocation	Common Reading: Mission, Vocation, and Gifts	Common Reading: Mission, Vocation, and Gifts	Common Reading: Mission, Vocation, and Gifts	Common Reading: Mission, Vocation, and Gifts
31		* Proverbs 24 Proverbs	* James 24 James	21 Enlightenment: Ally or Enemy?	Peace, Rose, Mobley: Foreword Introduction 1 Encountering the Neighbor
32		* Job * Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth) 25 Job and Qoheleth	* 1 Peter * 2 Peter 25 1 Peter 26 2 Peter	22 Europe Re-enchanted or Disenchanted?	Peace, Rose, Mobley: 2 Viewing Home Anew 3 Redrawing Our Maps

OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR: READING ASSIGNMENTS FOR VOLUME A

WEEK	UNIT	YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE	YEAR FOUR
33		*Ruth *Jonah *Esther 26 The Hebrew Short Story	* 1 John * 2 John * 3 John 27 Johannine Letters	23 To Make the World Protestant	Peace, Rose, Mobley: 4 Unpacking Our Belongings 5 Stepping Across the Line
34		*Daniel 27 Daniel, 1–2 Maccabees	* Jude 28 Jude	24 Not Peace but a Sword	Peace, Rose, Mobley: 6 Finding Fellow Travelers
35		*Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus) *Wisdom of Solomon 28 The Deuterocanonical Wisdom Books 29 From Tradition to Canon	* The Revelation to John 29 Revelation	25 Culture Wars	Peace, Rose, Mobley: 7 Repairing Our Shared World
36	<b>Final Meeting</b>	Closing the Year	Closing the Year	Closing the Year	Closing the Year

# About Online Resources

All EfM participants have subscriber's access to the Oxford Biblical Studies Internet site, which has articles, maps, timelines, a variety of biblical translations, articles on biblical interpretation, illustrations, and numerous other items. The *New Oxford Annotated Bible (NRSV)* can be accessed on the site.

oxfordbiblicalstudies.com

The login ID is **efm-sewanee** and the password is **ministry**.

There also are resources online that correspond to the Collins and Powell texts, as well as an EfM study guide for the MacCulloch text.<sup>1</sup>

**Collins:**

[http://www.augsburgfortress.org/education/academic/  
introductiontothehebrewbible/](http://www.augsburgfortress.org/education/academic/introductiontothehebrewbible/)

**Powell:**

[http://bakerpublishinggroup.com/books/  
introducing-the-new-testament/264690/esources](http://bakerpublishinggroup.com/books/introducing-the-new-testament/264690/esources)

**MacCulloch:**

[http://efm.sewanee.edu/assets/uploads/  
MacCulloch\\_Study\\_Guide-Babb.pdf](http://efm.sewanee.edu/assets/uploads/MacCulloch_Study_Guide-Babb.pdf)

Links to additional resources will be posted on the EfM website **Resources** page on occasion:

[efm.sewanee.edu/resources/resources](http://efm.sewanee.edu/resources/resources)

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1. These and other hyperlinks in this volume were operational at the time of printing. If you find the link does not work, try searching for the author or title to find an updated link.





# PART I

# The Guide





# Week One: Orientation and Organization

## ALL YEARS

### Read

#### Welcome

Welcome to the Education for Ministry (EfM) program, begun in 1975 at the School of Theology of The University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, and continuing through you. Education for Ministry is a four-year program in group reflection and study to support formation for Christian ministry in daily life. Assigned texts and essays provide the primary knowledge content in the study of the Christian tradition. The disciplines of individual and group theological reflection facilitate the connection of life experience with this study. The sharing of worship, spiritual autobiographies, and personal stories across the year help to form the relationships that are foundational to ministry.

In this first seminar meeting of the EfM year, the mentor(s) will distribute materials and lead the group in organizing the year and getting to know one another. Between this meeting and the next, participants will prepare the assignments and exercises described in Week Two. Assignments are provided in a Read-Focus-Respond-Practice format that continues through the thirty-six meetings for the year. Notice that this first meeting also follows the Read-Focus-Respond-Practice format.

It is customary to begin each session with worship. Your mentor may have an opening worship planned for this session or may have asked someone in the group to lead worship. It likely will be that responsibility for worship will be shared across the year. Your group will decide how to schedule this.

Take some time in this session to introduce yourselves to one another. The mentor will provide an “ice-breaker” or some other format for these initial introductions. Your group’s spiritual autobiographies will contribute to the relationships built in the course of the year together.

The group will be setting community norms during this meeting. A suggested format is given below in the Practice section.

## Core Practices in Education for Ministry

The terms “education” and “ministry” in Education for Ministry frequently need unpacking to better understand both the content and the purpose of the program. Some expect EfM to be a course in religion or theology, like one that might be taught at their local college or university. Some expect it to be geared toward preparation for becoming an ordained minister or pastor, for such is the limited understanding of ministers in contemporary culture.

EfM actually is neither of these, although it does provide an education in the content of the Christian tradition through reading the Bible alongside some basic biblical commentary, church history, and practical introductions to Christian theology and ethics, as well as through encouraging an appreciation for ways in which Christians respond to encounters with those of other faiths. EfM also explores a wider concept of ministry, based as it is in an understanding that baptism, the fundamental rite of entry into Christianity, marks our call to minister to one another in Christ's name in the course of our daily lives.

At its heart EfM is a program in practical theology, that is, a program based in a set of five core practices that form and support us in the various ministries to which we are called.

### ***Living in Community***

All ministry begins in relationship, and at its best is reciprocal. As we each share our own stories and listen attentively to another's stories, we come to know each other and the relationship deepens. Empathy deepens, and out of that empathy I minister to you even as you minister to me.

In EfM we begin the year by sharing a focused portion of our spiritual autobiographies. As we listen to one another we may find points of common experience and points at which our empathy is awakened. Sharing spiritual autobiographies forms a foundation on which we build relationships for working together in community through the year. As we continue to share stories of personal experience, name concerns and positions, offer varied expressions of worship, and acknowledge deep spiritual truths and longings, we deepen our connections to one another and actively look for ways to bridge differences that might otherwise separate us. EfM uses the Respectful Communication Guidelines and the Mutual Invitation process from the Kaleidoscope Institute as tools for learning to acknowledge and respect those differences.

### ***Regular Prayer and Worship***

EfM expects that weekly worship in the meeting, usually with members taking in turn responsibility for leadership, is a component of the seminar group's work together. Spiritual practices are addressed in the EfM curriculum, particularly in Unit Three each year, but also across the year through the introduction of practices from the Christian tradition like *Lectio divina*, the Ignatian examen, contemplative prayer, and walking a labyrinth. Participants are invited to explore entering into these traditional practices and encouraged to write a Rule of Life.

The different expressions and practices of worship shared weekly by members of the group offer ways to enrich individual spiritual practice, as do trial explorations of different practices from the tradition. In addition, participants are encouraged to be regular in attendance at worship and active participants in congregational life. The goal is to develop a spiritual connection with God and neighbor that grounds and sustains us in the work of ministry.

### ***Theological Reflection***

Examining life through a theological lens is the central spiritual discipline in Education for Ministry. The seminar groups practice theological reflection (TR) employing EfM's model that brings four sources of wisdom into conversation, using a method in four movements that lead to new understandings with implications for action in practicing ministry in daily life.

The four sources in the EfM model include three that form our context in daily living: life experience ("Action"), the culture/society around us ("Culture"), and our cherished beliefs and values ("Position"). The fourth source is the Christian tradition handed down over the centuries ("Tradition"). EfM's method for bringing these sources into conversation with one another follows four movements: 1) *identify* a focus from one of the sources for reflection; 2) *examine* the focus; 3) *connect* it to the other three sources; and 4) *apply* new learning to shape action in ministry. In movements two and three, questions are framed using an intentional theological focus.

Using EfM's process for theological reflection often feels awkward at first, yet few expect to be able to play a musical instrument proficiently or master an athletic pursuit without practice. The same is true for spiritual disciplines. With sufficient practice in TR comes the ability to slip seamlessly into bringing the lens of faith to bear on any aspect of life, essential to aligning our behavior with what we say we believe. When faced with making an ethical choice, regular reflective practice can enable one to answer the question: "How do I know this is a faithful way?"

The process for theological reflection is addressed in Unit Two every year with the expectation that theological reflection is practiced weekly (or nearly every week) thereafter in the seminar groups. The curriculum also instructs participants in practicing theological reflection as individuals outside the seminar meeting, with the goal of becoming reflective practitioners of their faith in daily life. Simply put, any seminar group that neglects the practice of theological reflection is not participating authentically in EfM as the program is designed.

### ***Study of the Christian Tradition***

A series of four Reading and Reflection Guides provide weekly assignments for reading, reflection, and response that encourage groups to develop a lifelong practice of engagement with the Christian tradition in study. Participants in the first two years read the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament along with commentary that helps them understand the texts in their ancient and modern contexts. In the third year, they study the history of the church. In their final year participants study Christian theology while examining their own personal theologies, consider ethics through the lens of the Anglican tradition, and read first-person stories of interreligious encounter.

In addition, the Reading and Reflection Guides offer contextual themes that shape ministerial formation over four years, viewing the study of the Christian tradition through lenses of personal and global contexts for our ministry in daily life as we grow in spiritual maturity and live into the

journey with God. The regular study of the Christian tradition in EfM forms a foundation for theological reflection in the service of faithful living.

### ***Vocational Discernment***

Listening for and responding to God's call to ministry in daily life, the focus of Unit Five each year, is a practice that undergirds the whole EfM curriculum. It is assumed that all Christians are so called.

In the group we begin with attentive listening to one another as we share spiritual autobiographies and continue that listening through shared prayer and worship, shared stories of our daily lives, shared theological reflection across the year. Through such listening we often find we can help one another identify specific gifts and the deep moments of longing or joy that may signal a call to a ministry in which the person can offer those gifts. As individuals the practice of regular prayer opens us to listening for God's call, a call that we can take to the community for reflection and support.

Responding to God's call is shaped by the regular practice of attention to personal and community contexts. What are the needs of the community around me? What gift can I offer? Attention to the fruits of theological reflection will shape response as well. What implications for my own or others' action in ministry can be taken from this TR? What are the next steps? What or who will be needed to support me in this response? How can I support you in your call? The seminar group becomes a community of affirmation, support, and accountability when regular attention is paid to vocational discernment with and for its members.

## **Expectations**

### ***The Participants***

You, the participants in an EfM seminar group, are all adults. You set your own learning goals and need the latitude to learn as each individual does best. This requires a certain commitment to the program, but every participant does not need to work in the same way or with the same intensity. EfM has the flexibility for each of you to work in his or her own way.

There are some basic expectations of each participant:

- Attend the seminar sessions or at least maintain the community by letting others know when you will be absent.
- Read the materials and complete the work assigned to the best of your ability.
- Participate in the discussions, reflections, and worship of your seminar group.

### ***The Mentor***

The role of the mentor is crucial to the life of the group. The term "mentor" originates in Greek mythology. Mentor was a friend of Odysseus who remained in charge of his household while he was away. "Wisdom" in

the form of Athena took shape in Mentor to be the guide and teacher of Telemachus. A teacher who guides is a description of an EfM mentor.

The EfM mentor brings skills in working effectively with small groups of people. The responsibility for the life of the group belongs to everyone, but the mentor is the initial convener. The mentor works to allow everyone an opportunity to learn, to share, to discover. At the same time, the mentor is also a member of the group. The mentor is also there to learn, to share, and to discover. The mentor has a second role, that of administrator for the group. The mentor handles registrations, receives and distributes materials, files reports, and is accountable to the administrative staff in Sewanee.

The mentor serves the group neither as a teacher whose most important task is to provide information nor as a therapist. The mentor is a guide in a journey of discovery. Some groups have co-mentors who work together as a team. This can be very helpful to the process since it can be very difficult to lead and participate simultaneously.

Mentor training and accreditation by an EfM trainer is required. It is an important component of the EfM program. Mentors must renew their accreditation every eighteen months.

### ***The Seminar Group***

The EfM seminar group is the crucible for learning in the EfM program. A seminar group usually contains no fewer than six and no more than twelve participants and a mentor (or two co-mentors). The group provides an environment that supports the exploration and expression of ideas so that discovery and learning occur. It is a place of trust and confidentiality as participants in the seminar reflect upon ways to pursue a life of faith on a daily basis.

Seminars usually meet for two-and-a-half to three hours once a week over a period of thirty-six weeks during the academic cycle. For many of us this cycle begins in September and ends in June, but the group may decide to meet more frequently for shorter periods of time or less frequently for longer periods of time. Less frequent meetings can be very helpful when participants are scattered or they live in a region where bad weather can make travel difficult for extended periods. Some seminar groups meet online.

EfM seminars regularly engage in three different aspects of learning. These may not all be done in any one session, but attention needs to be given to all three aspects.

- There is time for social and spiritual needs to be addressed. This is a way to build trust, friendship, and community. It is an opportunity to support each other and maintain the freedom we all need to express our thoughts and feelings.
- There is time to discuss the materials which participants read in the texts. It is not a time for classroom presentations, rather an occasion to raise questions, wrestle with the materials, obtain clarifications, and generally share impressions about what has been read.

- There is an opportunity to engage in reflective activity. This may come in the form of a spiritual autobiography, one of many forms of theological reflections, studying and following a spiritual discipline, or exploring the meaning of the ministries we have.

### **The Program**

The EfM Program expects participants, mentors, and trainers to remain faithful to the program. EfM is a program for adults and one expectation of the program is that adults take responsibility for their lives, set their own goals, and seek the support necessary to move forward. The program asks participants and mentors to provide an arena in which learning can take place on a mature adult level.

The relationship of EfM and The University of the South to the local church and to the judicatory/diocese is one of collaboration. Together we join to provide a program of theological education for the laity that carries a number of benefits.

- Portability—Participants can begin in one location and continue their work in another one.
- Accreditation—EfM grants Continuing Education Units to indicate completion of the work.
- Access to an international network
- A training opportunity for the laity
- Connection with The University of the South and its School of Theology
- Basic theological education to support the laity in responding to the call to ministry in daily life. For some the theological groundwork in EfM may be supplemented with additional opportunities to prepare for ecclesial roles such as that of lay reader, vocational deacon, or educator.

Providing the program is something in which various agencies participate. The local church provides a setting and may offer some financial assistance to participants. The diocese may contract with EfM, which lowers the tuition for participants. When there is a contract with the local jurisdiction, a function of that contract is the appointment of a coordinator who maintains a liaison with the EfM program in Sewanee, arranges for mentor training locally, acts as a communicator for EfM, and promotes the program.

### **What EfM Is NOT**

- *EfM is not only Bible study.*

EfM participants study what the Bible says, but they also learn how to understand the Bible within its historical context and literary setting. Biblical studies form the primary work of the first two years. EfM is more than a Bible study in which one reads the Bible, seeks to understand it, and then applies it to daily life. EfM takes seriously God's revelation through all of Christian tradition, from the earliest biblical messages,



through the development of liturgy and theology, and even in the context of the challenges we face in our own times.

- *EfM is not a program in personal therapy or problem solving.*

While EfM groups develop a close community in order to delve deeply into matters of faith and theology, the group does not exist as a problem-solving agency or as a setting for analyzing or addressing personal and social problems. In an EfM group, members may wish to share various aspects of their lives, but EfM is not a place to probe or press individuals to talk about those things they would prefer to leave unexamined.

- *EfM is not a closed community.*

The content of EfM materials and the processes we use for reflection are not secrets. A group may invite a guest such as someone who brings some special information or someone who would like to participate for a session in order to decide if he or she might like to join. On the other hand, we do respect one another's privacy. This means that we expect the group to maintain confidentiality about personal matters. The rule of thumb is: secrets—no; privacy—yes. Participants may share with others what they have learned and how that was learned, but they are expected to retain in confidence specific personal aspects of their colleagues' lives which may have been shared during the course of the program.

- *EfM is not an academic program leading to a degree or an ordination program.*

Local arrangements may permit EfM to become part of the work leading to a degree or to ordination, but the School of Theology of The University of the South makes no recommendations about ordination nor does it grant course credit for completing the Education for Ministry program.

## The EfM Curriculum

The EfM curriculum is presented in a cycle of four Reading and Reflection Guides. A theme for each volume in the cycle provides a lens for focusing the work throughout the year. Weekly assignments guide participants' responses to the readings. Weekly preparation includes practice in the disciplines of listening and theological reflection.

Volume A: "Living Faithfully in Your World"

Volume B: "Living Faithfully in a Multicultural World"

Volume C: "Living as Spiritually Mature Christians"

Volume D: "Living into the Journey with God"

Each volume contains five units that explore and nurture the core practices for developing foundational skills for ministry in daily life

Unit One: *Spiritual Autobiography and Listening* uses creating a spiritual autobiography and developing effective listening habits to focus on sharing stories to develop relationships.

Unit Two: *Theological Reflection as a Life Skill* introduces the EfM theological reflection model to integrate life experience and faith.

Unit Three: *Developing a Sustaining Spirituality* encourages, through prayer and worship combined with study and theological reflection, a four-fold spiritual discipline that can help sustain us in the practice of ministry.

Unit Four: *Integrating Belief, Behavior, and Doctrine* offers opportunities to examine and build a personal theology.

Unit Five: *Vocation* focuses on discerning and responding to God's call to ministry in daily life.

### Terms in the EfM Curriculum

**Common Reading:** A common reading is assigned to all year levels. Each unit begins with an introductory essay read by all participants. Interlude texts are also assigned for common reading.

**Identify, Explore, Connect, Apply:** Theological reflection is described in four movements: *Identify, Explore, Connect, Apply*. This pattern also underlies the *Read, Focus, Respond, Practice* pattern of the Reading and Reflection Guide.

**Interlude:** An interlude is a two-week session in which all participants in a group read and respond to a common text chosen in relation to the theme of the Reading and Reflection Guide. There are two interludes in each program year.

**Interlude Text:** The text assigned to an interlude session is called an interlude text or interlude book. Two interlude books are read each year. The books address special topics that reinforce the theme of the Reading and Reflection Guide for that program year.

**Participants:** Those enrolled in a seminar group are generally referred to as participants or group members.

**Program Year:** The approximately nine-month period (thirty-six sessions) during which the group seminar meets is its program year. An EfM group can begin its program year in any month *except June, July, or August*.

**Read, Focus, Respond, Practice:** The guide for each session follows the sequence of *Read* (assigned reading), *Focus* (questions or terms specific to the assigned reading), *Respond* (connects the reading to the unit theme), and *Practice* (suggested application for individual and/or group work). This sequence provides a four-fold discipline for the practice of ministry.

**Reading and Reflection Guides:** These guides outline what is needed for participants to prepare for each of the thirty-six seminar meetings in a program year, including individual reading assignments and suggested ways to focus, respond, and practice what is being learned. There are four volumes, A–D, used in a cycle. All groups use the same Reading and Reflection Guide volume in a program year.

**Readings in the Christian Tradition:** Textbooks provide participants with their weekly readings in the Christian tradition: the Hebrew Bible in Year One; the New Testament in Year Two; church history in Year Three; and theology, ethics, and interfaith encounters in Year Four.

**Theme:** Each volume of the Reading and Reflection Guide has a central theme that is carried through each of the units and interludes. Volume A's theme is ministry in your own particular context. Themes for the subsequent volumes are (B) ministry in an intercultural and interfaith context, (C) growth into spiritual maturity, and (D) the journey into a deepening relationship with God.

## The Seminar Schedule

There are thirty-six seminar weeks, weekly meetings of about two to three hours each. Groups meeting online may have shorter sessions, with some work shared online asynchronously. Each seminar meeting will include components of worship, community life, theological reflection, and reflective discussion of the participants' work prepared for that week. In the first few weeks, all participants prepare a spiritual autobiography and share a selected part of that with the group. Holiday breaks will be set as agreed in the group.

## Focus

You will receive the assigned texts appropriate to your year in the program as provided by the Education for Ministry program. Examine them briefly as they are distributed.

- **The Reading and Reflection Guide, Volume A, 2017–2018—“Living Faithfully in Your World.”**

The Guide supports EfM participants in preparing for their weekly seminar sessions. While it may not be possible to do everything assigned each week, giving priority to regularly completing as much of the work in the Guide as possible will enhance your formation for ministry through study and theological reflection.

- **Interlude books** bring additional voices into the study and support the theme of the year.

- *Fighting with the Bible: Why Scripture Divides Us and How It Can Bring Us Together* by Donn Morgan.
- *The Dream of God: A Call to Return* by Verna Dozier.

- **Texts for the assigned readings in the Christian tradition** provide a foundation in the study of the Bible and church history, and in the practice of viewing life experience and choices through a theological lens.  
Years One and Two will need a Bible for reading assignments, and all participants will benefit from bringing a Bible to the seminar for use during theological reflection. The most recent Oxford Annotated edition of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is recommended, but any translation may be used as long as it includes the Apocrypha. A Bible with study notes is helpful. Paraphrased Bibles are not recommended for study.
- **Year One:** *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. by John J. Collins.
- **Year Two:** *Introducing the New Testament* by Mark Allan Powell.
- **Year Three:** *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* by Diarmaid MacCulloch.
- **Year Four:** Four texts  
*Theology: A Very Short Introduction* by David Ford.  
*Mysteries of Faith* by Mark McIntosh.  
*The Christian Moral Life: Practices of Piety* by Timothy F. Sedgwick.  
*My Neighbor's Faith: Stories of Interreligious Encounter, Growth, and Transformation*, edited by Jennifer Howe Peace, Or N. Rose, and Gregory Mobley.

### Respond

Spend a few minutes as a group exploring the Reading and Reflection Guide. Note that there are two parts to the guide, the assignments for the weekly seminar meetings and a collection of supplemental resources. Note also that on pages xi–xiv in the front of the guide you will find an overview chart of all the reading assignments for the year and a list of hyperlinks for online resources.

Part I of the EfM Reading and Reflection Guide supports participants in learning at home *between* the weekly seminars, providing reading assignments as well as ways to focus and reflect on the week's study and prepare for the seminar. Mentors support participants *in* the weekly seminars by facilitating the group's conversation and reflection to draw on the participants' work from the Guide in a variety of ways. The work of the seminar group as a learning community is significantly enhanced when individual participants are faithful in doing the work assigned in the Guide.

Note that each of the six units in Part I begins with an essay that all year levels read together in place of a reading in the assigned textbooks. The Interlude sessions also are for the group together with all years reading the same text. In the remaining sessions each year level will have its own individual assignment for Read and Focus. The Respond and Practice assignments are for all year levels together.

- The **Read** section lists the reading assigned for the week. Most of the time each year level will have its own separate reading assigned. Other times, at the beginning of a unit and during the Interludes, the reading assigned will be for all years together.
- The **Focus** section is specific to each year level's reading assignment and may include terms to define, topics or names to note, or a question regarding that week's study in light of the themes of the year and the particular unit.
- The **Respond** section poses an idea that all participants can relate to from the perspective of their own individual study for the week. Respond may provide a vehicle for seminar discussion, encouraging the connecting of personal responses to those of others in the group in relation to the theme of the year or unit.
- The **Practice** section provides participants a suggested practical application in connecting learning to daily life, including practicing skills for ministry such as listening or theological reflection between group meetings. Mentors may choose to use an individual theological reflection model from the week's Practice as a starting point for group theological reflection, giving participants opportunity to experience how group reflection and personal reflection on the same topic may both differ and complement each other. Personal theological reflection can help us to go deeper in our theological understanding as it draws on the four sources from our individual perspectives. Theological reflection in a group also offers depth through insights from varied perspectives as participants share from their own life experiences and differing cultural and social contexts. Each way of reflecting is important in shaping a whole life attuned to listening for and responding to God's call to us.

Part II of the Guide contains resources to support the work of the year. Supplemental reading assignments are collected at the beginning of Part II. Also in Part II are sections that provide additional information about spiritual autobiographies, listening, theological reflection (including the basic structure of the four movements in the EfM method and examples of reflections beginning in each of the four sources), and resources to enhance an understanding of community life. The Respectful Communication Guidelines from the Kaleidoscope Institute are on the last page of Part II to make it easy to find them for regular use and review.

### Practice

If you have not already made introductions, you may want to do so now. What would you like to share briefly to help other group members begin to get to know you? The Kaleidoscope Institute's Mutual Invitation is recommended as a helpful process to use to make sure each person in the group is invited to share during these initial introductions as well as during check-in and times for group discussion through the year. A description of Mutual

Invitation is on page 318 in Part II. The process may feel awkward at first but will become easier as you practice. The extension of a gracious invitation can do much to encourage each person in the group to share with greater ease.

Begin to set community norms by reading aloud the Kaleidoscope Institute's Respectful Communication Guidelines on page 319 in Part II. Your mentor will facilitate the group in considering how these will form the foundation for your norms, as well as what you might need to add in order to help the group do its work as a learning community this year. You may want to review the norms you compose over several weeks before agreeing on a final set. Your group also may find it helpful to read the Respectful Communication Guidelines aloud at the beginning of each meeting, at least for the first several weeks of the year. Some groups do this every week to mark a safe space for sharing. You are encouraged to review your community norms periodically through the year to see if additions or changes need to be made. Everyone in the group should be willing to agree to abide by the norms you set together.

Finally, in the upcoming week prepare for your next meeting using the work assigned for Week Two. This will be the pattern for the year: Complete the assigned work in the week prior to the seminar meeting. Looking ahead will help you allow adequate time to complete the reflective work as well as sometimes long reading assignments, a practice that will enhance your learning and your experience in EfM this year.

## UNIT ONE

# Spiritual Autobiography and Listening





# Week Two

## ALL YEARS

### Read

## Faithful Living Is Contextual

A truism has grown up in recent times: “Context is everything.” Faithful living also is contextual, hence the title of this volume of the Reading and Reflection Guide: *Living Faithfully in Your World*. Your world is the particular context in which you are called to serve others.

Leadership consultant Tanmay Vora tells a story about a business consultant who found himself failing miserably in a particular company, even though he was extremely well educated about best practices in that industry.

It was clear that the consultant was loaded with content but did not do enough to understand the context of the problem—the culture, people, business model, root causes of problems and specific situations.

The boss explained, “Unless you put your lessons in a frame of reference, those lessons mean little. You can endlessly talk about your knowledge, but unless mapped to a context, it has no meaning. . . . Context is a powerful thing. It is a perspective you form based on a situation. A freedom fighter of one country may be considered a terrorist by the other. One man and two different ways to look at him based on the context he is in.”

He explained further, “*Your success as a consultant (and professional) is less about knowledge of best practices and more about your ability to map them to a specific business context. Context provides meaning to content. If you think of your knowledge content as water, context is the glass that holds it, gives it a shape; an identity.*”<sup>2</sup>

In much the same way, ministry must fit the context if it is to be effective. Education for Ministry asserts that knowledge of the Christian tradition acquired in study is not sufficient on its own, rather it is the application of that knowledge through practices of prayer and theological reflection in community that forms us as ministers called and equipped to serve in a particular place and time. Over the coming year you and the others in your seminar group will consider how the contexts in which you live and have lived shape your call to ministry, much as the glass shapes the water in the metaphor above and affects its use to a particular purpose.

To say that faithful living is contextual is not to say that the basic tenets of a particular faith are up for grabs, that anything goes, rather it is to acknowl-

2. <http://qaspire.com/2013/10/29/consulting-content-and-context-a-fable/>



edge that the expression of faith in daily living may owe as much to the experiences of a life lived over time (in EfM, the **Action** source)<sup>3</sup> as it does to the theological principles of a specific religion (the **Tradition** source). Further, a person's life is lived in a context of family and societal expectations (the **Culture** source). How a person responds to those expectations, examined or unexamined, shapes beliefs and values (the **Position** source) that in turn shape an understanding of ministry. The practice of theological reflection, which will be considered in more depth in Unit Two, allows us to bring into conversation these four sources of meaning that have shaped us and to look for rising implications for the shaping of our particular ministries going forward in the context of daily life. What is my understanding of ministry as a lay person? What are the needs around me? What inspires me? What gifts can I offer? What support will I need?

The particularities of lived experience shape how a person views the urgent questions of being human. Who are we and who am I? What is truth and how can I know it? What is real and endures? What is the end (*telos*) and purpose of my life? Answers to these basic human questions arise out of particular contexts. To live faithfully in today's world requires attention to how different contexts impact our understanding of God, self, others, and the world. A person of faith does not live in a vacuum but among multitudes of cultural and religious contexts.

Peter C. Hodgson, professor of theology at Vanderbilt University, writes of the challenge of living in today's world:

What is the new cultural situation that we face as North American Christians? It seems that it is not that of the "underside" of history, as is in the case with Latin American, African, and Asian theologies, but rather that of the "passage" of history—the passing of Western bourgeois culture, with its ideals of individuality, patriarchy, private rights, technical rationality, historical progress, capitalist economy, the absoluteness of Christianity, and so on. It *feels* as though we are reaching the end of a historical era since we find ourselves in the midst of cognitive, historical, political, socioeconomic, environmental, sexual/gender, and religious changes of vast importance, comparable perhaps to the great enlightenment that inaugurated the modern age.<sup>4</sup>

Obviously context is complicated. Contexts change. And one's life experiences and cultural and societal realities may differ significantly from another's. The ability to be compassionate and extend ourselves to others is enhanced when we are sensitive to the diverse contexts of the lives of others. Grappling with the reality of difference and developing sensitivity

3. In Unit Two you will begin to use the EfM four-source model for theological reflection. For now these sources (Action, Tradition, Culture, and Position) are just to be noted as being both shaped by and contributing to faithful living in context.

4. Peter Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit: A Constructive Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 53.

to differing contexts fosters a growing awareness of God’s activity in contexts not our own.

An EfM seminar, as a specific context, differs from an academic seminar. In a college context, a primary concern is understanding and mastery of content. The EfM program invites people into small, mentored learning communities that help us reflect on our lives and shape our actions as we deepen our Christian faith. In EfM the purpose of studying the Christian tradition is not to master every detail or demonstrate proficiency in a subject area, but to provide an overview of the Christian story from which to draw in theological reflection and to help us to be more articulate about the faith we profess. EfM is not a course for credentialing, but a program in which the seminar group becomes a place where members through conversation, prayer, and theological reflection mutually discover and exercise gifts for ministry among those with whom they live and work.

In putting our lives into conversation with the faith handed down, the contextual work for the year has two dimensions: the context of our individual lives and those we encounter in daily life, and the contexts of the people of God that we encounter in our study of the Christian tradition. Whether in the present in the midst of our own lives or in the narratives of the people of God in a text, listening to one another’s stories is the essence of communication and a foundational ministry skill.

Ministry begins in relationship, and relationships are formed as we begin to know one another. Sharing our stories is one side of this exchange of knowing; listening to one another is the other. As I share my story I “disclose” or open myself to the other. The boundaries between us soften and make me available to another’s need. As I listen to the other’s story attentively and with compassion I can become aware of points of commonality between us as well as become more appreciative of the differences between us. The give and take of sharing and listening over time deepen relationship and ministry. It also deepens our awareness of the impact of context on our own and others’ lives.

Living faithfully in a diverse, multi-contextual world presents challenges, all too often through conflict and violence. Despite assumptions we may have about others nearest to us, an EfM seminar group may well find a significant variety of viewpoints and life experiences at the table. Sharing with compassionate honesty, listening with empathy, and developing sensitivity to another’s worldview can encourage us to be open to God’s presence in our own lives and in the lives of our neighbors, whether they be in the group, in the local community, or across the country. An awareness of God’s presence can help us stay at the table and in the conversation, even when we find it a conversation that challenges our most cherished positions and beliefs. Thus the skills we are attentive to developing in ministry are important skills for daily life.

Resources and reflection questions in this Reading and Reflection Guide have been chosen with the intent of developing the ability to listen to many contexts—the reading assigned, the lives of others, seminar conversations, the

individual worlds which we inhabit, and to our inner selves. Listening opens the door to the other so that all may better participate in the service of others and of God.

### Spiritual Autobiography

At the beginning of every program year EfM participants reflect on and prepare spiritual autobiographies, then share a portion with their seminar groups. This is a foundational part of the work for the year and is not optional. Everyone, participant and mentor alike, participates in this exercise. Since reflecting on and sharing your own story and listening deeply to the stories of others are fundamental skills for the practice of ministry in daily life because ministry begins in relationship, the sharing of spiritual autobiographies provides the seminar group an opportunity to begin forming the learning community in which we will work and reflect together through the year.

The suggested format for framing an autobiography changes yearly, giving participants over the four years in EfM multiple spiritual lenses through which to consider their own lives. Why go through this each year? One reason that seems consistently true is that after completing my own account and hearing the autobiographical accounts of others, I become aware of additional pieces of my own story that I may not have recalled earlier. As life continues to unfold, year by year, day by day, my own story unfolds. My story this month is different from my story even six weeks or six months ago. Another reason is that choosing the slice of my larger story to offer as spiritual autobiography each year provides an avenue for reflecting on where my own experience encounters that shared by others in my seminar group, while simultaneously engaging with the greater story of the people of God encountered through EfM study and reflection.

A spiritual autobiography may contain both religious material—significant people or times within the religious community—and everyday material—people and times in your life that have influenced who you are now and how you understand God’s presence or absence in your life.

The work you do on your spiritual autobiography is private, “for your eyes only.” This allows you to be free, without concern about how others will interpret either the context or expression. Preparing a spiritual autobiography each year provides a way to deepen your understanding of Christian life and ministry. By virtue of your baptism you were called to ministry, guided and pushed by personal gifts, passions, skills, experiences, and interests.

Once you prepare your spiritual autobiography, you need to decide what you want to share with your seminar group. Martin Buber, twentieth-century philosopher and Jewish theologian, is reputed to have said that he could never hold a significant conversation with another person until he had heard the other’s life story. The purpose of sharing autobiographies is to build trust and understanding within the group and to begin to make connections within your own story. We need the experience of hearing other life

stories to know that we are not alone in God's world. By sharing appropriate stories of our lives we form learning communities that can challenge and support us throughout our lives.

Your mentor will relate her or his own story and help the group structure the time for sharing of autobiographies. Most groups give each member around ten minutes to tell his or her story, followed by time for the rest of the group to respond. Spiritual autobiographies are the focus of most of the seminar time for the first few meetings of the year. This is a special time for your group. This component of your group's life will carry you to the next phase of your year together. This may be the first time to tell your story in this way. It may seem a bit daunting at first. Remember that you should offer what you feel comfortable sharing in the group. This is not an opportunity for "group therapy" or psychologizing, so the group should not engage in raising questions about motives or probe for information beyond what you share. Feel free to say "no" or to say that you do not wish to explore questions that others may raise out of curiosity or concern.

Sharing your spiritual autobiography is a way to say, "Here I am," and to join your EfM group as a full participant. Over the years in EfM you will probably find that your spiritual autobiography changes. You may find yourself free to talk about things that were previously guarded. You also may find that your freedom to be yourself will grow as you discover ways in which your personal story, the life of the group, and the story of God's people relate to each other.

The format for this year's spiritual autobiography is given in the **Practice** section below.

## The Importance of Listening

Education occurs as a person reflects on experience and content. Listening initiates learning. Christian ministry begins and continues with deep listening—listening for God, listening to others, and listening to oneself. A learned ministry builds as a person "listens" to the Christian tradition and applies learning to daily living. Listening is central to both education and ministry.

Before proceeding much further, it is important to define terms. Robert Bolton in *People Skills* offers a distinction between hearing and listening.

It is helpful to note the distinction between hearing and listening. "Hearing," says Professor John Drakeford, "is a word used to describe the physiological sensory processes by which auditory sensations are received by the ears and transmitted to the brain. Listening, on the other hand, refers to a more complex psychological procedure involving interpreting and understanding the significance of the sensory experience."<sup>5</sup> In other words, I can hear what another person is saying without really listening to him. A teenager put it this way: "My friends listen to what I say, but my parents only hear me talk."

5. John Drakeford, *The Awesome Power of the Listening Ear* (Waco, TX: Word, 1967), 17.

I recall a time when I was talking with someone who seemed to ignore everything I said. “You are not listening to me!” I accused. “Oh, yes I am!” he said. He then repeated word for word what I had told him. He heard exactly. But he wasn’t listening. He didn’t understand the meanings I was trying to convey. Perhaps you have had a similar experience and know how frustrating it can be to be heard accurately by someone who isn’t listening with understanding.

The distinction between merely hearing and really listening is deeply embedded in our language. The word listen is derived from two Anglo-Saxon words. One word is *hlystan*, which means “hearing.” The other is *blosnian*, which means “to wait in suspense.” Listening, then, is the combination of hearing what the other person says and a suspenseful waiting, an intense psychological involvement with the other.<sup>6</sup>

“Listening is one of the greatest gifts we can give one another and a key component of a functioning group. Often we primarily focus on what we plan to say next rather than really listening to what others say.”<sup>7</sup>

One tool that enhances listening in the seminar group is to use Mutual Invitation, a process developed by the Kaleidoscope Institute.<sup>8</sup> With practice this tool can not only help us listen to another without mentally preparing what we will say next, an all-too frequent occurrence when taking turns speaking in order around a circle, but will also help us become more aware of who has shared and who has not. Mutual Invitation can be helpful when used in a group where some voices tend to dominate while others are more reticent about when to enter into the conversation. It is described on page 318 in Part II of this Guide. EfM recommends that your group practice Mutual Invitation regularly. It is particularly appropriate for check-in and reflection on the readings in a seminar group.



### Focus

Note some of the contexts in which you have lived different portions of your life. Describe briefly your current context and ways in which it affects your ministry or your understanding of ministry in general.

### Respond

Skillful listening involves gestures, attitudes, and attention. Effective listening builds from a few basic, common-sense approaches, which emerge from the desire to respect the dignity of others.

6. Robert Bolton, *People Skills: How to Assert Yourself, Listen to Others, and Resolve Conflicts* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 31–32.

7. “Listening Skills” from *Common Lessons and Supporting Materials* (Sewanee, TN: University of the South, 1998, 2002), 6-8-1.

8. <http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/>

Make eye contact without staring.

To really hear another person, listen for several things:

- What the person describes (what facts, events, situations, or information the person is trying to convey);
- How the person feels (what emotions accompany the information);
- Where the person places emphasis and shows energy;
- What the person's body is saying (sometimes one is unaware of the mixture of reactions and important information the body gives).<sup>9</sup>

Any skill builds from the desire to acquire it and then practice, practice, and practice some more. Use the time from week to week to continually practice until listening becomes habitual.

Think of several contexts in your daily life where you might begin to build better relationships through attentive listening. How will you begin?

### Practice

Begin to prepare your spiritual autobiography

Preparing a spiritual autobiography is a soil-turning event. The preparatory phase is done by and for the participant alone, but awareness that a piece will be shared can be intimidating. Often, the preparing of a spiritual autobiography for EfM is the first time someone has made such an attempt. Many people are uneasy or reluctant about this for a variety of reasons. There are a few things to keep in mind as you prepare:

- The full preparation of your spiritual autobiography is for your own personal growth and reflection. You will not be sharing your entire spiritual autobiography in the seminar group. The year's assigned format will suggest a focus so you can choose what to share and what to withhold as you present only a part of your story in your group.
- Your group likely included a standard of confidentiality in the group's norms, the covenant agreed upon in the first week or so. Even if the group did not specifically address confidentiality in general, confidentiality is required and should be explicitly agreed to during the time for presenting spiritual autobiographies. What each person tells of a *personal* nature during the EfM seminar may not be shared beyond that room or among those gathered. No one may recount anything they heard of another's story, including to someone in the group who may have been absent at the time. Any account of another person's story is by definition inauthentic. You may share your own story with someone who was absent; no other member of the group may share your particular story.
- The mentor and group together will support one another in holy listening and sharing. We are on holy ground when we hear another's story. The story offered is a sacred gift.

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9. Ibid.



## Your Spiritual Autobiography

**Background:** Experience begins from the moment of birth and continues to the present moment. “Raw” experience is neutral and insignificant until a person interprets the experience and gives it meaning. Each person grows up living within multiple worlds. There is the world of the family, the intellect (mind), the physical world of the body through which we know the physical universe. There is the experience of living within an economic world; that is, the way in which someone gets required resources. The world of play also is part of experience. Each of these worlds constitutes a context in which a person creates or discovers identity and meaning.

In EfM, participants are invited to construct a spiritual autobiography according to methods that change each year. This year, the method grows out of the formation theme of Volume A: “Living Faithfully in Our World.”

**Recollection and Reflection:** Living and growing as a person means living among several worlds or contexts. Recall “worlds” or contexts in which you have lived: intellect, family, religion, play, body. You may be able to think of some others.

- Who are the people of importance to your story in that world?
- What concerns or questions were central to the different worlds in which you live?
- What events do you remember?
- What stands out for you as you remember moving through different stages of your life?

After bringing together memories of those times and contexts, notice any sense of who you have been and who you are. These worlds or contexts and your recollection of the experiences shape your autobiography. In EfM our interest is in fashioning a *spiritual* autobiography that reflects the answers to theological concerns about the presence or absence of God, or the experience of grace, forgiveness, repentance, or questions about evil or life after death, among other concerns.

**Preparation:** After working to recall people and circumstances of your entire life in these various contexts, focus on any five to ten years: How was/is your faith impacted by your various contexts or worlds during that period? How has your faith sustained you through the selected period? When was your faith challenged? When or how did you experience the presence of God? What would you consider grace in various periods of your life?

**At the Seminar:** Each person will be scheduled a time, ideally in the next three or four weeks, to offer what was prepared from his or her spiritual autobiography.

### Scheduling Spiritual Autobiographies

The seminar group sets the schedule for sharing spiritual autobiographies. It is most important to share them as early in the program year as possible and to share them in a way so that all of the group can hear each spiritual autobiography shared. Many groups schedule a time to hear one to three spiritual autobiographies each week over several weeks, depending on the number in your group. Others have found, given the busy schedules of adults, that it is difficult to have all members present for every spiritual autobiography every week and have developed alternate ways for making sure all spiritual autobiographies are heard. Some gather for a retreat-like meeting where all the spiritual autobiographies are shared in a single day, often on a weekend. Some break the spiritual autobiography format into a series so that each week every person in the group responds briefly to the same prompt or question. Your mentor may have learned about other ways to schedule.

### Alternate Format for Sharing Spiritual Autobiographies

Everyone in the group does the work assigned in “Your Spiritual Autobiography” above. The difference is in how the spiritual autobiographies are shared in the seminar meetings.

Use Mutual Invitation (see page 318 in Part II of the *Guide*) and allow a brief silence before inviting the next person to share. Each participant answers the framing question or prompt in two to three minutes. There is no cross talk. After everyone has had a turn, the mentor leads the whole group in a closing prayer of thanksgiving for the gifts shared.

The following is an example of how framing questions or prompts drawn from the assignment can guide the sharing over five meetings. Your group may want to compose their own questions.

- Week One: Share a story about how your faith was impacted by one of your contexts in the period on which you are focusing.
- Week Two: Share a story about how your faith sustained you in one of your contexts in the period on which you are focusing.
- Week Three: Share a story about how your faith was challenged in one of your contexts in the period on which you are focusing.
- Week Four: Share a story about an experience of the presence of God in one of your contexts in the period on which you are focusing.
- Week Five: Share a story about grace in one of your contexts in the period on which you are focusing.



# Week Three

## A Reminder about Online Resources

As you begin the readings in the Christian tradition, remember that all EfM participants have subscriber's access to the Oxford Biblical Studies Internet site. This resource has articles, maps, timelines, a variety of biblical translations, articles on biblical interpretation, illustrations, and numerous other items. The *New Oxford Annotated Bible (NRSV)* can be accessed on the site.

[oxfordbiblicalstudies.com](http://oxfordbiblicalstudies.com)

The login ID is **efm-sewanee** and the password is **ministry**.

There also are resources online that correspond to the Collins and Powell texts, as well as an EfM study guide for the MacCulloch text.<sup>10</sup>

### Collins:

<http://www.augsburgfortress.org/education/academic/introductiontothehebrewbible/>

### Powell:

<http://bakerpublishinggroup.com/books/introducing-the-new-testament/264690/esources>

### MacCulloch:

[http://efm.sewanee.edu/assets/uploads/MacCulloch\\_Study\\_Guide-Babb.pdf](http://efm.sewanee.edu/assets/uploads/MacCulloch_Study_Guide-Babb.pdf)

Links to additional resources will be posted on the EfM website **Resources** page on occasion:

[efm.sewanee.edu/resources/resources](http://efm.sewanee.edu/resources/resources)

## About Reading Theological Works

Reading theological books may be a new experience for some participants. Most of us are accustomed to reading in our daily lives specifically for information and in small pieces, and more and more many of us read only from sources—especially in social media—that are curated for a narrow viewpoint. A theological text is meant to be part of a conversation. There is no need to accept the author's every assertion as gospel, nor to throw the book at the

10. These and other hyperlinks in this volume were operational at the time of printing. If you find the link does not work, try searching for the author or title to find an updated link.

wall simply because it challenges your viewpoint. Engage with the author. Be open to what you might learn and how you might be stretched by a different perspective. Write in your book (gasp!), make notes, come back over and over to see if you are able to find another way into what the author is sharing. And, finally, reflect, reflect, reflect. How can you put these words into conversation with your life and your theology?

You may find this blog post from Kwok Pui Lan helpful:

<http://kwokpuilan.blogspot.com/2011/02/how-to-read-theological-book.html>

And as Kwok frequently reminds her students: A hermeneutic of suspicion is needed, but it should be balanced by a hermeneutic of compassion. An ancient author, and even one from more recent centuries, is writing to a particular audience, one that may not share your worldview or use your vocabulary. Nonetheless, an author from the long tradition of Christian witness can speak to us across the centuries with insights for faithful living today.

### About the Reading Assignments

In various weeks throughout the year there may be long reading assignments in the Reading and Reflection Guide as well as in your textbooks. The practice of looking ahead can help you plan time to comfortably complete each assignment.

In particular for Year One, in order to provide opportunity to read a substantial portion of the Hebrew scriptures, reading assignments will sometimes be long, although it is not always necessary to read closely. Please think about what you need to do in order to provide enough time for your preparation. For example, if you have a long commute each day or if you are someone who enjoys audiobooks, you might consider listening to an audio version of the biblical passages assigned.

Year Three readers might consider purchasing *Christianity* in audiobook format, available through Audible.com. Also, a six-part video miniseries from the BBC features MacCulloch speaking on key themes from the book (although it does not track exactly with the chapters). Your local or diocesan library may have the set on DVD. Many Year Three participants have found the series helpful to their understanding of the sweep of church history.

## YEAR ONE

**Read**

Collins, Preface, Introduction, Chapter 1, “The Near Eastern Context,” and Chapter 2, “The Nature of the Pentateuchal Narrative”

**Focus**

Terms and names to note: anthropomorphic; Torah; Pentateuch; Julius Wellhausen; Hermann Gunkel; Rolf Rendtorff; Gerhard von Rad; Erhard Blum; sources in the Hebrew scripture; e.g., documentary hypothesis; J, E, P, and D sources.

“Critical” does not mean debunking scripture, and it does not mean proving its truth. Religious people should and will find truth in their scriptures, but they may also be interested to learn something about where their scripture came from, who wrote it, and how editors collected it for them to read. For that only a historical-critical inquiry will do the job.<sup>11</sup>

## YEAR TWO

**Read**

Powell, Preface, Chapter 1, “The New Testament World,” and Chapter 2, “The New Testament Writings”

**Focus**

Terms and names to note: testament; apostolic; catholic; seven categories of New Testament writings; Justin Martyr’s account of Christian worship; canon; stages in the transmission of the Gospel Tradition; Marcion; exegesis; hermeneutics

In the chapter section “Exegesis and Hermeneutics” Powell states, “All the exegetical methods and academic disciplines described above are used by people who operate with different hermeneutical assumptions and interests. The methods themselves are simply tools that are employed for very different purposes by people with different attitudes and goals.”<sup>12</sup>

When reading the New Testament or reading how someone else interprets a passage, it is best (if not essential) to know the purpose in reading the text or the commentary.

Name three methods of exegesis.

What kind of landscape (context) does the “New Testament world” reveal?

11. <http://www.wfu.edu/~horton/r102/hc-method.html>.

12. Mark Powell, *Introducing the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 60.

## YEAR THREE

**Read**

MacCulloch, Acknowledgements, Introduction, Chapter 1, “Greece and Rome”

**Focus**

Terms and names to note: Christians of the Middle East; Latin-speaking Church; Orthodoxy; repentance and conversion; Bible as central text of Christianity; “[b]ooks are the storehouses for human ideas”; historical truth; conventions used throughout MacCulloch’s book; Logos; Hellas; polis; *ekklesia*; Plato’s influence on Christianity; Hellenistic Greece; *res publica* (republic); Roman Republic; imperial monarchy

The Greek understanding of *polis* provides a way to flesh out a fuller understanding of living within a social and intellectual context [cf. pages 25, 26]. It involves knowing the collective consciousness that greatly influences a person’s identity. The *polis* greatly shapes how one behaves, thinks, and lives. Note as you read how the Greek and Roman cultural contexts shape Christianity.

Until recently, Christian history has traced the movement from Jerusalem, through the Roman Empire, and on to Europe, steadily moving westward to the New World. Such a focus of history is no longer practical.

MacCulloch’s book has been chosen for Year Three study precisely because of his taking a more global approach. He presents Christian history by following three paths: the movement west from Jerusalem that became the Western-Latin expression of Christianity; the path into the Middle East and Far East; and the Eastern Orthodoxies of Byzantium empires.

What is gained or lost in such an approach?

## YEAR FOUR

**Read**

Ballard, “On Being Theologically Literate” on pages 190–198 in Part II of this Reading and Reflection Guide; and Ford, Chapter 1, “Introduction: theology and the religions in transformation”

**Focus**

What role does theological literacy play in your faith life at this time?

How is the work of theology related to a life of “multiple overwhelms”?

Over the next several weeks, you will be reading two different texts and an essay on the work of doing theology. David Ford’s *Theology: A Very Short Introduction*, begun this week, examines the basic questions that arise when thinking about God and centers an understanding of God in worship. Sarah

Coakley's essay, "God as Trinity: An Approach Through Prayer," proposes that we can best experience the wholeness of the triune God in personal and corporate prayer. Mark McIntosh's *Mysteries of Faith* explores Christian doctrines using a central image of relationship. These works are very different from one another, yet each in its way offers a practical approach, a way of examining and constructing our own theologies centered in practice. As you read, notice how each author handles core theological concepts, such as the nature of God, the divine/human nature of Jesus Christ, the Trinity, the question of evil, the relationship of creation to creator, and other theological questions that may occur in the course of doing your own work in theology. It may help to keep a journal in which you can consider these questions over the weeks spent on these texts.

- What does each author contribute to your work and identity as a theologian?
- What concerns do you have about assertions made by any of these theologians?
- What surprises you?
- What new understandings are forming?
- What are points of congruence and divergence between your theology and those presented in these texts?



## ALL YEARS

### Respond

What purposes, attitudes, and assumptions do you bring to your reading and study of the Christian tradition?

How have your attitudes and assumptions been fashioned by the various life contexts (worlds) identified in your spiritual autobiography work?

How have those attitudes and assumptions affected your reading of the Christian tradition?

Use the notes or highlights you made during your assigned reading this week to reflect on the key contexts (concerns, interests, and issues) faced by the men and women of faith. What are some concerns for those who would have their lives reflect their faith?

### **Practice**

Describe what feeling “at home” means to you.

Knowing oneself includes an increasing awareness of the worlds in which each of us has lived or currently lives. In EfM a primary strategy for self-awareness is through the use of spiritual autobiographies. Review the information in Week Two regarding spiritual autobiographies as you are constructing your spiritual autobiography. Over the next few weeks, you will have opportunities to talk about your reflections on portions of your spiritual autobiography.

For the next few weeks the seminar will center on reflecting on your reading and reflecting on spiritual autobiographies.

When you share your autobiographical reflections, what do you need to do to communicate your thoughts? When you listen to others, what do you need to do to listen well?

# Week Four

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Genesis 1–11  
Collins, Chapter 3, “The Primeval History”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: primeval; two creation stories; ‘adam, Atrahsis myth; Epic of Gilgamesh; Sons of God (Genesis 6); Enuma Elish

Stories delight and entertain. They come in various forms and styles. Myths, epics, legends, novellas, and fables each tell some tale that entertains as they instill values, guidance, and meaning. Often the values live implicitly within the hearers of the stories only to surface in moments of crisis that call for decisive action. Some myths come into being to explain why things are as they are; others prescribe “right” behavior; while others venture into offering explanations along with establishing meaning.

All people, to some degree or another, seek answers to fundamental questions. What is truth and can I know it? What endures? What is real? Is there purpose to my life? Where did we come from and where are we going? Stories in all their forms, one way or another, offer answers to basic concerns.

What family stories or personal experiences have contributed to your sense of purpose?

## YEARTWO

### Read

Powell, Chapter 3, “Jesus,” and Chapter 4, “The Gospels”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: gospel as a literary genre; parables; miracle stories; pronouncement stories; passion and resurrection narratives; sayings of Jesus; the synoptic puzzle (aka problem); the Q source; Griesbach hypothesis; Diatessaron; two doctrines of Jesus; kingdom of God; themes in Jesus’ teaching; the historical Jesus

What questions are arising for you as you enter this year’s work with the Christian scriptures?

## YEAR THREE

**Read**

MacCulloch, Chapter 2, “Israel”

**Focus**

Terms and names to note: Maccabees; Tanakh; Apocrypha; the first and second exiles; Samaritans; the first and second temple; Septuagint; Hellenized Jews; creation out of nothingness; development of the notion of afterlife and individual soul; Hasmonean dynasty; Sadducees; Pharisees; Essenes; Zealots

Chapter 2 concludes Part I, “A Millennium of Beginnings,” in which MacCulloch traces the social and intellectual “seeds” of Christianity. The two histories (Greco-Roman and Israel) continually influence Christian life and thought.

Near the bottom of page 50 MacCulloch writes, “Even through their hardest and most wretched experiences of fighting with those they love most deeply, [Israel is] being given some glimpse of how they relate to God.” MacCulloch connects this struggle with Jacob’s formational struggle with the angel of the Lord, with God, at the River Jabok. This way of drawing meaning from experience allowed Israel to view history through the eyes of faith. History became the arena in which they could see God at work, bringing them into being as a people bound to God. Some might consider this a rewriting of history, merely a means of self-justification. There is plenty of room for that view. However, this is also a way of interpreting history, of seeing God at work in the life and experience of an individual and a group; this is salvation history—history that tells the story of God’s work of redemption.

## YEAR FOUR

**Read**

Ford, Chapter 2, “Theology and religious studies: how is the field shaped?”

**Focus**

Terms and names to note: four elements of wise and creative theology; *ressourcement*; *aggiornamento*; “confessional” theology; “neutral” religious studies; Frei’s five types of theology; Vatican II; Hans Frei; Rudolph Bultmann; Paul Tillich; Karl Rahner

Where do you place your own theology in relation to Frei’s types?





**ALL YEARS****Respond**

Trust, confidence, and faith often mean the same thing. What issues of trust have been present in your life?

In your assigned reading this week, what issues of trust do you find?

What implication does trust have in your daily life?

**Practice****LISTENING SKILLS*****Effective Listening Takes Practice***

Listening is one of the greatest gifts we can give one another, a key component of individual ministry and of community building in a well-functioning seminar group. A few tips can help you become a better listener and help the person you are listening to feel “heard.”

1. Be attentive to the speaker. Make eye contact without staring at the other person; this can take some practice. Also, be aware that some cultures find sustained eye contact uncomfortable. Find a way to make it clear the speaker has your undivided attention.
2. When you listen to another, notice four things:
  - What the person describes (what facts, events, situations, or information the person is trying to convey);
  - How the person feels (what emotions accompany the information);
  - Where the person places emphasis and shows energy; and
  - What the person’s body is saying (be aware of the mixture of reactions and important information the body can give).
3. Be sure to focus on what the speaker is saying and not on what you plan to say next. EfM uses two tools from the Kaleidoscope Institute (provided at the end of Part II of this Reading and Reflection Guide on pages 318–319). Mutual Invitation and the Respectful Communications Guidelines have been designed to help us be better listeners and communicators. Mutual Invitation, in particular, can help keep us from planning what to say next since we do not know when our “next” will be.

***Ways to Not Listen***

Sometimes we may be unaware that we are behaving in ways that signal to others that we are not listening to them. Notice when you find yourself on the giving or receiving end of these behaviors that can reduce participation, detract from group cohesiveness, and contribute to conflict in your seminar group, as well as detract from person-to-person engagement and limit relationship development in your ministry.

1. **Passive listening:** not concentrating on what the person is saying.
2. **Happy hooking:** constantly changing the subject to center the conversation on you and not on the speaker. Many times people become very competitive and try to devise a topic that is similar but more exciting than the speaker's.
3. **Mind reading:** completing the other person's sentences, acting as if you understand what they are saying, giving advice before you have heard them through.
4. **Inappropriate body language:** jiggling your foot, clicking a pen, staring at the person, touching them without being sensitive to whether they want to be touched, saying you are interested while showing the opposite with your body, showing aggression and impatience with your body while saying you are concerned.

Sidetracking a conversation is another way to not listen.

1. **Answering emotions with logic:** When someone is excited about something, he or she does not want the first response to be a critical analysis. The speaker wants the other person to share some of his or her excitement.
2. **Bringing in old issues:** When people want to discuss a problem, they do not want to be told that they always have similar problems or that they failed to do something about the problem three months ago.
3. **Using sarcasm or cynicism,** or not taking the other person's issues seriously.

### ***Practice to Improve Listening Skills***

During the week, find opportunities to do each of these at least once:

1. Carefully listen to something that someone tells you: a coworker, family member, neighbor, store employee, someone you encounter in your daily routine. As soon as possible after the listening opportunity has ended, write about the experience, including the following:
  - a. A synopsis of the sharing;
  - b. What you heard regarding the speaker's feelings about what was shared;
  - c. Words, images, and metaphors that you noticed;
  - d. What you thought the speaker was saying with his or her body.

2. When someone has listened to you in a way that caused you to feel really “heard,” thank the listener and express the following:
  - a. How the listener asked questions that encouraged your sharing;
  - b. How the listener’s body posture encouraged your sharing;
  - c. What other responses helped you feel understood and helped you clarify what you were saying.

What would you like to share in your seminar about your experience with these exercises?

What image conveys your sense of how it feels to really listen?

What image conveys your sense of how it feels for someone to really listen to you?

How might listening be a holy act? What is the relationship between listening and ministry?

# Week Five

## YEAR ONE

### Read

“The Priestly Creation Story” essay provided in Part II, pages 199–216

### Focus

Terms and names to note: covenant; Baals; cult; Sabbath; ex nihilo; Zoroastrianism; Manichaeism; dualism; Plato; Neo-Platonic; via negativa

“The Priestly Creation Story,” an excerpt from an earlier version of the Education for Ministry curriculum, is a theological reading. Consisting of only ten verses in Genesis, this passage poetically presents a full doctrine of creation. It also offers a doctrine of God. The story shows God as wholly Other yet present to creation. God transcends all that is, thereby providing a corrective to all forms of dualism. Many theological difficulties get untangled by the implications in the story.

The Priestly creation story is a mature statement of Israel’s belief about God and the relationship of all that exists to God. Describe the development of your personal view of the relationship between God and creation, that is, between God and all that is not God.

Reflect on what it means to be a created being and on what it means to be created in the image of God.

## YEARTWO

### Read

The Gospel according to Matthew

Try to set aside enough time to read this gospel in one or two sittings.

### Focus

Note any terms or references that you had to look up.

The Gospel writers tell the story of the Good News of God in Christ. The Gospel in its entirety communicates the story. However, seldom do people hear the entire story, rather they experience the scripture verse by verse or in short pieces they hear within worship. Such reading is like watching a trailer of a film and believing you have seen the movie. Individual scenes make little or no sense without the context of the whole story. So too it is

important to know the entire Gospel, allowing you to experience its drama. Once you have a sense of Matthew's story, you are positioned better to interpret individual scenes, teachings, and events. Notice any new insights emerging about stories from this Gospel that you may have heard many times before.

### YEAR THREE

#### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 3, "A Crucified Messiah"

#### Focus

Terms and names to note: cluster of words (*evaggelion*, *evangelium*, Gospel); Julius Africanus; *epiousios*; parables; *abba*; *Kyrios*—"Jesus is Lord, the word for God"; Paul of Tarsus; *epistole*; Paul's use of the word "church"; Johannine Christ; Jewish revolt and fall of Jerusalem

Change in the eastern region of the Roman Empire eventually upset the Roman Empire's social order. The history of Christianity began with seemingly insignificant events. How did the importance of those events become clear through the lenses of experience and hindsight? What does this suggest for our own view of history?

### YEAR FOUR

#### Read

Ford, Chapter 3, "Thinking of God"

#### Focus

Terms and names to note: "real"; omnipresence; omniscience; the "divine"; Trinity; the God worshipped by Christians; being "multilingual" in faith

In your experience, how is God known?

Ford defines the divine as "what is worshipped." How is this a helpful (or not helpful) definition for you?

The Trinity is a core doctrine in Christianity. How do you understand the Triune God? What are your questions about and/or challenges with this doctrine?



## ALL YEARS

### Respond

How have debates between authority and revelation affected your personal context? Think more broadly than within faith communities.

How has your life experience helped you make decisions in matters of authority, whether related to the church or to politics or to culture (e.g., family, community, or nation)?

What changes in the social order have affected life where you live and work? What is your story (i.e., how you talk) about those changes?

### Practice

Change disrupts continuity. New ways of speaking and even newer ways of behaving may create unrest. Yet without continuity change evaporates into nothingness. Society's reordering of itself after chaotic change provides the stuff of history.

Find evidence in news stories or other circumstances of changes that are challenging continuity in your local context as well as in greater contexts. Practice listening for the voices on both sides of such a challenge—those embracing change and those advocating “holding true” to what has been. What do you discover when you listen for those voices?

What opportunities for ministry are there in the midst of such challenges?

# Week Six

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Genesis 12–50  
Collins, Chapter 4, “The Patriarchs”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: the Patriarchs; Abraham; Sarah; Isaac; Rebecca; Jacob; Rachel; Leah; Benjamin; Joseph; Miriam; pharaoh at time of Joseph; Jethro; Horeb; Legends—etiological, ethnological, etymological, and ceremonial; Hermon Gunkel; *Sitz im Leben*; *bris*; Abraham Cycle; Jacob Cycle; Joseph Story

Why do we recommend you read the Bible assignment before reading the Collins text? Collins’s *Shorter Introduction* is a secondary text commenting on the primary text, the Bible itself. Reading the Bible first provides a base for understanding what scholars and others say about the primary text. Robert Denton, professor of the Old Testament at General Theological Seminary, with a smile often reminded his students that they would be amazed by how much the primary text could illuminate the commentary. Each person has unique experiences that shape how scripture is interpreted. While the work of biblical scholars is enormously valuable, only you can bring your distinctive experience to the learning process. Your experience with the text then can be brought into dialogue with what scholars have written. It is in that dialogue that deeper learning occurs.

What light does Collins shed on your own reading of the Genesis assignment?

What sources do the “authors” of the stories of the patriarchs use to explain meaning?

Notice what sources Collins uses in this chapter. Examples of such sources include academic disciplines, biblical references, personal experience, or beliefs or conclusions that he asserts.

## YEAR TWO

**Read**

Powell, Chapter 5, “Matthew”

**Focus**

Terms and names to note: five speeches of Jesus; Beatitudes; binding and loosing of the law; *oligopistoi*; Eusebius; Ecclesiastical History

## YEAR THREE

**Read**

MacCulloch, Chapter 4, “Boundaries Defined”

References to primary sources are sprinkled throughout the chapter. Try to find two or three primary sources to read, even if only a portion of the work. Henry Bettenson’s *Documents of the Christian Church* includes many primary sources from the early Christian tradition.<sup>13</sup> Used and new copies of this book in several editions are available to purchase and through some libraries. Online, the Christian Classics Ethereal Library at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org) includes numerous documents of the early church in its collection. For example, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, Commonly Called the Didache*.<sup>14</sup>

**Focus**

Terms and names to note: *Hermas (The Shepherd)* and the *Didache* online or in Bettenson (if you have access to that book) or elsewhere and read what you can or want; Letter to Philemon; *Didache*; gnosis, Gnosticism, Nag Hammadi; Docetism; key points of difference between gnostic and Jewish attitudes; Marcion; Diatessaron; *presbyteroi*; *diakonos*; *episkopoi*; the importance of Antioch and Jerusalem in the early church; Clement; Ignatius; Victor; Stephen of Rome

## YEAR FOUR

**Read**

Ford, Chapter 4, “Living before God: worship and ethics”

13. Henry Bettenson’s *Documents of the Christian Church* has been published in four editions by Oxford University Press. Any edition will give you a taste of these early documents.

14. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.viii.i.html> Note: This and all links provided in the Reading and Reflection Guides were active and working at the time of printing. Sometimes links are changed for various reasons. If this one does not work, try searching for “Didache” in your browser search engine or on the Christian Classics Ethereal Library main page: <http://www.ccel.org>



**Focus**

Terms and names to note: religious and non-religious forms of worship; five basic forms of prayer; idolatry; ethics; the shaping of desire; theological anthropology; Dietrich Bonhoeffer

How do you define God? In what ways are your ethics shaped by your concept of the Trinity?

**ALL YEARS****Respond**

Faith is a complex matter; like any form of life, it consists of beliefs, actions, attitudes, and patterns of behavior that are often hard to identify, much less distinguish from one another and then define. Thus, at times we may not know what it is we believe theologically or why we undertake the specific faith-practices that we do, but we nonetheless do them over and over again just as we are constantly re-enacting particular theological habits of thought in the course of our daily lives. Furthermore, our religious beliefs can almost never be separated from other beliefs, actions, and attitudes that we hold and that also shape us, such as our culturally constructed beliefs about what it means to be a woman or a citizen or a student of theology.<sup>15</sup>

What does living faithfully mean to you?

How have reading, reflecting, and listening expanded your understanding of what is involved in living faithfully?

Autobiography: Who are the people in your life of whom you could say, “That person is an example of living faithfully”?

**Practice**

Write the qualities or characteristics of living faithfully.

Listening requires attentiveness, which also requires silence. Practice attentive listening this week. Notice what it takes for you to be silent and really listen to someone else. Notice what you have to do in order to achieve that state of attentive listening. What is difficult about listening attentively?

15. Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland, eds., *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classic Themes* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 11. A project of The Workgroup on Constructive Christian Theology.

# Week Seven

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Exodus 1–15  
Collins, Chapter 5, “The Exodus from Egypt”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: Manetho; Hyksos; Hecataeus; Ramesses II; Habiru; *YamSup*; Passover; “charter myth”; history; legend; folklore; founding myth; YHWH; Adonai (Lord); *HaShem*; *’ehyeh ’aser* (I AM WHO I AM); *’ehyeh*; *eimi ho on* (I am the one who is); absolute Being; YHWH is on the side of the weak; “salvation history”

Name the images/metaphors for God that the writer of Exodus uses to tell the story of God’s action of liberation for the children of Israel. Select two or three of the images for God and explore the qualities of God the image reveals.

## YEAR TWO

### Read

The Gospel according to Mark  
Powell, Chapter 6, “Mark”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: John Mark; intercalation; major themes in Mark; messianic secret; inclusio

Every discussion, written or spoken, draws on material to form the presentation. The content (images, story, ideas) comes from different sources, which may be other writings, personal experiences, or beliefs held. Notice the different sources that Powell uses throughout his chapter on Mark.

## YEAR THREE

### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 5, “The Prince: Ally or Enemy”

**Focus**

Terms and names to note and become familiar with pronunciation: parousia; Apostolic Tradition; Celus; in catacumbas; Origen; Plotinus; Mani; Manichee/Manichaeism; Diocletian; Syriac Church; Osrhoene; Dura Europos; Armenia; Ephraim; Odes of Solomon; Trdat (Tiridates)

Christianity not only survived but grew under the wave of persecutions from 100 to 300 CE. People willing to suffer and die for what they believe wield powerful inspiration. When religious conviction is stronger than the fear of pain and death, it is as if the persecutor's sword sharpens one's beliefs into passionate convictions. Clarity comes as a person discovers relationships that matter more than death. The witness born from martyrdom has transformative power for both believers and non-believers.

What might stories of martyrs contribute to an understanding of what it means to live faithfully?

**YEAR FOUR****Read**

Ford, Chapter 5, "Facing Evil"

**Focus**

Terms and names to note: personal, structural, and natural evil; theodicy; the double mystery of evil and goodness; metanarrative; Anselm of Canterbury; Bonaventure; Augustine

What experience have you had or heard about that supports a belief that God can bring good out of evil? In what way can evil be seen as a form of idolatry?

**ALL YEARS****Respond**

From time to time, a person needs to stop and take stock of what has been done and what is being learned. Conversations about important matters can bring fresh awareness and allow seeing the new within the ordinary. Insights can bring a renewed energy and vitality to the creation of meaning.

Understanding that comes from seeing anew the dynamics in daily life may open the door for a person to see how her or his life is being lived. Then, a decision can be made about whether to continue living in that manner or to make different and possibly better decisions.

Review the thoughts and feelings that you have had over the previous several weeks. As you sift these recent experiences, consider what you have learned from listening to yourself and to others within the seminar. What difference does what you have learned make to how you live your life?

**Practice**

Choose a place that works well for you to focus and be still. Set a timer for fifteen minutes and allow yourself to be present to your self, your environment, and to the presence of God. Just be still. Allow images and thoughts and sounds and sensations to come, not trying to ignore them or push them away. Just be.

After fifteen minutes, write briefly about all that you were aware of during this time of listening and presence.

What prayer would you like to offer in response to this time?

## UNIT TWO

# Theological Reflection as a Life Skill



# Week Eight

## ALL YEARS

### Read

## Theological Reflection Is a Life Skill

*Two people sitting at a table over coffee engage energetically in conversation. Clearly, even from a distance, what they are saying to one another matters. Moving closer we can begin to hear something of what concerns them. Some relationship of one kind or another seemingly occupies their minds. While we cannot make out exactly what they are talking about, the two people say enough to have us realize that one of them has recently undergone some experience that left them with the desire to make sense of the experience. Together they struggle to find meaning in what happened. Only partial phrases can be overheard: “I read about this recently on the Internet,” one says. “That reminds me of something I read in the Bible recently,” the other adds. Near the end of the conversation they both can be heard saying, “I can’t believe that, but I can believe this!”*

That scene, or one like it, occurs throughout the world and all languages. The desire to create meaning out of experience is universal. From one generation to another people need to find answers to important questions or at least simply to understand better their experience. As a person matures, the issues change but the desire to know and understand remains. We are meaning-seeking beings who hope to find wisdom that guides us.

Theological reflection is a life skill used to create meaning, in fact, to discover ultimate meaning. What makes reflection theological is not a specialized vocabulary, but the relentless, restless urge to experience wholeness which brings a person to the Holy. The word “holy” in English stems from the Old English word *haleg*, which means whole.

Education for Ministry makes a bold claim: Each of us is a theologian. It is not an option. The question is not whether or not we reflect theologically. The question is how proficient we are.

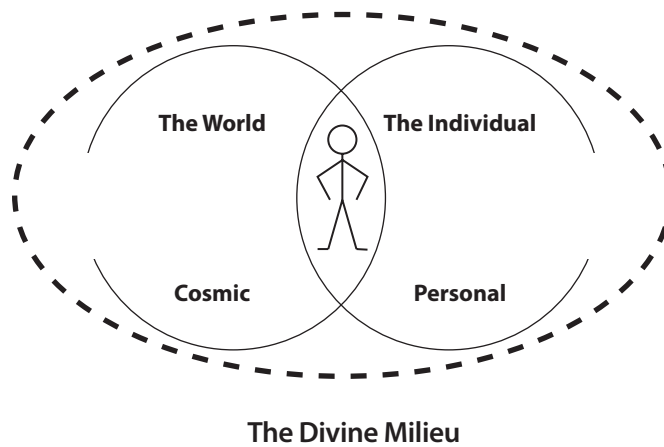
Models and methods developed within the program guide and support theological reflection.

In general, the term “theological reflection,” used in various ways throughout the theological world, means knowing God and knowing about God through experience. Over four years, participants practice EfM’s discipline of theological reflection using a specific model and a method developed and refined over the life of the program (since 1975). Assignments in the coming weeks will present fundamentals of theological reflection and provide resources and practice for the refinement of the life skill of theological reflection.

### The EfM Four-Source Model for Theological Reflection

Sources from which one draws meaning have long been important for theological learning. Richard Hooker, a sixteenth-century Anglican theologian, used three sources: scripture, tradition, and reason. Paul Tillich, a twentieth-century theologian, indicated that the theologian's sources are the Bible, church history, history of religion, and culture. Contemporary theologian John Macquarrie, while disliking the term "sources," lists six "formative factors": experience, revelation, scripture, tradition, culture, and reason.

The EfM program suggests that theological reflection occurs at the juncture of our personal experience and the world we encounter. Both are enveloped by the divine milieu, which we encounter in liturgy and spiritual points of our lives. Reflection occurs when we stand in the juncture as depicted in the following diagram:



Our experience indicates that theological reflection is more effective if we differentiate personal experience from experience of the world and are careful to distinguish among four sources: Personal Experience/Action, Personal Beliefs/Position, Culture/Society, and the Christian Tradition. The Action and Position sources reflect personal experiences and beliefs, and so may be thought of as internal to ourselves, while the Culture and Tradition sources identify what we receive from the world, thus external to ourselves.

*Please note: Although in EfM these have often been shortened to Action, Position, Culture, and Tradition, in this Guide we will frequently use the alternate descriptors to emphasize the fullness of what is contained in each source.*

#### **ACTION**

The Personal Experience/Action source of meaning involves what we do and experience. The specific actions we take, as well as the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives associated with the actions, come from this source.

In constructing spiritual autobiographies, each person works principally with the Action source. We remember past events and weave them into a pattern that tells our life stories. We say, “I remember . . .” or “My thoughts were . . .” or “I felt. . .” And we say, “Then I walked to . . .” or “I did. . .”

### **POSITION**

The Personal Belief/Position source of meaning refers to that for which one consciously argues—personal attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and convictions. Phrases beginning, “I believe . . .,” “I know that . . .,” “That’s the way it is . . .,” and “It’s true that . . .” indicate one is drawing from the Position source. Included here are tentative opinions as well as passionately held convictions.

### **CULTURE**

The Culture or Contemporary Culture/Society source of meaning encompasses almost all the objective content available to a person. The libraries of the world contain material that is in the Culture source. The attitudes and opinions generally held in a society also fall within this source. The Culture source draws from movies, television, magazines, advertisements, law, architecture, customs, and attire—in short, all the aspects of life that are around us. Culture is so vast that one can only deal with certain specific aspects of it; therefore, there is need to identify specific items from Culture on which to focus in a theological reflection. Culture frequently sends mixed messages and may be intertwined with aspects of our faith, such as a picture that mixes the Christmas crèche with Santa Claus and a Christmas tree.

### **TRADITION**

The Tradition source refers to a faith tradition, and in EfM generally refers to Christian Tradition, the content of the Christian heritage. It begins with the Bible and extends to the liturgies, stories, documents, music, artifacts, and history of Christianity. The Tradition source contains the literature that the Christian community has designated as authoritative. In addition to conveying truth and meaning, the contents of the Tradition source evoke awareness of the holy, experiences of awe, or a sense of God’s presence. Phrases like, “The Bible says . . .” and “According to the Prayer Book . . .” mark this source. The EfM program provides a four-year presentation of the Christian faith tradition through the participant’s reading material. The Tradition source of meaning relates to the underpinnings of a faith tradition. Therefore, the term “Tradition” could be modified by Native American, if someone has that experience in their personal history; or Buddhist, or Hindu, and so forth. The important point is that Tradition as a source of meaning refers to that area of life that has nurtured or formed someone’s view of God and the holy. If your group has members from different faith traditions, it will be important to identify the specific Tradition source in the course of theological reflection.

It is useful both to distinguish among these sources and to notice where they overlap. Each person draws on the sources as they try to make sense of



the world around them. Each source functions as a kind of framework within which an individual, or even a group, interprets their experience. Often there is an inclination to keep these frameworks separate from one another. For example, what happens at work may lead to quite cynical conclusions about human nature. An individual may keep these conclusions altogether apart from how he or she views life as a family member or as a member of the church or faith group. In theological reflection we bring together these different ways of looking at the world. We look at each of the four sources of meaning so that our entire understanding may be informed by the Christian faith tradition.

Merely accessing a variety of sources—the Christian faith tradition, contemporary culture, personal experience, and personal beliefs—is not the whole of theological reflection. The work of theology requires a holistic response that involves the intellect, imagination, and emotions. It requires developing the ability to employ imagination to create metaphors, symbols, and analogies. Analogical thinking, especially practiced within a community of faith, is an essential element of theological reflection. When a person gives studied attention to knowing God, the person begins to reflect theologically. How one understands God will influence an individual's view of the church (ecclesiology), worship and prayer (liturgics and spirituality), mission (missiology), human nature, and ministry. The *Guide* presents ways to practice analogical thinking by using images and metaphors along with practice in connecting among the four sources of meaning in our lives—Christian Faith Tradition, Personal Experience/Action, Society/Culture, and Personal Beliefs/Positions.

### A Method for Theological Reflection

*For literally decades, a beginning artist tried to draw human faces using pencils and paper. While the drawings were recognizable, they resembled what one might see in a fun house mirror that distorts facial features. He decided to attend art classes to learn the basics of drawing. The first class introduced four principles: 1) all drawings are made up of basic shapes such as circles, triangles, squares, and rectangles and their oval, trapezoid, and parallelogram cousins; 2) arranging the shapes on the paper (the picture's composition) is primary; 3) shading adds depth; 4) details are drawn last. The instructor then said, "It is important to follow the composition, shading, and detail steps in order. Almost all problems arise in the composition or shading steps and not in the details. The problems you encounter in drawing can be solved by returning to the basics." The novice artist came away from the introductory lecture understanding how to solve difficulties in drawing. He also knew that to become proficient in sketching he must practice, practice, and practice again the basics of drawing.*

This section begins with a story about drawing because theological reflection is an art analogous to drawing. Basic principles, developed over several decades within the EfM network, introduce the art of theological reflection.

Learning the basic principles helps “correct” problems experienced as an individual or group works with theological reflection.

Disciplined thinking works with models and methods. A model shows *what* is to be done while a method guides *how* it is done. The discipline of theological reflection as practiced within EfM works from the Four-Source Model (Christian Faith Tradition, Contemporary Culture/Society, Personal Belief/Position, and Personal Experience/Action), to produce a “picture” of what we are trying to do: put the four sources in conversation with each other to better understand the relationship between faith and life experience. A method allows us to apply the model.

### ***The Basic Structure of EfM Theological Reflection in Four Movements***

#### **IDENTIFY A FOCUS**

*This is the most crucial step of all. A good focus propels the reflection.*

Identify the beginning point on which to reflect. Is it something from a Personal Experience, from the Christian Tradition, from the Culture, or from a Personal Position? If the beginning is in a personal experience, identify a specific moment in the experience and the thoughts and feelings at that moment. If from a Bible passage, what is the main idea or image? If from something in Culture, what is the main focus? A Personal Position statement is itself the focus. Create a focus as either an image or a concise statement that captures the main energy of the beginning point and decide the specific stand-point from which the focus image or statement is viewed.

#### **EXPLORE THE FOCUS IMAGE/STATEMENT**

*Asking the theological perspective questions is what turns general reflection into theological reflection.*

Investigate the focus by posing two or three theological questions around the focus image or statement. Exploration grows out of examining the breadth and depth of the identified focus. What’s the story in the image? What kind of world is this? What could be destructive in this world? What could change things? What would make things work out? Those are questions that deal with classic systematic theology’s perspective categories of creation, sin, judgment, and redemption. Another way of expressing theological perspectives is the language of wholeness, brokenness, recognition, reorientation, and restoration. What statement can be made about God, human nature, or grace as a result of your exploration of the image? How does the image relate to the theological affirmations of humanity being created in the image and likeness of God?

#### **CONNECT OTHER SOURCES TO THE REFLECTION**

*This is the heart of reflection that helps us connect our lives and our faith.*

Exploring the focus image or statement theologically generally prompts natural connections to occur—Bible stories may be recalled that relate to the focus, or events in the Culture come to mind, or Personal Beliefs rise up. Theological reflection deliberately attends to those sources. If a theological reflection begins in Personal Experience, consider how our Christian Tradition, our Culture, and our Positions/Beliefs can guide us when life is like the image or statement that provides a focus for the reflection.

#### **APPLY LEARNING AND INSIGHT TO MINISTRY**

*A reflection that does not end with implications for our own lives as ministers in the world is incomplete.*

Insights lead to implications that are applicable to one’s ministry in daily life. Decide how the theological reflection calls us into actions of ministry in our daily life. Implications may take the form of a reframed question, a commitment to a specific action, or a new attitude.

The theological reflection method in EfM follows a four-phase process: *identify*, *explore*, *connect*, and *apply*. It is important to note that the EfM method applied to the EfM Four-Source Model is the skeleton that supports the reflection. Further, the method is the same for any EfM theological reflection using the Four-Source Model; the only real difference is the starting point.

For example, this week's work introduces a reflection that begins with a text from scripture, thus a **Theological Reflection Beginning in the Christian Tradition**. In the course of the reflection, using the EfM method, the focus identified from the Tradition source will be connected to the Action, Culture, and Position sources. Likewise, a theological reflection that begins in the Action source, an experience someone had, for instance, will be connected to the Tradition, Culture, and Position sources as the reflection progresses. A theological reflection that begins in the Culture source is not a different method from one that begins in the Tradition or Action or Position sources. In EfM there is one model and one method. For convenience and clarity we identify a particular theological reflection by the source from which it begins. The method remains the same, no matter which source is the starting point: *identify*, *explore*, *connect*, *apply*.

### A Closer Look at the Four Movements

To provide a starting point, each reflection begins by *identifying a focus*, e.g., something from Personal Experience/Action such as a personal incident; from Contemporary Culture/Society such as a news story, movie, poem, work of art; from Christian Faith Tradition such as the Sunday scriptures, sermons, prayers of the church, hymns; or from Personal Belief/Position such as found on a bumper sticker or an essay or opinion page of the newspaper (a Position that occurs in a Culture piece).

*A note about the Position source: Whether someone writes an essay, a news article, a poem, work of fiction or nonfiction, a news program or many other examples, there will be a Personal Position contained within the writing or presentation.*

The focus of any theological reflection centers on something for which there is interest in exploring further. For example, a person reading the Priestly creation story might focus on verse 31: "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good." The *identifying* phase continues by recalling a specific time of experiencing life as being "very good." Next would be to develop an image that expresses what that experience of "life is very good" was like; e.g., "it was like finding an ordinary-looking box and discovering a wonderful, joyful gift." The image becomes the identified focus. At that point the reflection moves from *Identifying* (e.g., an ordinary box that contains a wonderful gift) to *Exploring* what it is like to live in a world of discovering unexpected gifts among the ordinary.

The next phase of theological reflection uses some theological questions to *explore the focusing image or metaphor*. The purpose, like any concentrated

investigation, is to notice features and characteristics. Thematic questions used to explore the focus in EfM are based on theological topics, often developed from basic doctrines. For example, theological themes or perspectives developed from the Hebrew Scriptures include, but are not limited to,

*creation* (What is the world or life like for those in the image or passage or text being considered?);

*sin* (What alienates, breaks, or separates in the image-world?);

*judgment* (What surprises, jolts, or causes one to be aware of alienation or wholeness?);

*repentance* (What turns someone in that image away from destruction and toward life?);

*redemption* (What brings life, renewal, restoration to someone in that image?).

*Explore* by looking at the image from different theological viewpoints, e.g., asking what characterizes the “world of the image” (creation perspective) or what causes alienation in that world (sin perspective) to guide the conversation in light of the theology embedded within the image. It is generally good to use at least two or three of the theological themes/perspectives to *explore* the focus.

During the *connecting* phase the associations with each of the sources of meaning in someone’s life begin to occur. If someone is not yet able to discern distinctly the four sources, the reflection may produce confusion and feelings of being lost. Therefore, it is important to become proficient in distinguishing the four sources that offer wisdom or meaning in our lives: Personal Experience, Faith Tradition, Contemporary Culture, and Personal Position.

For example, in the reflection beginning in the Christian Faith/Tradition source with the passage from Genesis, recalling an experience when “Life is very good” draws from Personal Experience to produce the image of discovering a box with a joyful surprise inside to illuminate the focus of that passage. The *Explore* phase asked theological questions of the image to help get a sense of the dimensions of that kind of world. At this point two of the sources of meaning have already been identified and explored: Tradition and Action. The *Connect* phase then turns to the other two sources, Culture and Position. It is important to note that this is only an example. The method does not specify the order in which the sources are to be connected; connections to other sources can occur at any point and in any order. The requirement is that all four sources be connected in the course of the reflection.

*Connection* that draws from the Contemporary Culture could use movies that may have shown something about life being very good, or perhaps for another perspective, movies that have shown life as not good. Or the Culture source of meaning could draw from how advertising in America looks at life or “the good life.” Once a *connection* from this additional source

comes to mind, comparing and contrasting the view presented in the Culture source of meaning with that presented in the Christian Tradition source produces further food for reflection. Then the *connecting phase* of this particular example turns to Personal Beliefs/Positions: What do I hold as true about life? What positions do the views of Culture and Tradition inspire me to take? Where do my beliefs about this come from?

Theological reflection can result in entertaining ideas that quickly evaporate if not put into practice. As you enter more fully into theological reflection, it is essential that the *applying phase* be given significant attention. It is hard work to apply what one learns to concrete and specific life situations.

The final phase or movement of theological reflection involves clarifying and *applying* what the exploring and connecting phases bring into view. New learning often touches on the Position and Action sources, the most personal of the four. Often the learning involves a desire for a change of behavior, or occasionally a shift in how a person understands self, human nature, and God. When the *applying phase* is brought center stage, the skills, knowledge, and attitude needed to “incarnate” insights in daily life have energy to inspire us to change and grow.

It is good to remember that the terms “learner,” “disciple,” and “discipline” are closely related. Knowing God and learning how to think about God, especially for Christians, necessitate a congruency between belief and behavior. Insights require drawing out implications for living more faithfully in “thought, word, and deed.” Your own facility with theological reflection will be enhanced as you do the work in Practice assignments through the year. As you do your reading and focus your study using the Reading and Reflection Guide, do so with the continual question of what relevance your study, reflection, and learning have to your life and ministry. Yet deep, significant insights also need support and encouragement if we are to translate them into the change desired. That is one of the reasons it is very helpful to practice theological reflection in a supportive community on a regular basis. The variety of experiences and thoughts group members bring to the reflection enrich and add complexity to the process.

All reflection involves thinking carefully about what one reads, experiences, believes, or knows. To be fruitful, such thinking benefits from a willingness to be open and vulnerable as one reconsiders in light of what others believe, understand, or interpret. Julian Marias, a Spanish philosopher of the twentieth century, said that Christianity does not give solutions, but does give light by which to seek them. Theological reflection in EfM is not a problem-solving process, but a means to new or renewed awareness and understanding. As a person learns more about the Christian tradition, the increased knowledge provides fuel that generates more light by which to “see” situations more clearly. Careful theological reflection illuminates experience.





**Focus**

Note the questions you have. What stood out for you? What did you learn about theological reflection?

**Respond**

The use of metaphor is the method of teaching that Jesus used in the parables. In theological reflection, we employ the power of a metaphor to take us from the specific to the universal—the collective experience of human beings in God’s world.

Metaphors are verbal pictures. We are not concerned here with the finer distinctions between images, metaphors, and similes. All of these translate meaning from one thing to another. The literal meaning of the Greek *meta* + *phero* is “carry over.” The metaphor functions as a bridge that connects what happens to us in our contemporary world with the other sources of meaning in theological reflection.

Metaphors provide a means to move from the known to the unknown, to understand the unfamiliar by means of the familiar. The metaphor also can offer a fresh look at what we think we already know. Religious metaphors depend on the intersection of the known, daily, human world and the unknown, mysterious, divine realm of God. Metaphors can be generated from experiences, thoughts, and feelings. The metaphor in theological reflection emerges from the identified focus. In a group, drawing from the similarity of feelings and thoughts among members of the group makes the metaphor unifying. It paints a clear picture of contemporary life as experienced, at least on occasion, by the members of the seminar.

Think of an incident in a movie, television show, or book that aroused significant feelings for you. Write a short description of the incident. What metaphor can you come up with that creates a “picture” of those feelings? How would you describe the world of that metaphor? What is destructive or broken in that world? What would repair that world?

**Practice**

Analogical thinking undergirds theology, for we can only speak about God using metaphor, images, story, or pictures. Listed below are some exercises that may help you become more comfortable in the practice of generating and discovering metaphors:

1. List biblical images—as many as possible (the vineyard, lost sheep, etc.).
2. List metaphors from everyday life. Come up with as many as you can: a caged tiger, walking a tightrope blindfolded, ice cream melting in the hot sun, traveling an unfamiliar highway without a map, and so on.
3. Describe characteristics of each metaphor. What are the feelings and thoughts in the world of the metaphor?

4. Tell a family story and ask the group to listen for metaphors within or evoked by the narrative.
5. Tell or read a news item or other print media piece and listen for metaphors.
6. Listen for sources in a sermon. In most liturgical churches, the sermon is a brief reflection on a scripture passage of the day. Which passage does the sermon draw from (Christian tradition)? Where does the homilist begin: a joke (culture), a personal experience, a personal belief, another scripture passage? What insights does the preacher offer? What call to ministry (application) does the sermon suggest?

# Week Nine

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Exodus 16–40  
Collins, Chapter 6, “Revelation at Sinai”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: Mosaic/Sinai covenant; Hittite treaties; Assyrian treaties; vassal treaty; theophany; Baal; Asherah; Festival of Unleavened Bread; Sukkoth; Book of the Covenant; apodictic law; casuistic law; Yahwist Decalogue; ritual Decalogue; unwritten (oral) law

Note how Israel’s covenant with God is part of the foundation of Israel’s identity.

## YEAR TWO

### Read

The Gospel according to Luke

### Focus

Name three aspects of Luke’s account of the good news that differ from the other two synoptic gospels, Mark and Matthew. What do these aspects contribute to an understanding of the identity of Jesus?

Imagine the writer of Luke making a list of images for Jesus. What would be on that list?

Describe how Luke’s images shade and color the gospel he proclaims.

## YEAR THREE

### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 6, “The Imperial Church”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: Constantine; Chi Rho, Milvian Bridge; Codex Vaticanus; Codex Sinaiticus; *Hagia Eirene*; *Hagia Sophia*; Helena; Athanasius; Basil; Arius; Miaphysites; Nestorius; *sedes*, *cathedra*, *basilica*; *catechesis*; *eremos*, *monachos*, *abba*, *homoousion*, *homoousios*, *hypostasis*, *ousia*, *Theotokos*; monasticism; *The Acts of Thomas*; Councils; Chalcedonian Definition; dates: 312, 325, 481



History presents a narrative that the author creates from primary or other secondary sources. What sources can you identify that MacCulloch uses in this chapter?

## YEAR FOUR

### Read

Ford, Chapter 6, “Jesus Christ”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: resuscitation vs. resurrection; Christology; catholic; the Councils; the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ; Alexandrine vs. Antiochene Christology; hermeneutical gap; Augustine; Irenaeus; Jaroslav Pelikan

How does Ford’s “defensible historical core” (pages 86–89) compare to your own understanding of Jesus? What are some losses and gains in translation of sacred texts? How does this affect your understanding of the biblical text? Why is the Jewishness of Jesus important?



## ALL YEARS

### Respond

As you read this week’s assignment you likely made connections with other things that you have read, thought, or experienced. Identify some thoughts, feelings, memories, and connections to other authors. These connections help you identify some of the sources you use as you form your understanding. What do you notice about the sources you draw upon?

Defining relationships and identity looms large in the readings of all four years. Year One read about the unfolding of the covenant through the lives of the patriarchs. Year Two considered Luke’s proclamation of the news of Jesus Christ and its power over people. Year Three watched the nascent church-state issues of power unfold. Year Four read about the identity of Jesus Christ. Name some stories of identity that are important in your context. Possible areas of focus include local, regional, national levels of community; your congregation, diocese (or other judicatory body, if applicable), and larger denominational context; and your own identity as situated in your family over your lifetime thus far. What do you notice about these stories?

## Practice

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION BEGINNING WITH THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Use your assigned reading this week to:

**Identify** the focus of what you read and state it briefly;

**Explore** the focus by identifying theological views of the world, sin, judgment, repentance, and/or redemption that may have been present in your reading;

**Connect** by

identifying how the author(s) drew on his or her contemporary culture in writing the chapter;

identifying the beliefs that the author seemed to hold and how those interact with your beliefs;

recalling personal experiences related to the chapter's focus.

**Apply** by making notes of what you want to reflect on with the seminar group.

# Week Ten

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Leviticus and Numbers  
Collins, Chapter 7, “Priestly Theology: Exodus 25–40, Leviticus & Numbers”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: the Tabernacle; sacrificial system; Day of Atonement; stories of Nadab and Abihu and of Korah; impurity laws; Holiness Code; relationship of ethics and holiness; Cultic Calendar; Book of Numbers

## YEAR TWO

### Read

Powell, Chapter 7, “Luke”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: Theophilus; “the beloved physician”; Luke’s Gospel in relationship to the Acts of the Apostles; the major themes in the Gospel of Luke; passages from Luke widely used in Christian liturgies  
What interests or concerns you in Powell’s presentation of Luke’s Gospel?  
Which of the major themes Powell identifies do you find interesting or even compelling?  
What makes the Gospel according to Luke sacred literature?

## YEAR THREE

### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 7, “Defying Chalcedon: Asia and Africa”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: *The Life of Balaam and Joasaph*<sup>16</sup>; Miaphysites; Dyophysite “Nestorianism”; Tome of Leo; *Henotikon*; Jacob Baradeus; Syriac Orthodox Church; Sergius; Peter the Iberian; Armenian Church; *Trisagion*; Theopaschism; Ethiopia; abun; Ezana; tawahedo; Kebra Nagast;

16. An eBook English translation of “*The Life of Balaam and Joasaph*” can be found at <http://omacl.org/Barlaam/>.

King Kalleb; Dyophysite Christians; failure of the Marib Dam; School of the Persians in Edessa; Sebokht; “Mar Thoma” Church; Cosmas Indicopleustes; Thomas Christians; Evagrius Ponticus; Alopen; library pagoda of Ta Qin

Identify the central opposition for one individual or a group that defied Chalcedon (Kal-SEE-dun).

## YEAR FOUR

### Read

Ford, Chapter 7, “Salvation—its scope and intensity”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: salvation; predestination; God’s salvific will; universal salvation; secondary creation; theological virtues; eschatology; Aquinas; Calvin; Anselm of Canterbury; Martin Luther

Identify some different Christian understandings of salvation. What is your theology of salvation in relation to these? How does salvation have a corporate dimension? How might inter-religious dialogue help you as a Christian better understand a doctrine of salvation?



## ALL YEARS

### Respond

Select a theme or concept from your reading, for example, holiness, heresy, Christ, salvation, or another theme that stood out for you. Consider these questions:

What do you believe about the selected theme or concept? How has your personal experience shaped that belief?

What personal values can you identify as you talk about that belief?

What personal values does the selected theme or concept challenge?

### Practice

Theological reflection is foundational to ministry. Looking at what we do and say through the lens of faith provides opportunities to hear and know God more, to act in the world in ways that reflect God. See where the following reflection outline takes you.

Carefully read the passage below and identify two or three places that interest you. Connect your personal experience with that focus.

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them." —Exodus 3:1–9

#### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION BEGINNING WITH THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

**Identify:** The passage above from Christian tradition is the identified starting point. Focus by considering where the key energy/heart of the scripture passage is, what the passage seems to be about. Develop an image in words or a drawing that illustrates the heart of the passage evident. You might try to think in visual terms, as if you were making a video or a painting that conveys the feeling.

**Explore** the image using a question from the theological themes of Creation, Sin, Judgment, Repentance, or Redemption; that is,

What kind of community does the image-world suggest? (Creation)

What might get in the way of relationships in that image-world? (Sin)

What could make those in that world realize there's something wrong?  
(Judgment)

What would represent a change of direction? (Repentance)

What might a new, life-giving creation look like? (Redemption)

**Connect** with:

Experience—When has something happened in your life that is like the world of the image/metaphor? Compare your experience with the exploration above.

Contemporary Culture/Society—Who or what has taught you something that is helpful when life is like the image? In our world, where is opposition to that image? Where is support for it?

What key issues do the metaphor and personal experience and contemporary culture raise?

State your beliefs and positions relative to those issues.

**Apply** meaning and purpose to the reflection by identifying learning and clarifying questions.

How do the beliefs and insights of the exploration support you in ministry?

Notice where you might want to make some changes in action or viewpoint about the matter covered in the reflection.

What prayer would you offer in this matter?

# Week Eleven

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Deuteronomy  
Collins, Chapter 8, “Deuteronomy”

### Focus

As you read Deuteronomy, define the Mosaic covenant and notice how the covenant underwent renewal and reinterpretation.

What can you find out about the history of the baptismal covenant in the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer over time? Compare that history of covenantal renewal and reinterpretation to that of the Mosaic covenant. What inspires the change?

## YEAR TWO

### Read

The Gospel according to John

### Focus

Make note of anything you had to look up and any surprising ideas or images that you found in reading John’s Gospel. Especially note how John’s Gospel presents the message of Jesus. Compare John’s proclamation (*kerygma*) with that in the other Gospels. What do you notice? What challenges you?

## YEAR THREE

### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 8, “Islam: The Great Realignment”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: *Qur’an*; *al-ilah* (Allah); how Christian *divisions* contributed to Muslim conquests; Mosques of Umar (Dome of the Rock); John of Damascus; Timothy I; Ta Qin monastery; Bishop Alopen’s writing; Khan of the Keratis’s vision of St. Sergius; Kublai Khan and Dyophysite Christianity; Christians of Bagdad; North African Church; Coptic patriarchs; Ethiopian Christianity; *The Miracles of Mary*; Prester John myth

What do you find surprising in this chapter? What information about the history of Christianity in this particular context is new to you?

## YEAR FOUR

### Read

Ford, Chapter 8, “Through the past to the present: texts and history”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: Pentecostal; Charismatic; deification; liberation theologies; the context of the text; genre; the canon of scripture; the “levels” or “senses” of the text; commentary; original languages of the Bible; hermeneutics; critical history; presuppositions; Ernst Käsemann; Friedrich Schleiermacher; Paul Ricoeur

Ford’s guidelines for interpreting texts on pages 137–139 is extensive. Do you find any surprises in this list? Which do you already do regularly in your reading of the Bible or theological texts? Which would you like to add to your practice? What would you like to suggest be added to Ford’s list? How does the study of history contribute to your reading of the Bible or other theological texts?



## ALL YEARS

### Respond

“Right” behavior operates within the ordering of values and expectations. Consider how different laws or teachings about right and wrong have operated in your life, especially over time, in different settings and circumstances.

Reflect on how the notions of “right” behavior you learned in your first ten years shaped your beliefs about God.

Identify any issues raised in your assigned reading that you find still present in contemporary society and among the people you encounter in your daily life.



**Practice****THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION BEGINNING WITH THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION**

Use your text reading this week to

**Identify** the focus of what you read;

**Explore** by identifying the views of the world, sin, judgment, repentance, and/or redemption that may have been presented in your reading;

**Connect** by

identifying how the author(s) drew on his or her contemporary culture in writing the chapter;

identifying the beliefs that the author seemed to hold and how those interact with your beliefs;

recalling personal experiences related to the chapter's focus;

**Apply** by making notes of what you want to share with the seminar group as you reflect on your reading.

If your group chooses to use this reflection assignment in the seminar, note how group reflection differs for you from reflecting on your own as an individual.

What are the advantages of individual reflection? What is lost?

What are the advantages of reflection with a group? What is challenging?

# Week Twelve

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Joshua and Judges

### Focus

As you read the book of Joshua, note the concerns of the people. Especially think about the nature of God that the narrative presented and how that understanding of God shaped their understanding of the world and of themselves.

## YEAR TWO

### Read

Powell, Chapter 8, “John”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: Book of Signs; Book of Glory; Logos; beloved disciple; abundant life; Paraclete; Sacred Heart piety; Raising of Lazarus; Washing the Feet; *Christ of Saint John of the Cross*

Identify the meaning of major themes in John’s Gospel: true revelation of God; Jesus as God; Glorification of Jesus in his death; world and Jews; loving one another.

How does John’s Gospel support your own understanding of God? Of Jesus? What does Powell’s commentary add to your understanding? What about Powell’s commentary do you find challenging?

## YEAR THREE

### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 9, “The Making of Latin Christianity”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: *Papa*; catholic; Latin Rite; St. Lawrence; Basilica of St. Peter; Damasus; Jerome; Vulgate; Faltonia Betitia Proba; Prudentius; Ambrose; Augustine’s *Confessions*; Monica; Manichaeism; *tolle lege*; Donatists; *City of God*; Pelagius; 410 CE; Augustine’s analogy of Trinity; double processions of Holy Spirit; Martin; Sulpicius Severus; *capellae*; Cassian; Benedict; Rule of St. Benedict

What are you finding challenging in MacCulloch's history of the church?  
What connections are you making to the church today?

## YEAR FOUR

### Read

Ford, Chapter 9, "Experience, knowledge, and wisdom," and Chapter 10, "Theology for the third millennium"

### Focus

Terms and names to note: epistemology; levels of knowing—experience, understanding, judgment; corrigibility; *docta ignorantia*; wisdom vs. knowing information; Bernard Lonergan

Ford names nine aspects of knowing God. What questions does this list raise for you in your experience as a person trying to live a faithful life?

How does Ford envision theology's role in the third millennium? What role does theology play in your understanding of the call to ministry in everyday life?



## ALL YEARS

### Respond

Compare how God is involved in the variety of worlds present in the readings with how you find God to be involved in your worlds of work, family, play, mind, and body.

### Practice

As you increase your knowledge of the Christian tradition and clarify your beliefs, you will likely find yourself thinking new thoughts such as "I never knew that." New learning can be insightful and hold implications for your life as a Christian. Putting that learning into practice requires a willingness to do the hard work of honest self-examination.

Select one thing that you have learned about God from your study and reflection. For example, reading about the theme of justice throughout the Christian tradition can lead to the insight that God cares about those who suffer from injustice. Once you know that about God, ask how that knowledge impacts your different worlds of play, family, work, and how you view your body.

# Week Thirteen

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Collins, Chapter 9, “Joshua”; Chapter 10, “Judges”

### Focus

Judges in the Hebrew Bible are more aptly described as warlords than magistrates. Collins writes that the selection criterion for a judge was might. As you step back into the time of Judges, why do you think these stories would be recorded and valued? State how you think the people would have seen God to be present.

## YEAR TWO

### Read

The Acts of the Apostles  
Powell, Chapter 9, “Acts”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: the role of the Church in Jerusalem; Stephen; the relationship between Paul and the Roman Empire

Make note of what surprises you in reading Acts; what you have to look up; and the events, images, or ideas that interest you. Note key points in the differences between Paul and Peter, and their goals.

Powell notes that the commonly used title “Acts of the Apostles” is misleading because Luke’s focus actually is on the acts of God the Holy Spirit. Do you agree or disagree? What evidence can you show to support your opinion?

## YEAR THREE

### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 10, “Latin Christendom: New Frontiers”

### Focus

Note how MacCulloch organizes five hundred years of Latin Christian history around several themes: how changing allegiances affect the church; the mission to expand the church; the role of converts in shaping the identity of the church; and the church’s relationship with empire.

Identify a few key persons and events related to these themes. What aspects of these themes do you find in the church today?

## YEAR FOUR

### Read

The Coakley essay: “God as Trinity: An Approach through Prayer” in this EfM Reading and Reflection Guide, Part II, pages 217–228

### Focus

Terms and names to note: hypostases; Karl Rahner; David Hume; doxologies; Schleiermacher; *richesse*; St. John of the Cross; Hippolytus; Origen; Mithras; Basil the Great; Gregory of Nyssa

What is your understanding of the relationship of the three “persons” of the Trinity? Does Coakley’s essay raise questions for you?

What is your experience with the question of gendered language in speaking of God? What are the issues for you? How do you address them? Write a position statement on the topic of gendered language in liturgy.



## ALL YEARS

### Respond

How people view God impacts how they behave. Furthermore, how they understand human nature influences how they view God.

How did those in your reading this week see God—what images or metaphors did they use for describing God and for describing human nature?

List images of God that you have or have had—recognizing and respecting that there may be others who do not like to think of God that way, even in your seminar group. What source(s) do you draw from in your imaging of God? What do your images of God suggest about how you understand the meaning of being human?

### Practice

Theological reflection is the central discipline of EfM, and it is expected that individuals and groups will regularly engage in theological reflection, especially in the weekly seminar. As with all spiritual disciplines, practice is the key to becoming proficient, and with proficiency comes greater comfort and ease in the process.

Reflections in a group work best when all contribute; more experienced members can help the process by encouraging participation from those less experienced. Note group reflection does not mean that the group simply

is sharing individual reflection work you have already prepared at home. Group reflection is a fresh opportunity to incorporate multiple viewpoints and insights that can inform your own perspective.

As your group reflects together in the seminar, notice for yourself how reflecting in community differs from personal reflection. There is a time for each process as we engage deeply with the intersection of faith and life.

For this reflection, start from a biblical passage that someone in Year One or Two has encountered during the week's study; or a passage that someone in the group particularly wants to engage; or a passage from a recent Sunday scripture reading. Choose one biblical passage from which the group will pull a focal point. Try to make the choice fairly quickly to allow adequate time for the reflection. Read it together, perhaps several times with different voices.

#### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION BEGINNING WITH THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

**Identify** a focus in the passage chosen. Create an image or metaphor for that focus, one that the whole group can agree to. Again, do this as expeditiously possible while giving everyone a voice.

**Explore** the focus with theological questions:

*Creation:* How would you describe the world of this image?

*Sin:* What constitutes a disconnect or brokenness there?

*Judgment:* Where is the moment of recognition or what catches us up short?

*Repentance:* What would cause things to turn around?

*Resurrection:* What restores this world to what God means it to be?

**Connect** the focus to other sources:

*Experience:* What personal experience does this image evoke?

*Culture/Society:* Where does this image occur in your world?

*Position:* What personal opinion or belief does this image bring up for you?

Use the same theological perspective questions to explore at least one of these questions.

**Apply** the fruits of this reflection, first by noting insights you have. Share your insights in the group, as you are comfortable. How might those insights make a difference in your ministry in your local community? Group members may offer ideas for possible action steps for their own ministries.

Make a plan to follow up at some point to see if group members have taken any action steps identified. Accountability to the community is one thing a group can encourage for an individual who is discerning a ministerial call.

## FIRST INTERLUDE

# Dialogue and the Bible



# Week Fourteen

## ALL YEARS

### Read

Morgan, Preface and Chapters 1–4

### Focus

Note how Morgan sets up his metaphor of house vs. home. What sources of difference and division does he identify in church and society? Where are these sources illuminated in the Bible, and how might the biblical tradition be in dialogue with the contemporary situation?

What would you like to share about this portion of the book in the seminar?

Remember that interlude texts are intended to spark a conversation, not just to convey information that you may or may not already know. It is not helpful in the seminar to limit your comments to whether you “like” or “dislike” a particular text or passage. Try your best to engage the text, articulate your own response, and then listen attentively to what others in the group have to say. Sometimes hearing another’s perspective can open us to things we didn’t see on first reading.

If the book challenges you—or you wish to challenge its author—reflect on what is so challenging to you. Reflect on what feelings that challenge evokes. How would you answer the author if the assertion(s) you find disturbing or respond to negatively were said in your presence? (If it helps, keep in mind that the author is also a Child of God!)

If you find yourself nodding in agreement with or finding new insights from what the author is saying, what can you share with the group that illuminates how the book resonates with your positions and/or life experience? What will you do with any new insights? What are the implications for your ministry in daily life?

There may be new science, new knowledge, or cultural events that were not in existence at the time when the book was written. What can you share with your group that would take the conversation beyond simply citing the shortcomings of an author not privy to the information we now hold? How might this book provide a jumping off point for further research on the topic for your own learning?

Above all, we ask you to avoid simply dismissing a book you find difficult. If we read only works we already agree with, where is the possibility for growth? *Lectio divina*, described in the Practice section, is one way to read



a book from a spiritual rather than informational standpoint. This form of prayerful reading can be used with any text, not just the Bible.

### Respond

Intentionally living into Christian identity likely will mean encountering issues that affect what one does and says. As questions and conflicts challenge what it means to live faithfully in the world, having a time and place to reflect with others moves from being something desirable to a necessity. Interlude sessions make available time and content to address specific ministry concerns and issues.

Almost without exception the concerns surface from experiences that have ministry formation implications. Ministry formation operates within four primary dimensions: identity, knowledge, skill, and attitude. For example, whenever conversations turn to religion, comments about the Bible usually follow. Within a short period of time unspoken thoughts and feelings surface: “I never can quote the Bible” (knowledge and skills issue); or “I don’t feel like I am a good Christian” (identity and attitude issue).

The Bible is foundational in shaping how Christians relate to others and to God. Holy Scripture can unite Christians by providing a common source that feeds the human spirit. However, Christians differ significantly on how they approach and interpret the Bible, resulting sometimes in distance and division. Before open and honest conversation about the meaning of a Bible passage can occur, people have to know how each other understands what the Bible is and is not.

Marcus Borg clearly describes the situation Christians face today:

At a basic level, the referent of the word Bible is obvious—it names Christianity’s holy book, its sacred scripture. Yet what it means to affirm this is not agreed upon. Indeed, conflict about the meaning of the Bible—its origin, authority, and interpretation—is the single most divisive issue in American Christianity today.<sup>17</sup>

Identify some divisions concerning reading and interpreting the Bible you have encountered in church and society. Which are related to the foundational questions of mission, identity, purpose, membership, leadership, and authority? Where do you stand on these issues?

### Practice

Being able to be in dialogue with the Bible requires familiarity with the text. Regular reading over time is one way to cultivate a deeper relationship with the text. How we read the Bible also influences how we understand it. Sometimes we read the Bible as we would read a textbook or a newspaper—scan for the important points, skim or skip over parts that seem inconsistent or

17. Marcus J. Borg, *Speaking Christian: Why Christian Words Have Lost Their Meaning and Power—And How They Can Be Restored* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 55.

incomprehensible, then move along. In this way we do come to “know” what the text says. On the other hand, we can also know the Bible by taking on a more spiritual practice in reading it as a spiritual text. *Lectio divina* (“divine reading”) offers a slower pace, another way of reading that invites us, in the words of a twelfth-century monk named Guigo II, to savor the text in small bites, to chew on it and extract all its flavor and nourishment. Rather than reading for facts or information, *Lectio divina* approaches the biblical text from the standpoint of prayer. This prayerful way of reading scripture encourages us to enter into a text, to allow the text to be in conversation with one’s heart and mind.

*Lectio divina* is often thought of as an individual spiritual practice, but it also lends itself to group practice. An individual period of *Lectio divina* followed by experiencing the practice in a group can be instructive in seeing how the richness of the passage can be enhanced by a variety of perceptions and responses.

## Lectio Divina

**Step 1: Select a passage** of scripture that touches you or the group of which you are a part. Some examples might be:

- a. God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (Romans 5:5)
- b. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:19b–20)
- c. Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28–30)

**Step 2: Prayer.** Begin with prayer for the presence of the Holy Spirit to guide this period of prayer and scripture reading.

**Step 3: *Lectio*. Read.**

- a. Read over the passage you have selected very slowly, savoring each of the words.
- b. Read the same passage a second time in the same way.
- c. Read the same passage a third time, this time forming the words with your lips.

If a group is engaging *lectio divina*, two people consecutively might read the same passage aloud, using a variety of translations. The third reading could be done silently by each member of the group, according to the direction in c.

Step 4: ***Meditatio. Contemplate.***

- a. Return to the passage and listen for the word or words that have attracted you during your reading. Group members may want to offer the words or phrases aloud, or simply hold them silently within.
- b. Repeat the word or phrase over and over in your heart.
- c. Let the word or words speak to you and resound in you rather than analyze its meaning.

Step 5: ***Oratio. Respond.***

- a. In silence, you may find that you want to thank God for what you have received, or to praise God, or to ask for the promise that you hear in the passage.
- b. Pray to God in the way that seems right to you.

Step 6: ***Contemplatio. Rest.***

- a. Remain in silence before God, asking nothing but to enjoy God's presence.
- b. Whenever thoughts enter your consciousness, return to the word in the passage that spoke most strongly to you.

Step 7. **Prayer.** At the end of the time, thank God for God's presence to you during this time together.<sup>18</sup>

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18. Prepared for publication by Robert D. Hughes III, Ph.D. Adapted for the EfM Reading and Reflection Guide.

# Week Fifteen

## ALL YEARS

### Read

Morgan, Chapters 5–7

### Focus

How does the metaphor of moving from house to home function in this half of the book? How can the dialogical aspects of the biblical story model for us constructive dialogue about difference and division in church and society?

What do you want to share in the seminar now that you have read the entire book? Did you find that anything in the second half answered questions or concerns you had when you stopped at the end of the first half?

### Respond

Find a passage from the Bible that troubles you and that you want to understand better. What present day issue or question underlies why this passage is troubling to you?

Become familiar with the passage using the biblical scholarship that you have at your disposal.

What does the text imply for living faithfully in today's world?

What does the text have to say about how to act in today's world?

### Practice

Morgan offers a Study Guide on pages 117–124 that includes a template for a community dialogue. Consider what opportunities you might have for bringing some part of your own community into dialogue about an issue, using this template.

What pressing issue(s) can you identify in your community that might benefit from such a dialogue?

How might you find others willing to participate?

What will you need to do to prepare the community to consider such an event?

Who will you need to partner with to plan and implement the dialogue?  
How might you invite them into this work?

## UNIT THREE

# Developing a Sustaining Spirituality



# Week Sixteen

## ALL YEARS

### Read

Spiritual theology proclaims that the Spirit is the source of all relationships. Prayer and worship are intentional acts of entering into a relationship with God, grounding and sustaining a person through the work of ministry and service to others in challenging times. Faithful living requires the development of a sustaining spirituality that deepens life-giving relationships with God, others, self, and creation.

A first step in creating a sustaining spirituality is to understand, as best as we can, the human dimension to which the word “spirituality” directs our attention. Urban T. Holmes, III (aka Terry Holmes) was dean of The School of Theology at Sewanee when the Education for Ministry Program was developed. While on a sabbatical leave he wrote what became, after his death, *Spirituality for Ministry*. The opening essay of his last book serves us well in laying a foundation for developing a spirituality that supports, nurtures, and encourages ministry in daily life.

## The Spiritual Person<sup>19</sup>

BY URBAN T. HOLMES III

It has been my experience that one does not drop the word “spiritual” into a conversation lightly. “How is your spiritual life?,” I unwittingly asked a minister in the presence of some others. There was a sudden, discernible tension in the air, as if I had inquired into the intimate details of his sex life. Someone coughed and the person of whom I inquired, obviously sharing the embarrassment, felt he had to say something to me. After all, I was a fellow pastor. “Great,” he said with an enthusiasm tinged with condescension. “I’ve really gotten it all together.” Somehow “getting it together”—the tired jargon of humanistic psychology—was not what I had in mind, but now aware that I was treading on forbidden territory I let it pass.

Later on in a conversation with several of the same people, a colleague of mine who had the irritating habit of never rebuking me directly but always through intermediaries remarked, “Why are we asking people about their spiritual life?” Since I was the only one who asked, the “we” obviously meant

19. Urban T. Holmes, “The Spiritual Person,” in *Spirituality for Ministry*, The Library of Episcopalian Classics (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2002), 3–19.

me. “After all,” he averred, “all of life is spiritual!” As I walked away somewhat chastened, I wondered why, if all of life is spiritual and my question had been pointless and unanswerable, the mention of the word so perceptibly heightened the anxiety of those gathered there.

This scenario has been repeated several times due to a stubborn streak that makes me keep asking questions in search of answers. After one such conversation I inquired of someone with whom I felt some rapport why the word “spiritual” evoked so much feeling. He replied, “I don’t think we realized that you are charismatic. You know most of us have been pretty active in the civil rights movement and protesting the Vietnam War.” I am not sure he spoke for anyone but himself, but for him “spiritual” did not mean everything, “all of life”; it was something very specific. It was synonymous with “baptism in the Holy Spirit,” speaking in tongues, prayer meetings, and opposition to the church’s social action. It was the escape from the confrontations of the 1960s. It was the enemy. I explained that I could hardly count myself charismatic, and he looked puzzled. Obviously wishing to get off the subject, he said, “Whatever it is, we don’t do it.”

I responded to his sensitivities, but something else came clear to me at that moment. There is judgment connected with the word “spirituality,” particularly when used by clergy of a certain generation. I remembered a classmate in seminary many years ago telling me why he had transferred from another institution. In the former school during his first year he had chosen a course entitled “The Life of Prayer.” After three weeks of faithful attendance, he had not heard the word “prayer” mentioned. That day after class he asked the instructor when they would begin to discuss the subject of the course. With some anger the instructor glared at this poor bumpkin. “Young man,” he said, “a hot bath will do you more good than all the prayer in the world.”

Why the tension? Why the anxiety? Why the ferocity? Is it possible that a whole generation of clergy rejected something they understood to be spirituality, without totally removing from the conscience an inchoate, lingering suspicion that this is precisely what they are to be about? Mention of spirituality provoked guilt, anger, and defensiveness in them.

Then came the renewed interest in spirituality in the church and the tragedy was compounded. For almost a generation clergy have pursued little classical education in spirituality and have had few models for its practice. Caught in an enthusiasm that has touched the lives of many church people, the word “spirituality” came to mean whatever anyone wanted it to mean. Because of their ignorance—culpable or not—there has been a serious lack among the church’s leadership of the knowledge that gives substance and direction to a contemporary form of the authentic spiritual renewal of the church. Not infrequently they fall back on the worst kind of hick piety.

Devoid of clear meaning, spirituality has become a catchword for whatever one favors or opposes. I have discovered that passing mention of spirituality can bring immediate acceptance by some or can evoke intellectual skepticism in others. The cynicism of its detractors is only reinforced.

In truth we use the word far too loosely. In my interviews with persons considered spiritually mature it was clear that there was no consensus as to what spirituality meant. “Spirituality” has too little intellectual substance. It has to be more than a name for warm feelings, which in our search for assurance we attribute to God. These feelings may very well be an intimation of our awareness of God’s presence, but until we can distinguish spirituality from what it is not—an initial criterion for a definition—then we do not know what it is. It cannot be everything and have any meaning. The word needs to point to a discrete, identifiable something before we can talk about it intelligently.

### Defining Spirituality

The classical definition begins with certain dogmatic and religious presuppositions. For example, prior to recent times spiritual theology was divided into ascetical or ordinary spirituality and mystical or extraordinary spirituality. The assumption was that the latter was reserved for those particularly gifted. There has also been the assumption that there are specific tests of an authentic spiritual life by certain manifestations that accompany it. For example, there are the fruits of the Spirit, such as love, joy, and peace. Or some have insisted that various spiritual epiphenomena must be present, such as speaking in tongues.

The definition of spirituality in this study is generic and experiential. Inasmuch as spirituality is a theological discipline, it reflects the conviction that theology moves from humanity to God and not from God to humanity. This is often described as doing theology “from below.” The distinction becomes clear when a generic and experiential definition of spirituality is contrasted with a classical definition.

I have no desire necessarily to pass a negative judgment on the classical definition of spirituality, whatever it may be; but there is a value in beginning with a generic and experiential definition. It permits the widest possible ground for dialogue, since it seeks to begin with the observable data. Furthermore, this definition permits the development of a correspondence with the human sciences although it will quickly move beyond the capabilities of those sciences. In other words, a generic and experiential definition is consistent with a foundational theology that argues for a continuity between nature and supernature.

With this in mind, I am defining spirituality as (1) a human capacity for relationship (2) with that which transcends sense phenomena; this relationship (3) is perceived by the subject as an expanded or heightened consciousness independent of the subject’s efforts, (4) is given substance in the historical setting, and (5) exhibits itself in creative action in the world.

First, there are not two classes of people: those who are spiritual and those who are not. Spirituality is our openness to relationship, which is a universal human capacity involving the whole person. One priest spoke of this very directly:



Spirituality is a total part of my life. I am a person who is concerned with realities and spirituality is as much a part of that as my right hand and my feelings and my perceptions. It is an appetite which I need to feed.

Plato said that to be is to be in relation and Aristotle defined the human being as a political animal, *zoe politike*. This term is sometimes translated “social animal,” but it literally means a creature who lives in a city (*polis*). In other words, for us to be we must exist in a community, in which our identity does not stop with our skin, but extends into the corporate reality. We are our community or the multiple communities of which we are a part.

In the evolutionary process there is a movement from creatures whose behavior is totally intra-specific (i.e., the result of genetic coding), as in an amoeba, to those whose behavior is a reflection of an acquired memory overlaying biology, as in human beings. Culture is the carrier of this memory, and the individual appropriates the cultural memory by socialization within the immediate family and the society as a whole. The supreme example of cultural memory is language, which enables us to be self-conscious and consequently human. This is to say that *Homo sapiens* is a creature with the capacity to think about thinking, to transcend himself or herself, which is made possible by the ability to represent and retain the memory of experience by means of language and to reflect upon that representation with more language.

There is an abiding legend in the folklore of some cultures of the child abandoned by its parents and brought up by wild animals. For some reason the favorite animals are wolves, perhaps harking back to the story of the founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus, who were supposedly suckled by a wolf. Despite romantic speculations to the contrary, the “wolf child” is subhuman because it has not had a relationship with other humans. As a matter of fact, even if such a creature returned to the company of its own kind after a period of years, it would not be able to recapture its lost previous relationships. It would be forever less than human. The evidence in the human sciences that this would be so is overwhelming.

Spirituality begins with this fact that the human being is by nature a creature requiring relationship. It operates from the postulate that to be a person is to be open to the other and goes on to say that there is within each of us an innate longing for union with the other. This urge is known as eros, from which we get the word “erotic.” But this desire is far more profound than a spicy feeling. It is the fundamental need we have for one another and ultimately for God. It is an energy within us, which, while perhaps deflected in its true end (what the doctrine of original sin seeks to say), is nonetheless a grounding for humanity’s spiritual longing.

The human need for relationship is not satisfied by external proximity alone; it is not enough to touch. We must compenetrate, which is to say enter into the internal reality of the other, which requires that we share our inner self. This is the nature of intimacy: to come to know one another as we truly are—or come as close as we can. To put it more graphically, there

is a desire to get inside each other's skin, of which sexual intercourse is the most profound symbol.

Yet we never do finally comprehend the other! In every relationship we must eventually come face to face with the mystery of the other person. There is no "solution" to the inquiry, Who are you? For we do not even know who we ourselves are. If we chose to answer the inquirer, we could not. Every human personality is rooted in the mystery of God, and attempts to "explain" humankind ultimately founder because they are inevitably reductions. Most of the self is hidden beneath the surface, reaching into the depths, of God's infinite purpose.

It is only an incredibly vapid culture, like our own, that could permit a theory of human nature to prevail that does not understand this mystery of being. A person is far more than the vortex of his or her material conditioning. Behaviorism, the theory that people can be explained in terms of conditioned reflexes, then, is a reductionism so patently contrary to our everyday experience of the mystery of the being of the other that it is difficult to see how anyone can take it seriously.

This leads, second, to the expectation of spirituality for relationship with that which transcends sense phenomena. If anything characterizes modernity, it is the loss of faith in transcendence, that reality that not only encompasses but surpasses our daily affairs. We have been seduced by our socialization into thinking that all truth is susceptible to scientific analysis (as in the natural sciences). Such analysis reduces all experience to numbers, which are then manipulated in the service of objectivity, prediction, and control. But these three values are incapable of explaining the mystery of human relationship. The fact of the matter is that scientific methodology does not describe reality or any part of it; it only builds models, which are subject to constant revision and are occasionally contradictory to one another.

Spirituality's experience of transcendence is one of being addressed from beyond the material world by that which is greater than anything we on our own can conceive. In the quest of eros for the knowledge of the other we become aware of the fact that the more we know, the more there is to be known. Every answer generates another question or series of questions. There is an infinite presence of the not-yet-known that engages the horizon of our knowing and yet recedes before our inquiry into infinite mystery. The very limits of our language in describing experience leave the questioning person with a sense that "of what we cannot speak we must remain silent"—to quote the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951)—and yet in expectant awe.

The transcendence that addresses us is an energy that takes certain forms. In other words, we do not know God in himself, but only as his transcendent being confronts our finite minds. God is the ultimate source of our intrinsic and normative values, but we perceive this as his energy moves in our world. The purpose of life is that final cause embedded in this transcendent presence, always calling us out of where we are to where we might be. It gives global and personal meaning, but that meaning is

still penultimate. The transcendent presence imparts to life its quality, as opposed to its quantity. Numbers may point to what lies beyond, but they never encompass this mystery that overcomes the banality of brute facts. It is the character of the spiritual life to be open to this transcendent energy in all its forms.

The notion of transcendence subverts the idea, of course, that all of reality is reducible to the phenomena or the appearances of things. In fact, when science understands itself, there is every indication that its own methodology becomes spiritual (i.e., open to a relationship with what transcends the phenomena). This is to say that the explanation of the methodology of the natural sciences requires that it draw on that which addresses us from outside the material world. There is good evidence that the data resulting from our observations cannot find a coherent and unified resolution in relation to data themselves, but only by reference to a point beyond the data. If seeing alone were believing, as we sometimes suggest, then the world of natural science would be a hopeless morass of contradictions. Transcendence is the hope for meaning we cannot otherwise have, and spirituality is our capacity for a relationship to that meaning: the mind of God.

Third, the key to the identification of the spiritual experience is a heightened or expanded consciousness. This has been the notion guiding much of the research in recent decades in transcendental experience among sociologists of religion, and it is confirmed by the comments among the members of the research sample for this study. For example, one pastor spoke of spiritual awareness as “anything that builds and holds a sense of meaning in life.” Another described a new “consciousness” as “something God did for me. It was there and [I] opened up to it. God did it.” Still further, a priest spoke of a spiritual turning point as the “clarity of one’s call.” One pastor’s spiritual journey was highlighted by a book, a person, and therapy, which gave his life and discipline “a whole new sense of meaning and purpose.”

This sense of a new awareness is at the heart of the Christian spiritual tradition. Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) says of her own mystical experience, which she calls rapture, “What I know in this case is that the soul was never so awake to the things of God nor did it have such a deep enlightenment and knowledge of his Majesty.” Among the early church fathers the sacraments, particularly Baptism, are spoken of as the illumination.

David Bohm, a theoretical physicist teaching at the University of London, in a book called *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, advances the theory that reality is essentially energy, which surrounds us in a flux and flow. This energy, he argues, takes two forms: material reality and consciousness. Consequently, the stuff of creation possesses an implicate or enfolded order that is consciousness. Theological reflection upon this hypothesis suggests that God is present in his creation supremely as one to be known. If we are related to the living God our initial realization of this relationship is in the form of knowledge.

Coming to knowledge, awakening, and illumination are all words or phrases that indicate ourselves as passive recipients. Spirituality is not

acquisitive. This is why, in one sense, it is not something we “do.” There is nothing that we can possess by “being spiritual.” It is receptivity, a waiting, a trusting. Whatever knowledge may come does so as a given, over which we have no power or control. It is not a form of problem solving, which is why some may think of it as antithetical to social action. The reason for this passivity is that we have no leverage on the knowledge. We cannot get behind it to grasp it; we have to be open and wait for it. But it is an active passivity, by which I mean that we actually seek to allow the possibility of God’s illumination of our heart and minds.

We are aware of the divine energy in perceiving new knowledge. This is what John of the Cross (1542–1591) means when he says that the Word of God is the effect upon the soul. The soul possesses, of course, the mind or what I have described as the capability for the un-contingent process of knowing. When we know God, when the relationship with the transcendent is occurring, the perceivable effect is a heightened or expanded consciousness. In this sense God speaks and we hear his Word.

This approach follows from the understanding that spirituality is rooted in the dynamic of knowing and being known. The participation of the finite subject in the infinite God is in terms of the process of coming into knowledge. But the awareness of that process means it must become incarnate; it must be the form of concrete knowledge, however that may manifest itself. This is analogous to the creative process, which is not recognizable except in works of art, music, sculpture, poetry, and the like. Of course, just as the profundity of the creative process is measured by the quality of what it creates, so is our spirituality evaluated by the quality of the awareness that arises.

Fourth, this leads to the substance of that knowledge and the fact that it is always historical. By “historical” is meant that the shape of the content of knowledge is a function of a particular time and place. The Old Testament notion of God, for example, reflects the memory and language of the Hebrew people. The task of Paul was to translate the preaching of Jesus into the culture of the Roman Empire. This inevitably and appropriately gave our knowledge of God revealed in Christ a distinctive shape.

Generally speaking, Baptists do not have visions of the Blessed Virgin, Norwegians do not think of Christ as black, and Muslims do not quote Buddha. We frame our experience of God in those representations that are not only available to us, but particularly deeply ingrained in our memory. The deeper we draw from our memory the greater the power of our knowledge. If I can evoke the Christ of my childhood to help me understand God’s presence, it will have far more impact on my life than what I may read about Christ in the latest book.

All this has a great deal to say, of course, about the understanding of spirituality in general in relation to specifically Christian spirituality. God transcends history. He is not in himself a Jew or Christian, any more than he is male or female. The God revealed in Christ is not, as he is to himself, a first-century Jew. The truth that the Christian holds as distinct from

other forms of spirituality lies beyond the historical manifestation of God in Christ. For example, God is personal, loving, and forgiving. Even those concepts have a historical quality but certainly reach beyond a temporal and geographical provincialism.

A distinction of Christian spirituality is its willingness to affirm the historical nature of the knowledge of God as something positive. The belief in the Incarnation frees the Christian from the attempt to escape history. There is in Christianity the scandal of particularity, a catch phrase that calls to mind that the identification of God in a moment in history is an invitation to see God in all history. In the historical Jesus we have that supreme moment, the proleptic event of universal history; but it is still history. Human beings are spiritual creatures, therefore, who realize their spirituality in a historical setting.

Fifth, the making of decisions and the action that grows out of those decisions is a product of the knowledge to which we have come. One cannot play tennis unless he first knows there is a game of tennis and is familiar with its rules. A person cannot travel from New York to San Francisco unless she first knows there is a San Francisco and where it lies in relation to New York.

Every action, by which I mean anything we do in which we have a degree of choice (salvation is not an action but a reaction; writing this book is an action), is a projection into the future of what we know about the world. If in the spiritual quest it is true that God expands our consciousness and we know as we did not know before, then inevitably it shows itself in our actions. This is why it is contradictory to say that authentic spirituality is an escape from social action, if in truth God intends that his Kingdom come on this earth as it is in heaven.

For this reason a prophet is a mystic in action. His vision of what should be, if it is of God, can only come from God. It is our spiritual nature that enables us to see and know the world as it is in God's mind and as he intended it to be. Therefore, the fulfillment of a person's spirituality is measured by his or her action on behalf of the Kingdom. By their fruits, Jesus told us, we shall know them.

Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556), the father of modern spiritual theology, speaks to this fifth point. He explains that the purpose of contemplation is to attain the love of God, and then calls attention to two points:

1. Love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than in words.
2. Love consists in the mutual sharing of goods, for example, the lover gives and shares with the beloved what he possesses, or something of that which he is able to give; and vice versa, the beloved shares with the lover. Hence, if one has knowledge, he shares it with the one who does not possess it; and so also if one has honors, or riches. Thus, one always gives to the other.

[Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, (trans. Louis J. Puhl, SJ), 230–31.]



Spiritual theology is, therefore, logically prior to moral theology. Yet it is also a consequence of a moral conversion, the willingness to ask questions of value and to be open to a transcendent vision of the world.

### Prayer as Spiritual Action

Prayer is often used as a synonym for spirituality. People who ask how your spirituality is mean to inquire about the state of your prayer life. It is necessary for this discussion to make a distinction between prayer and spirituality, to define prayer, and to explore kinds of prayer. There is no final authority to which to appeal in arriving at these distinctions. They must be drawn selectively from the tradition and our contemporary experience.

In my judgment prayer is to spirituality as eating is to hunger. Spirituality is an inner disposition toward a relation with him who transcends the appearances, and prayer is the action this begets. We pray because we are spiritual beings. Those people who do not pray are not “aspiritual”; they choose not to exercise their spirituality and could be said to be spiritually undernourished.

In turn, the desire for God is fed by the act of prayer. We become aware of our spiritual selves as we actively seek to enter into relationship with God. It is like someone who has not eaten for a long time. She may remark after her first bite or two that she did not know how hungry she was until she started to eat. In a similar vein, another may remark that he did not know how much he longed for his wife until he experienced their marriage. Prayer awakens our spirituality.

But this is not to say what prayer is. Our understanding of the meaning of prayer has very much to do with our understanding of God. The New Testament common verbs for prayer, *euchomai* and more especially *proseuchomai*, mean to pray as to wish for something. The implication is that God is the source of what we might desire and prayer consists largely of a “wish list.” Such an understanding of prayer raises all kinds of questions about God, if we understand him as he who foreordains all things and knows all that shall come to pass. It is as if one prayed each day for the sun to rise the next. It is almost presumptuous, unless we assume that God chooses for the sun to rise each day by some capricious whim.

Prayer obviously means more than filing our wishes with God. In his treatise *On Prayer*, Origen, one of the greatest minds of the early church, struggles with this question. He believes that to be rational, we have to be free to make choices, but the freedom of humankind operates at a different level than the providence of God. One might say he defines God’s providence as the divine vision for his creation. God is no capricious deity and prayer is more than the uplifting of a wish list to him. It is in prayer that the freedom of humankind meets the vision of God. In this act of meeting, humanity is drawn up into the divine purpose. One priest with whom I spoke said, “Prayer is a part of myself and the way I relate to things around me.” This points to prayer as a way of seeing creation with God as our eyes.

Prayer is the movement of God to humanity and humanity to God, the act of meeting. It is no less nor is it anything different from that. In whatever manner this meeting is realized it is an act of prayer. In other words, prayer is communication within the relationship between humankind and God and flows both ways. Benedict of Nursia (c.480–550), in his reform of the religious life of the Western church, sought to dignify manual labor as worthy of the monk. He pointed out that to labor is to pray. This makes sense of Paul's injunction that we pray without ceasing (I Thess. 5:17), for it vastly broadens the context of relationship with God. Prayer is the act of making whatever we do a cause for meeting and knowing God.

Clearly prayer in this sense has as its primary goal not the favorable reply to our requests but the establishment of a relationship. We miss the point of those passages in the Gospels that assure us of the power of prayer if we do not see that they point first of all to the relationship that the follower of Christ has with God. Luke writes, "Even if he will not provide for him out of friendship, the very shamelessness of the request will make him get up and give him all he needs" (Luke 11:8).<sup>20</sup> But God is not only our friend, Luke tells us, he is to us as a loving father. He will give us his Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13): God present, disclosing himself to us and fulfilling our inchoate longing for him.

Not all forms of prayer, however, are the same. For centuries there have been efforts to distinguish different ways in which we pray, if for no other reason than to provide some standard by which to examine our own prayer life. Traditionally the distinction has been made between mental prayer and vocal prayer. The difference here lies in the focused articulation of words, sentences, and paragraphs directed toward God as opposed to the absence of such focus. A meditation on the Annunciation would be mental prayer. A prayer for the return of Aunt Susie's health would be vocal prayer.

It is better to distinguish forms of prayer by a less mechanical means that would allow for a less arbitrary or artificial division. I would suggest that the different kinds of prayer fall along a continuum of focused intentionality on the part of the person who prays. At one end of this continuum is prayer that intends to intend nothing at all; at the other end of the continuum there is prayer that intends a specific answer from God, for example, the healing of Aunt Susie, the safe return from a journey, the forgiveness of our sins.

It is apparent that as persons mature spiritually their prayers move from a more to a less focused intentionality. Classically this has been described as a movement toward contemplation and union with God. Richard of St. Victor defines contemplation as "the free, more penetrating gaze of a mind, suspended with wonder concerning manifestations of wisdom." There is nothing so extraordinary in what he means. An analogy might be the quiet communion that can take place between persons in a close, longstanding marriage. For example, my youngest child has, since his older siblings left

20. Holmes quotes from the New English Bible.

home, complained of the silence in our home. My wife and I sometimes sit or drive together, saying nothing for hours. Our son will interrupt when he can bear it no longer and ask if we are angry with one another. When we reply in the negative, he then asks what we were thinking about. Often we have to say, “Nothing.” Yet there is a specific desire to be with one another and the quality of silence together is indeed different from the quality of silence alone.

There are forms of prayer that have as their purpose the inducement of this state. They work on the principle that by means of simplicity and repetition the mind is emptied of worldly concerns and becomes open to the transcendent Word. The Jesus prayer—“Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior, have mercy upon me”—repeated over and over in rhythm with our breathing is an example. It has an honored history of over fifteen hundred years, but it is only one example of a genre of prayer, both Christian and non-Christian, that has the purpose of enabling us to intend nothing at all in the act of prayer. Any such prayer whose purpose is to empty the mind of images is called apophatic prayer.

Physical exercise, manual labor or jogging, for example, can also have an apophatic effect in prayer. There is an unfocused openness that can occur in this kind of activity that, when we consciously direct the experience, can allow for an awareness of God’s presence to emerge. The same thing can happen in any routine task, such as driving on an interstate highway, that engages the more automatic level of consciousness and leaves the higher brain functions relatively free.

Prayer that lies at the less focused end of the continuum is in a listening mode. The aim is not to tell God what we wish, much less to inform him of the weather, world events, or of the little crises at home. In that curious mixture of sensory metaphors common to spiritual theology, we listen that we might see. A spiritual friend of mine describes sitting on a high place in a field and listening to the wind until it forms an image in her mind. This is a way of saying that prayer for her is an imaginative attending to what is beyond mere sense data.

Contemplation is not the same thing as meditation. Meditation is more focused in its intention than contemplation, although it still seeks to listen. The early Benedictines spoke of the *lectio divina*, “divine reading.” There is nothing esoteric about this. What they meant was that we ought to read the Scriptures and books of spiritual merit in a slow and deliberate fashion, chewing over each sentence and paragraph for whatever message may be there. Later a whole methodology of meditation was built upon this and made popular by Ignatius Loyola and, even more, by the French spiritual masters of the seventeenth century such as Francis de Sales (1567–1622) and Jean-Jacques Olier (1608–1657).

Meditation that customarily draws upon scriptural imagery to be a “carrier” of the divine message in prayer is a kataphatic form of prayer. By this I mean that it requires an overt and imaginative retention of certain images. The one who prays plays with them, much as one might play with a kalei-



doscope. There is no expectation of a given pattern that might emerge, but attention is paid to whatever pattern appears. It becomes a source of spiritual listening in order, to mix the metaphor one more, that one might see.

A number of the clergy interviewed in this research center their prayer in a meditative reading of Scripture.<sup>21</sup> Certainly this conforms to the Reformation principle that if the individual comes to the Bible prayerfully, the Holy Spirit will illumine his or her understanding of what is read. There is nothing so formal as the principles of Jesuit or French methodology, but the intent is very much the same.

At the more focused end of the continuum of prayer is what has customarily been called verbal prayer. The Lord's Prayer is verbal prayer, as are the *Gloria in excelsis* and the Hail Mary. The one who prays is telling God what he or she has in mind. Such prayer has been divided into a number of classes of telling and these in themselves are of varying focus. For our purposes here, moving from the lesser to greater focus, I will list five classes of prayer: adoration, thanksgiving, confession, intercession, and petition.

*Adoration* is an act of love and praise. It is like telling a spouse, "You are the most wonderful man (or woman) in the world." It is akin to a football cheer. Obviously, what we expect in return is a like feeling. *Thanksgiving* is a recognition of the source of our blessings, and *confession* is an awareness of our failure to love as we claim to love. These three classes of prayer are clearly relational in nature and differ from contemplation and meditation only in the concerted activity of the one who would pray.

*Intercession* and *petition* are different. They have an end result in mind. It is in reference to such prayer that we struggle with the issue of "unanswered prayer." The great amount of energy spent on the problem of intercession and petition is symptomatic of a failure to appreciate the vast continuum of prayer and its fundamental goal of relationship with God. While there is no doubt some legitimacy to the problem of unanswered prayer in general, most effort has been expended on it vis-à-vis intercession and petition because of their sharply focused intentionality.

Many years ago I was listening to a radio preacher while driving across the country. He was explaining the cause of unanswered prayer in some very down-home imagery. As he said, the other day he had tried to call his old grandma, and all he got was static on the telephone. He complained to the telephone company, who explained that a cat had climbed the power pole, been electrocuted, and fallen on the telephone lines between him and his grandma. "If we expect our prayer to be answered," he suggested, "we have to get the 'dead cat' off the lines."

There is a sense in which this anecdote is misleading and another in which it is legitimate. The problem of unanswered prayer is not the result of technological failure. Yet prayer is primarily an act of communication that

21. In the Introduction of his book, Holmes described the research project he developed to prepare for the writing of *Spirituality and Ministry*. The reference to interviewing clergy alludes to the research project.

deepens our relationship with God. If we intend too much, want too much, want our own goals and desires too much, these intensions can become the “dead cat” on the lines. We cannot listen and see, because we lack the purity of heart of which Matthew spoke (5:8). Purity of heart is an uncluttered intention to know the will of God. The “dead cats” can be our notions of what ought to be which stand in the way of God’s intentions.

Prayer that is not primarily listening always runs the risk of getting in the way of the ultimate purpose of prayer, a deepened sharing in God’s vision for his world. This is the supreme lesson of Jesus’ prayer on the Mount of Olives: “Father, if it be thy will, take this cup away from me. Yet not my will but thine be done!” (Luke 22:42). In doing God’s will we come into relationship with him, which is the ultimate goal of the spiritual life.

This is undoubtedly the reason why growth in the Spirit involves a movement toward a less focused intentionality in prayer, while not requiring a total abrogation of intercession and petition. The surrender of the ego becomes a very real part of prayer and, perhaps, a reason why prayer itself can be frightening—it is built upon trust.

## Conclusion

The fundamental assumption of this study is that God created human beings with the capacity for relationship with himself. Spirituality is a disposition and a potentiality for that relationship. It is not a part or piece of humanity, it is a character that cuts through the totality of the human, involving all of the individual; but it points to a particular posture of the person, which is distinguishable from emotional well-being, physical health, or intellectual activity. The key to spirituality is the awareness of a transcendent gift of knowledge.

Whereas spirituality needs to be understood specifically and experientially, prayer requires a broader definition than we often give it. It is the intentional act of entering into a relationship with God. That intention does not have to be focused, however, in any specific way. The key to prayer is the conscious direction of the self to the subject that lies behind and beyond the world as it appears.

In Christian prayer the conscious intention has within it certain symbols, principally the symbol of Christ. This is what it means to pray in the name of Jesus. The manner of our reaching out to God is moved and shaped by our image of our Lord and the infusion of God’s Word within our consciousness is substantially Christ like.



## Focus

Note terms that are new to you, especially the names for different ways of categorizing forms of prayer.

Note how Holmes's work defines spirituality and how prayer is understood within the framework of spirituality.

### Respond

Consider how Holmes's presentation illuminates your own understanding of spirituality and prayer.

What experiences have you had that parallel those of the earliest Christians? What stands out in contrast?

Which of the forms of prayer Holmes identifies do you use most often?

### Practice<sup>22</sup>

Our personal prayer life, the worship life of an EfM group, and the liturgy at church reflect our theology. What we think or pray, however, is best reflected in what we do, how we behave, and how we relate to one another and to God. Some maintain that what we pray is what we do. Our work is our prayer and our prayer reflects our theology.

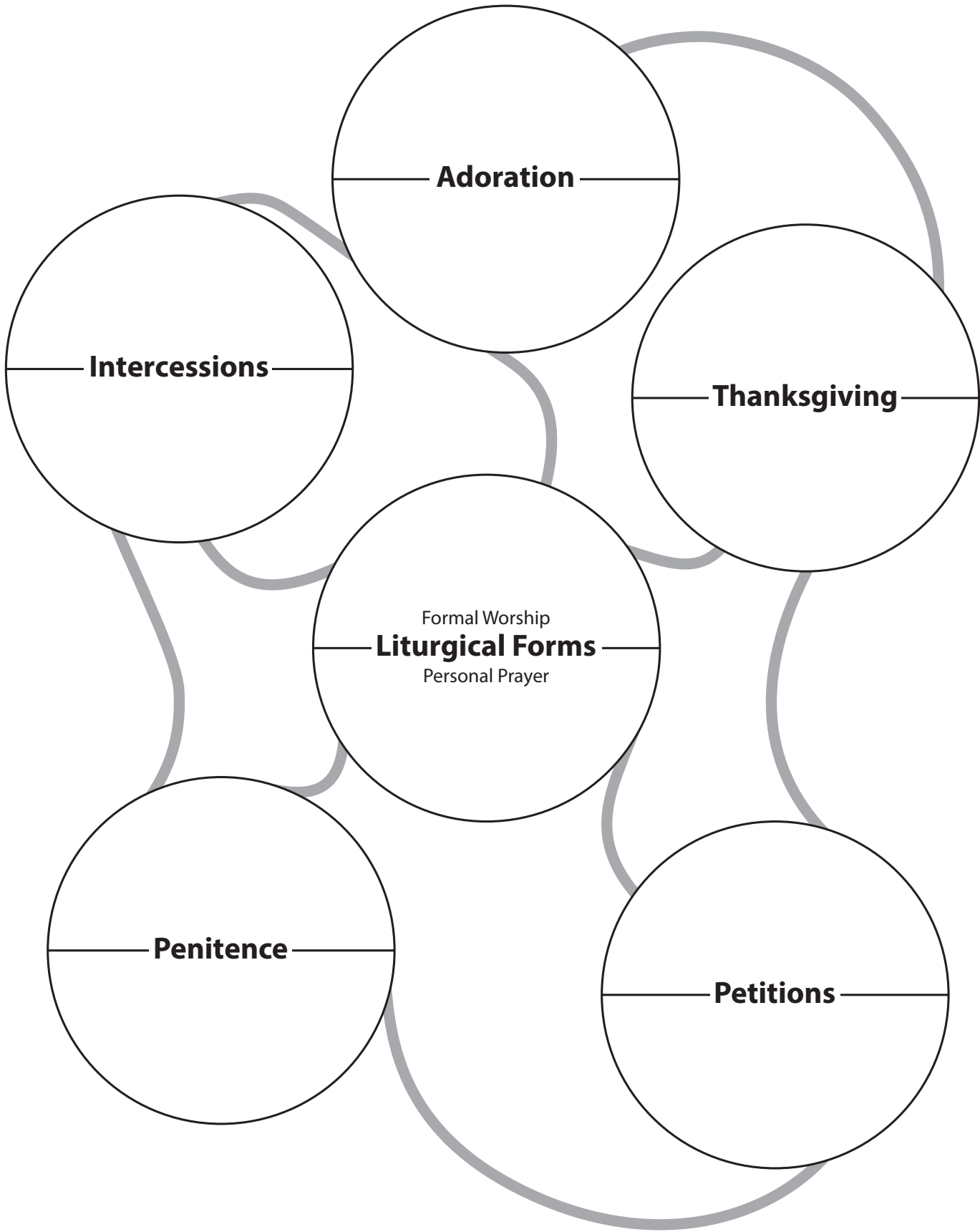
Tradition suggests that there are five basic forms of prayer: petitions, intercessions, penitence, thanksgiving, and adoration. Personal and public worship fall into these five forms.

How you understand and use these forms of prayer can illuminate your theological point of view, something that can be examined not only through reflection on your personal life of prayer, but also that of your learning community, your EfM group.

**One suggestion:** You (or your group) can use the graphic below to examine these forms of prayer in both formal worship (liturgy) and personal prayer. Write an example from formal worship in the top half of the circle, and an example from personal worship in the bottom half. Compare and contrast. What theology (understanding of God) is reflected in this prayer? What position (personal belief) is reflected in this prayer? What cultural or social need does this prayer meet or address? What influence of my cultural context do I find evidence of in this prayer? Note any observations you have about how the different types of prayer relate to each other. Note any observations you have about differences between personal prayer and public (formal) worship.

Sometimes faith and prayers are in contradiction. For example: If you believe that God has given you freedom and you pray for God to intercede and change your life or those of others, does that suggest that you also believe that God will take your freedom, if so moved? If you pray for forgiveness, does this not suggest that you believe in a creation where forgiveness is possible? Consider any disconnect you find in the theology in the prayer and the theology you profess.

22. Adapted from EfM Common Lessons and Supporting Materials (2005), pages 4-3-1 to 4-3-4.



**Another suggestion:** When you arrive at the end of a theological reflection, in place of seeking insights and implications, write what you have learned in terms of the five basic forms of prayer that will provide a format in which to gather your thoughts and give them a liturgical expression.

One way to put your reflections in the form of a prayer or collect is to use the following format:

In our reflection

God is . . . ;

The world is . . . ;

We ask for . . . (petition)

We ask for . . . on behalf of . . . (intercession)

We confess . . . (penitence)

We give thanks for . . . (thanksgiving)

We come together in awe and wonder at . . . (adoration)

So that . . . ;

In the name of . . . .

The prayer will act as a closure for your reflection. You may want to keep a record of these prayers. They may show your discoveries, your concerns, and your hopes for your own ministry. It can also be a way of meeting the responsibilities inherent in your prayers so that prayer and action truly can be part of a continuum. This also works well for group theological reflection.

# Week Seventeen

## YEAR ONE

### Read

1 Samuel  
2 Samuel  
Collins, Chapter 11, “1 Samuel,” and Chapter 12, “2 Samuel”

*Note: Next week there also will be substantial reading.*

### Focus

First and Second Samuel paint a sweeping picture of the formation of the Jewish faith. Identify ideas, images, and actions that were vital to that faith community’s spiritual life.

Create a chart in three columns that identifies concerns at the time of Samuel—concerns of Samuel, of the religious community, of the political constituent.

Describe Samuel’s relationship with God.

## YEARTWO

### Read

Powell, Chapter 10, “New Testament Letters,” and Chapter 11, “Paul”  
Hyperlinks 10.1–10.4 at [www.IntroducingNT.com](http://www.IntroducingNT.com)

### Focus

Terms and names to note: Pastoral Epistles; Prison Letters; Catholic Epistles; *cuneiform*; *ostraca*; *papyrus*; *amanuensis*; structure of epistles; Gamaliel; chiasm; pseudepigraphy; Muratorian fragment; gospel (*euangelion*); Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension; life after death; being made right with God (justification); new age of God; nature of Jesus

Using the material in Powell’s Chapter 11, construct a first-person spiritual autobiography of Paul’s life. For example, identify ten to twelve events that cover his entire life, for example, “I was born and raised as a member of the people of Israel within the tribe of Benjamin”; “I lived as a Pharisee observing the Jewish law”; “I studied and the feet of Gamaliel.” Read through the events of Paul’s life to get a sense of the flow of his life as a whole.

Note the context(s) of Paul’s ministry and how different experiences shaped his spirituality—how he prayed and worshiped; revelations and/or visions he reported; and other experiences that formed his relationship with God.

## YEAR THREE

**Read**

MacCulloch, Chapter 11, “The West: Universal Emperor or Universal Pope”

**Focus**

Terms and names to note: Monastic revival in England; Cluny Abby’s legacy, especially noting the agrarian economy, pilgrimage piety, origin of purgatory, and the Peace of God movement; universal monarchy; marriage as sacrament; rise of papacy—from Vicar of Peter to Vicar of Christ; clerical celibacy; dividing lay and clergy

Describe the growth struggles of the church in the West during this historical period.

What were the costs and promises of separating lay and clergy?

## YEAR FOUR

**Read**

McIntosh, Chapter 1, “Mysteries of Faith,” and Chapter 2, “The New Encounter with God: The Mystery of the Trinity”

**Focus**

Terms and names to note: mystery and meaning; three moments on the theological journey; Logos; habitus; communion; Trinity as mutual relationships; the *relationality* of God; becoming a person; Trinity vs. “tri-theist”; mutuality vs. subordination; mathematical vs. organic unity; interdependence; Herbert McCabe; Simone Weil; Elizabeth Johnson

Looking back over your life, when and where have you been aware that God is speaking? How are you cultivating a habit of theology? In what ways can you see your developing theology as a conversation with God? What is the relationship between your theology and your prayer life?

What role has Christian community played in your spiritual life? How have liturgy and sacraments shaped your identity as a person who seeks to live faithfully?



## ALL YEARS

**Respond**

Ministry is supported and undergirded by our spirituality, that is, by our relationships with God, with people we encounter, and with the world we inhabit. Compare your own spirituality with the way that people (or the author) in your lesson appear to understand their relationships with God,

others, and the created world. Do they understand God as active in or removed from the world, as vindictive or caring toward all creation? Where do you find evidence for your assertion?

Describe how participating in prayer and worship influences your ministry.

### **Practice**

In the essay introducing this unit (Week Sixteen), Holmes offers five features for a generic and experiential definition of spirituality. The first feature he explores is the capacity for relationship: “Spirituality is our openness to relationship, which is a universal capacity involving the whole person.”

Use the four movements of EfM theological reflection to guide you in reflecting on spirituality and ministry in your life.

### **Identify**

Consider the various contexts of your life, e.g., work, friends, family, times of leisure, study, physical life. How have you experienced being open to relationship within those various contexts and other contexts you might name?

### **Explore**

What metaphor or image expresses what it is like to be open to relationship in any of those contexts? What questions do you have for the image-world? What questions explore the “snapshot” from the standpoints of sin, judgment, repentance, or redemption?

### **Connect**

Make connections between the image and our Christian tradition; our society or the culture we inhabit; and personal values or beliefs about openness to relationship. Write belief/value statements.

### **Apply**

In terms of openness to relationship, what do you see that you have not seen before? What contributes to and has implications for ministry in your daily life and for developing a spirituality that sustains and supports you in that ministry?



# Week Eighteen

## YEAR ONE

### Read

1 Kings

2 Kings

Collins, Chapter 13, “1 Kings 1–16: Solomon and the Divided Monarchy,” and Chapter 14, “1 Kings 17–2 Kings 25: Tales of Prophets and the End of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah”

### Focus

Prophets speak God’s truth and frequently have the most to lose. Difficulties arise when prophetic voices do not agree on what the “truth” is. Possible responses to uncertainty are to wait to see which choice leads to the most life-giving outcome, to decide what is correct for one personally and act accordingly, or to view the variations as each addressing something of truth.

How do you discern truth in the midst of uncertainty?

## YEAR TWO

### Read

The Letter to the Romans

### Focus

The letter to the Romans likely contains verses you know as familiar quotations. Note any changes in your perception of the meaning of these familiar verses when read in their context.

How is the letter structured? Name the key aspects of the case Paul builds in the letter.

## YEAR THREE

### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 12, “A Church for All People?”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: Waldensians; *scholae* educational method; Peter Abelard’s *Theologia Christiana*; Dominic and Dominicans (Blackfriars); Francis, Franciscans, and Francis’ *Testament*; Carmelites; Fourth Lateran Council; transubstantiation (Real Presence); Thomas Aquinas; *Summa Theologiae*

(Sum Total of Theology); Anselm; Abelard; Hildegard of Bingen; *The Cloud of Unknowing*; Meister Eckhart; Bridget of Sweden; Catherine of Siena

Consider how mysticism and other spiritual movements of this period were responses to prevailing contexts in society and the church.

## YEAR FOUR

### Read

McIntosh, Chapter 3, “Splendor of God: The Mystery of Creation,” and Chapter 4, “The Voice of God: The Mystery of Revelation”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: to be something vs. to be; “creation out of nothing”; revelation through the Books of Nature and Scripture; concern for certainty; early modern scientific approach to knowing; Jesus as God’s revelation; church as the eucharistic Body of the Word; Thomas Aquinas; Hadewijch of Brabant; Dorothy Sayers; Thomas Traherne; William Temple; William of Ockham; Francis Bacon; René Descartes; Austin Farrer; Richard Hooker; Hans Frei

What is the relationship between God’s revelation and personal transformation?

How can knowing God come through practice?



## ALL YEARS

### Respond

Each generation inherits social, political, economic, and technological arrangements that are intended to work for the common good. Whenever these patterns no longer serve individual and corporate needs, times are ripe for change. In unsettling times, reformation of fundamental thought and social patterns can occur. A “re-formation” creates something new out of that which has grown ineffectual, obsolete, and unfruitful.

In one way or another, readings assigned for this session deal with a reshaping of conventional patterns. Reformation can be a response to dynastic, scientific, political, and economic changes, or movements that reinterpret long accepted theological understandings. What re-formations, great or small, do you find in your assigned reading?

What re-formations have you experienced in your lifetime? In what ways do the re-formations in your reading and those of your own experience impact your ministry and daily living as a faithful person?

**Practice**

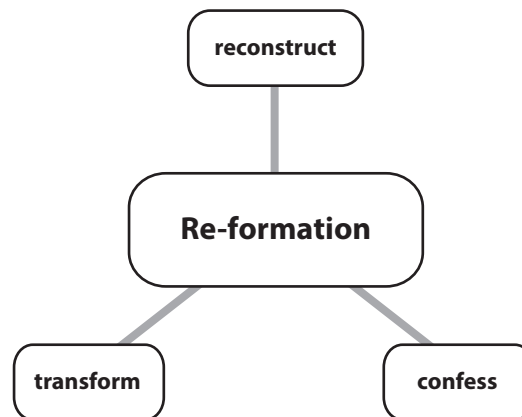
This theological reflection begins with the construction of a mind map, a tool for a brainstorming-style process sometimes referred to as radiant thinking, a way of describing connecting thoughts around a central theme. A quick Internet search provides information on and myriad examples of “mind-mapping” or “radiant thinking.”<sup>23</sup>

Using a mind map to begin a theological reflection can facilitate seeing connections between what you are learning in EfM and your ministry in the world. A mind map can begin with a word or image from any of the four sources. In this case, since the word and its initial associations are drawn from the assigned readings, the source is the Christian tradition.

**THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION BEGINNING WITH A MIND MAP (TRADITION SOURCE)**

**Identify** a focus:

Construct a mind map with the centering theme “re-formation,” placed in the center of a sheet of paper. As you make associations from your assigned reading over the past few weeks, write those associations around the theme and draw a line between the theme and each association. The figure below is an example. Your associations may be anything you choose.



Additional levels of associations will radiate out. Straight lines are not required. Using different colors, drawing images, and forming metaphors in addition to the words will enhance the creative process of the mind map.

After making several levels of associations, study the entire map and select one metaphor or image to explore.

23. <http://www.tonybuzan.com/about/mind-mapping/> is one link to Tony Buzan’s work with mind-mapping. There are many others.

**Explore** the world of the metaphor/image:

Identify a specific point from which to explore the chosen image. For example, if the image is “Jumping into an Abyss,” then be sure to explore the image from a specific standpoint such as the person jumping into the abyss. Do not shift to other possible standpoints such as observing someone jump into the abyss or leading someone to the edge of an abyss. It is important not to shift the focus if the reflection is to process smoothly.

Develop two or three theological perspective questions and explore the image through those perspectives. For example, what questions would explore the destructive dimensions of the image (Sin)? What questions would explore the nature of the world of the metaphor-image (Creation)? What questions help to bring in the Judgment dimensions of the metaphor? Or the Repentance and/or Redemption perspectives? *For example, what would cause someone to reconsider jumping into an abyss?*

**Connect** with other areas of life:

Begin connecting with your life by briefly stating when you experienced the world depicted in the image/metaphor. Remember to work from the standpoint previously identified. *For example, when have you metaphorically jumped into an abyss?*

Connect with contemporary culture and society. *For example, what recent stories in the news remind you of jumping into an abyss?*

Bring in your personal beliefs. What do you believe? What do you hold to be true? *For example, for what are you willing to risk metaphorically jumping into an abyss?*

**Apply** to your life going forward:

Notice how what you learn from the reflection applies to your life. *For example, what light does this reflection shed on how you engage opportunities for ministry?*

# Week Nineteen

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Amos  
Hosea  
Collins, Chapter 15, “Amos and Hosea”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: prophecy; royal archives of Mari; the essence of prophecy; focus of Amos’s prophecy; Amos’s themes of social justice and of condemnation of the cult; the day of the Lord; metaphor of marriage to a promiscuous woman; Gomer; two crucial differences between Amos and Hosea’s messages; Hosea’s basic critique

What contemporary prophetic statements like those of Amos or Hosea can you identify?

What themes or images in Amos and Hosea do you find troubling or challenging?

## YEAR TWO

### Read

Powell, Chapter 12, “Romans”

### Focus

For Western Christianity, the Pauline teaching on justification, being in right relationship with God, is highly influential and formative. Which model or combination of Powell’s “Models for Understanding Justification” best clarify the “justification issue” for you?

## YEAR THREE

### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 13, “Faith in a New Rome”

### Focus

Describe three or four characteristics of Orthodoxy.

Name distinctive qualities of Byzantine spirituality.

Name one or two reasons that understanding the iconoclastic controversy is important to you as you live in today’s world.

In a nutshell, describe Photios's missionary strategy and the significance for Christianity in the twenty-first century.

## YEAR FOUR

### Read

McIntosh, Chapter 5, "The Humanity of God"

### Focus

Terms and names to note: Incarnation; desire; God and humanity are not mutually exclusive; objections to the idea of incarnation; Chalcedonian Definition; "person"; John Neville Figgis; Frederick Dennison Maurice; Charles Gore; Michael Ramsey; John Henry Newman

McIntosh says that transformation is painful because of distorted desire. How do you respond to that assertion?

What is your understanding of Incarnation? What in McIntosh's chapter surprised, challenged, or encouraged you?



## ALL YEARS

### Respond

"God Save the Queen!" or "God Bless America!" or "Long Live (You Name It)!" What is meant by such statements? Is it a prayer, a hope, a conviction, a battle cry? The act of blessing, to borrow a phrase from David Ford and Daniel Hardy, "needs to be rescued from the magical and superstitious associations it has gathered." Such a rescue operation often begins with clarifying definitions and etymological investigations. Ford and Hardy provided such when they wrote:

There is a comprehensive biblical term for the powerful yet respectful interaction between God and the world, in which the world is enhanced at all levels. It is that of "blessing." In being blessed a person, animal, plant, situation or thing is affirmed by God in the way most appropriate to its nature and future. There is no manipulation, but a combination of discernment and active enabling. "God rules creation by blessing," said the Jewish rabbis of the time of Jesus.

Blessing is the comprehensive praise and thanks that returns all reality to God, and so lets all be taken up into the fulfillment of creation. For the rabbis of Jesus' time, to use anything of creation without blessing God was to rob God. Only the person receiving with thanks really received from God, and if there is one summary expression of Jewish response to God it is the blessing of the divine name, which represents God's whole being. Jesus was in this

tradition, and himself blessed God, food, children, and disciples. His whole work is summed up in Acts having been sent to bless, completing the history of the blessing of Israel through Abraham (Acts 3:25f). Jesus is seen as the concentration of the mutuality of blessing, God blessing people and people blessing God. This is the dynamic of both creation and reconciliation.<sup>24</sup>

Blessing occurs within the radical specifics of one's situation. For someone imagining the social, cultural, and intellectual contexts of a bygone era, the risk is always to rush to judgment, thereby projecting current mores onto the lives of people of the past. Notice how the people you read about this week understood blessing and how their understanding shaped praying. How, if at all, was God active in their lives as One who blesses?

### Practice

#### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION BEGINNING WITH A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Reflect theologically on how you have experienced blessing in your life.

##### **Identify** a focus:

Recall how you have experienced and participated in blessing food, children, friends, crosses, pets, or God.

Notice what threads of commonality are present in the variety of experiences and list them for yourself.

Select one of the identified threads or themes to focus the reflection.

##### **Explore** the focus:

Develop questions to explore the world of the theme. For example, what kind of world is assumed?

How is God present (or not) in that world?

Question the view of humanity assumed or actively present. Examine what unexpected influences are present.

##### **Connect** to other sources:

What stories from the biblical and historical heritage of Christians come to mind?

Identify what from society/contemporary culture connects with the reflection.

Express what beliefs, values, and/or positions you hold about the focus of the reflection.

24. David F. Ford and Daniel W. Hardy, *Living in Praise: Worshipping and Knowing God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 102–103.

**Apply** what is learned to daily life:

Once a person takes a stance or affirms a position, implications for ministry begin to emerge.

What possibilities do you see for your ministry as you live day to day?

Close by composing a prayer adapting the structure of Jewish prayers:

Blessed are you, O Lord God, (describe God's nature),

for you (describe the works of God)

and make us (describe our response to God)

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



# Week Twenty

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Micah  
Isaiah 1–39  
Excerpt on Micah, pages 229–232 in Part II of the Reading and Reflection Guide  
Collins, Chapter 16, “Isaiah”

### Focus

Micah and First Isaiah contain familiar and often-quoted passages. Identify key verses from both prophets that speak to prayer and worship.

## YEAR TWO

### Read

1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians  
Powell, Chapter 13, “1 Corinthians,” and Chapter 14, “2 Corinthians”

### Focus

What is the context of the letters to the Corinthians?  
Paul addresses a number of issues he has heard about the church in Corinth. What does he say about the spiritual life, prayer, worship, and faithful living?

## YEAR THREE

### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 14, “Orthodoxy: More Than an Empire”

### Focus

MacCulloch uses a sweep of eight centuries of history to show how Orthodoxy became more than an empire’s religion. Describe the profile of Orthodoxy that comes through to you from the chapter. What key figures, ideas, and events contributed to what Orthodoxy became?

## YEAR FOUR

### Read

McIntosh, Chapter 6, “The Glory of Humanity: The Mystery of Salvation”

**Focus**

Terms and names to note: the nature of evil; baptismal renunciations; Orthodox and feminist critiques of Jesus suffering to appease God's wrath; Thomas Hobbes; Peter Abelard; *Christos Yannaras*; William Temple

McIntosh asks, what do we need to be saved from? How do you respond?

What is your understanding of sin? What is your understanding of salvation? From what sources do you draw in forming your position on these key topics in theology?

**ALL YEARS****Respond**

Work and worship live in a symbiotic relationship. The Greek word for worship—*leitourgia* (let-oor-YEE-ah)—means a work of the people done on behalf of all. Worship (that is, liturgy) expresses the ultimate significance of the meaningful action a person takes on from day to day. While “work” in common usage today often refers to income-producing activity, a deeper understanding incorporates any activity done creatively. The work of parenting, hosting a party, creating a painting, caring for the needs of a loved one are all activities performed out of a deep sense of meaning. They matter because work shapes personal identity; builds a sense of belonging; contributes to the community; and draws the person beyond self interest alone, to become “mindful of the needs of others.”

Basic human yearnings for intimacy, belonging, contributing, and transcendence motivate work. What work do the people in your readings engage in? What values underlie their work?

State four or five values held by the people in your assigned reading. Reflect on how those values might have shaped worship.

Examine the values that underlie your own work, paid and unpaid. How are those values reflected in your own acts of worship?

**Practice**

In English, “worth” (in the sense of value) is closely related to worship. Worship is the response given to someone or something that is worthy of reverence, honor, and praise. Work—in the sense of meaningful action—is done out of a sense of worth. As a way to develop a connection between your meaningful work and your worship, use the worksheet “An Individual Theological Reflection Process” to reflect theologically on a specific work. For example, it might involve an incident from your income-producing activity. It might be the creation of a special meal. The sole criterion for selection is that it involves meaningful activity.

## Theological Reflection Beginning with a Personal Experience

### IDENTIFY A FOCUS

### RESPONSES

#### Write a brief description of an incident for reflection.

For this reflection, use something related to “work” in a broad sense. Recording the experience aids in making the identification specific and concrete. Use the criteria of “a piece of your life story which challenged your feelings, values, or way of looking at things.”

*For instance: Describe one specific incident of parenting, or income-producing work, or hobby. The criterion is that the incident matter to you.*

#### List the shifts in action in the incident you chose, and choose one shift for the focus.

“Shifts in action” can be physical, emotional, or cognitive movement. Conscious decisions as well as spontaneous responses are listed. Look over your list and choose one. Any of the shifts will serve as a point of departure. Therefore, choose one that holds a certain interest for you.

*Example: A work-incident of creating a garden that was raided by deer might have shifts such as:*

- *I walked out to enjoy coffee in my garden.*
- *I saw most of the plants eaten down to the ground.*
- *I saw deer prints.*
- *I sat down and cried.*

*One of the shifts in your incident will have the most energy. Choose that one as the focus.*

**IDENTIFY A FOCUS****RESPONSES****Recapture the feelings and thoughts at the moment of focus.**

List three or four feelings and thoughts you had at the key moment of shift of focus identified above. Often, there is the temptation to project feelings and thoughts into past situations. Recall as accurately as possible what you actually experienced at that moment specifically.

Thoughts*Oh no!**I'm going to set a trap**All that work gone*Feelings*Shock**Anger**Sorrow***Recall another time when you had the same combination of feelings and similar thoughts.**

Identifying another time when you viewed life in the same way is important. Metaphors are generated best by comparing two or more incidents. When you recall a past experience, new insights often occur. Briefly record the similar incident, including any insights and awareness.

*Similar Incident***Create a metaphor.**

Think about both experiences. Allow them to become present again. Consider what they were like. How would you describe them using a single metaphor, image, or simile? List all that come to your mind. Then, choose one to explore further.

*Example: At the moment of seeing the destroyed garden—Possible images/metaphors that capture what it's like in that kind of moment: "I feel like a wrung-out dishcloth"; "I feel like I've been hit in the stomach"; "I feel like a fallen soufflé."*

*What images/metaphors reflect what life is like when you had the thoughts and feeling you identified?*

*Write or draw your metaphor.*

**EXPLORE THE FOCUS****RESPONSES****Explore the “world of the metaphor.”**

Explore or question the metaphor from one or more perspectives such as:

“What is life like in the metaphor?” (CREATION)

“What temptations to destroy are there in the metaphor world?” (SIN)

“What brings those in that image up short, takes their breath away?” (JUDGEMENT)

“What changes would be called for?” (REPENTANCE)

“What would be an occasion for celebration?” (REDEMPTION)

Example: In a world of being hit in the stomach—Creation—what the world/life is like: life is dangerous, needs caution, painful

Sin—what tempts those in this world to be destructive: tempted to seek revenge, to harm in return, to give up because of anger or fear

These are some of the questions that can be used to develop your understanding of the “world of the metaphor.” Don’t attempt to give a full account of each question. When your energy begins to slow, take this as a sign that enough work may have been done. Sometimes insights will occur while exploring the metaphor. Write those down.

**CONNECT TO OTHER SOURCES OF MEANING****RESPONSES****Bring in the Christian Tradition.**

Consider the material that you have been studying as it relates to this reflection. Is there anything from the current reading chapter that comes to mind? Review several of the chapters you have read. Write a few sentences commenting on the part of the TRADITION that connects with the selected metaphor/image.

*What stories from the Bible or hymns or prayers come to mind with this metaphor? Ex.: Where in the Bible would there be accounts where someone might feel/think "It was like being punched in the stomach"?*

*List possible stories and select one. Read it carefully.*

**Compare and contrast the perspectives of the metaphor and of the piece of Christian Tradition.**

Write a short paragraph that compares and contrasts the Christian Tradition with the perspective contained in the "world of the metaphor."

*How is the scripture story or hymn or prayer similar to and different from the metaphor perspectives?*

**Connect to Contemporary Culture/Society and Personal Beliefs.**

What examples are there in our contemporary CULTURE of life being like the metaphor you chose? How is God present in those times?

*Record your responses.*

Include any statements or judgments that represent presently held positions or beliefs. How would you state the "truth of the matter" as you see it in this reflection (POSITION/BELIEF)? What does "the truth of the matter" contribute to the relationship of meaningful work and worship?

**APPLY****RESPONSES****Identify insights and questions.**

Record insights you now have. Do you have any new questions related to the matters that the reflection brought up for you?

*Record your responses.*

**Decide on implications.**

In light of your reflection, what might you do? Are you aware of something you want to change, or study more, or pray about, or talk to someone about? You might want to choose a new way to act out your ministry during the next few days.

# Week Twenty-one

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Jeremiah  
Lamentations  
Collins, Chapter 17, “The Babylonian Era”

### Focus

The prophetic writings that Collins considers this week are full of poetic imagery. Describe how that imagery has contributed to Christian theology and worship.

What beliefs sustained the people of God during the Jeremiah/Lamentations time period as they strove to live spiritually grounded lives?

What vision of wholeness or goodness do Jeremiah and the writer(s) of Lamentations hold up? What sense of brokenness are they responding to?

## YEAR TWO

### Read

Galatians  
Powell, Chapter 15, “Galatians”

### Focus

What does Paul have to say to the Galatians about living faithfully? What does this letter contribute to developing a spirituality that sustains us in service to others?

## YEAR THREE

### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 15, “Russia: The Third Rome”

### Focus

Note the markers of Orthodox spirituality that developed in this period: church architecture; kenotic emphasis on Christ’s example; the Holy Fool; monastic communities; hermits; Rublev’s icon of the Trinity; liturgy; popular piety

Find a color image of Rublev’s icon of the Trinity if you can and try using it as a focus for prayer. Describe your experience.



## YEAR FOUR

**Read**

McIntosh, Chapter 7, “The Drama of the Cosmos”

**Focus**

Terms and names to note: Pentecost; persona; personhood at individual, communal, and cosmic levels; *apostello*; unlocking desire; “re-membered into God’s Body”; the Trinitarian self-giving of God; baptismal moment; eucharistic moment; Augustine; Rowan Williams; Simone Weil; John Polkinghorne; Herbert McCabe

What role has the church played in your spirituality? How is communal life “sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever”? Connect if you can with an experience of this communal life that grounds your spiritual life.



## ALL YEARS

**Respond**

Human ingenuity has created varieties of ways to dispense resources. One way to think about the exchange of necessary resources is through economics. Etymologically, the origin of the word “economy” referred to the management of the household. Over time an economy was the system by which needed and wanted goods were distributed.

In most recent societies, economy is based on money. The currency of the nation measures the value of a specific item. Work, time, and products could all be measured by a cash value. Almost all economic conversation today assumes a monetary economy.

During the Middle Ages of Western Europe, people lived under an economy of inherited privilege. The lord of the land distributed food, shelter, and clothing according to social rank. Society operated on the benevolence of the king who received his rank by divine action. The divine right of kings was an act of God and accepted as God’s way of ordering life. Privilege was extended from God to king and then to whomever the monarch so desired. Another economic system moved goods through negotiated bartering; cow’s milk was traded for some other produce. The barter system has time-honored roots likely springing from the earliest human communities.

Varieties of economic systems exist simultaneously within any society. Often economies live in peaceful coexistence. A credit-based economy includes money, bartering, and social privilege.

One economy that persists within every society—or so it seems—is the economy of violence. Fear of suffering, destruction, and death fuels the violent economy in which the darker motivations of human nature prevail.

Terror becomes a currency through which power and authority distribute goods and services. Street gangs operate in this economic system. Some households run on the economy of violence. Nations may trade in an economy of fear where suffering, destruction, and death keep order through the threat of warfare.

A systematic deployment of an economy of violence requires participation. Such involvement occurs either overtly or through passive complicity that covertly supports the violent dynamic.

What examples can you find in your reading assignment where the people, issues, and events participate in an economy of violence? Describe how the doctrine of God as Lord can foster an economy of violence.

In addition, consider how prayer, worship (liturgy), and spirituality can address and challenge the destructive qualities of any economy, especially the economy of violence.

### Practice

Theology touches on the whole person—mind, heart, and soul. Theological reflection in community should always have safeguards that provide a supportive, safe environment. Safeguards take the form of commitment to group standards (norms). The following standards are basic to establishing safe space for a reflecting community:

- Participation is voluntary. A person can pass or opt out of the discussion without judgment.
- A person speaks of personal experience or offers personal positions in the first person using the pronoun “I.”
- What a person shares is selected from options (for example, someone might recall several different experiences and knows that only some might be comfortably shared).
- Confidentiality is essential. Anything of a personal nature stays within the group.

Theology done experientially necessitates looking to personal experience as a continual source for God’s self-disclosure. To think theologically about violence requires a method that guides the reflective process with care and precision. The following approach begins by recollecting personal experiences of violence.

Violence here is defined broadly to include more than physical violence. Physical violence is easily identified—for the most part—however, other forms of destructive behavior often are less dramatic and noticeable. Emotional abuse covers a significant range of behavior. Verbal abuse, taunts, and bullying chip away at a person’s well-being. Sometimes humor masks destructive behavior, allowing it to be socially acceptable, so that sarcasm, practical jokes, and ethnic-based jokes may not be seen as destructive. However, abusive and violent behavior is determined not by the actor but by the effect the behavior has on the vulnerable person.

*Unwelcome memories and feelings may be triggered by reflecting on violence. This reflection is framed for individual, private work; pay attention to your own feelings of discomfort and practice self-care as needed. You may find writing in a journal helpful.*

If your seminar group decides to reflect as a community be aware that persons in the group may have widely different responses to reflecting with violent themes, and be respectful of responses that may differ from your own. Reviewing the Respectful Communication Guidelines from the Kaleidoscope Institute on the last page of Part II of this guide may be helpful before beginning a group reflection on such a theme. In a group setting, it may be more fruitful to reflect on violence in a form with wide societal impact, such as war, rather than an individual account of a personal experience of violence.

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION BEGINNING WITH A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

**Identify** a focus:

Recall several times when you were the object of destructive behavior. It may be something like a practical joke, or being the subject of a playful trick. Or it may be something more physically dangerous like being mugged or robbed.

Make a list of the experiences for your eyes only.

Look for threads that run through that list. Do several of the experiences relate to the same person, or do some share a similar aspect? List all the threads you can identify. Pick one as the focus on which you would like to reflect further.

**Explore** the focus:

Reflection on the focusing thread may produce an image (picture) or metaphor (“It’s like this when I experienced the violence . . .”) or an issue. Write or draw an image or issue suggested by the thread you selected. Whatever form it takes can be explored using theological perspective questions:

Develop questions to explore the world of the thread. For example, what kind of world does the image or issue assume?

What destroys in that world?

How is God revealed (or not) in that world?

Consider the view of humanity assumed or actively present in the world of the image.

Examine what unexpected influences are present in that world.

**Connect** to other sources of meaning:

Culture: Record literary works, scenes from movies, or song lyrics that come to mind.

What pieces from the Christian tradition feed the conversation? Especially look at Psalms, liturgies and prayers (a resource may be the Book of Common Prayer), hymns, etc.

Ask, “What seems to be the truth about this reality?” Allow yourself to think deeply and write one or more of your own beliefs concerning the ideas and images you surface in the reflection.

**Apply** learning to daily life and ministry:

Sometimes a good reflection leads to better questions. What questions arise for you in light of this reflection?

How might your participation in prayer and worship be impacted?

Close with a collect:

O God who \_\_\_\_\_

I pray \_\_\_\_\_

So that \_\_\_\_\_

In Christ’s name. Amen.

## UNIT FOUR

# Integrating Belief, Behavior, and Doctrine in Everyday Life



# Week Twenty-two

## ALL YEARS

### Read

## “Doing” Theology

It is a continual theme of Christian theology that every new generation must take up the task of “faith in search of understanding” with fresh vigor and creativity. Over the centuries, this task has been undertaken by many, sometimes in the midst of enormous social crisis, sometimes in the stayed quiet of history’s rare moments of peace. It is a task that has been embarked on when Christian theology has voiced the thoughts of the powerful and also in cases when only stifled whispers of a repressed and silenced faith could be heard. It is a task as hard as it is rewarding, as fraught with tensions as it is guided by grounding wisdoms, a task both invigorating and daunting, an enterprise filled with as many surprises as familiar truths.<sup>25</sup>

A person of faith continually seeks understanding of what that life of trust (faith) means to everyday life. Each generation has to make sense out of their social and intellectual situation in relation to Christianity. In short, each generation of Christians has the task of building a theology that supports and enlivens faithful living as a person of God. Theological books from the past can seem like dusty antiquated relics that have been stored in the attic and remembered only as nostalgic expressions of bygone eras. Christian theology—at its best—is a creative, invigorating process that draws people into the wonder and grace of the Holy. However, in the most recent past, theology has fallen on hard times because it became an intellectual puzzle rather than a vital, essential inquiry into the mystery and wonder of being human. Ellen Charry, a Princeton University professor, brought challenge and freshness to the meaning of theology when she wrote, “Theology is not a theological enterprise—a set of ideas that ought to fit together like pieces of a puzzle. Theology is about knowing and growing in the love of God and our neighbor so that we flourish in the destiny that God has in mind for us.”<sup>26</sup> Theology for her is learning about God so that she knows God’s love—a love that spills out into the lives of others. When theology embraces

25. Jones and Lakeland, *Constructive Theology*, 1.

26. Ellen Charry, “Growing into the Wisdom of God,” *The Christian Century* (February 13–20, 2002): 22.

the intellectual, imaginative, affective, and sensory process of knowing, then a holistic understanding develops. Theologians may too often today seem to be people living apart in a rarified intellectual atmosphere. The first person to be known as a theologian was St. Gregory of Nazianzus, for whom people coined the word “theologian,” which literally meant a God-knower. Whenever people spent time with Gregory, they came away with the sense that they had experienced something of God. The first theologians, while being learned persons, were seen primarily as God-knowers.

The call is to “do theology” that merges one’s mind, imagination, emotions, and senses into “knowing and growing in the love of God and our neighbor so that we flourish in the destiny that God has in mind for us.”

This lofty goal brings a person into an inquiry that (as expressed in the opening quotation): “It is a task as hard as it is rewarding, as fraught with tensions as it is guided by grounding wisdoms, a task both invigorating and daunting, an enterprise filled with as many surprises as familiar truths.” The task seems like mission impossible. Facing such an enormous task may seem like trying to eat an elephant. How does one do that? The well-worn response is “one bite at a time.”

This unit’s six sessions initiate and encourage a lifelong process. Constructing your theology is a lifelong pilgrimage characterized by continual revisions in light of new information and experience. EfM participants accumulate a body of knowledge that comes from systematically studying scripture, Christian history, and theology. Reflecting on experience in light of the increased knowledge sets the stage for “doing theology.”

Each person comes into EfM with a theology, often implicit and occasionally explicit. The process of building a theology is an ongoing conversation among one’s beliefs and experiences along with acquiring additional knowledge gained through directed reading of the work of scholars. The process of becoming a theologian involves disciplined practices. Every discipline requires assimilating the vocabulary that supports the ongoing practices.

### Building a Vocabulary for Practicing Theology

**Theology:** Theology directs attention to knowing about God and knowing God through reason, imagination, behavior (deeds), and affect (emotion). Christianity over the centuries has expressed theology through each of these modes of knowing.

**Reason:** Theology’s normative mode of expression consists of propositional statements. A common example of this form of theology is a catechism with a series of questions and answers concentrated on theological themes. Academic theology employs carefully reasoned propositions that answer fundamental questions. The theologian desires to have the teachings (doctrines) interconnect. The resulting writings describe the “interconnection of doctrines in what is variously called systematic theology, dogmatic theology,

doctrinal theology, or constructive theology.”<sup>27</sup> The primary mode of human consciousness employed in such theologies is reason. Examples of such writings include Paul Tillich’s three volumes of *Systematic Theology* or Robert Jenson’s two volumes bearing the same title.

**Imagination:** Theology expressed in story, myth, picture, and symbol engages the imagination. For example, C. S. Lewis presented a comprehensive theology through his *Chronicles of Narnia*. Liturgy, especially as enacted in the Eastern Orthodox churches, expresses theology through worship’s drama. Plays such as Archibald McLeish’s *J.B.* present dramatically the theology found in Job. Myths, stories, symbols—religious or otherwise—express a deeper understanding about the nature of something; God, the world, human condition, to name a few. Christian symbols help express an attitude or knowledge about God. The imagination has continually played an important role in “doing theology.” T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* and *Ash Wednesday* employ imagination and affect to create theological meaning. Dante’s *Divine Comedy* can be seen as Thomas Aquinas’s theology expressed through poetry. Additionally, music is a prime example of theology expressed through emotion. Bach, Beethoven, and Handel are but three composers who “do theology” through music. Contemporary song and lyric writers continuously use feelings to create theological meaning.

**Behavior/Deeds:** Action, service, and dance communicate feelings and beliefs. South African Christians literally danced with joy at the end of apartheid. Church ceremony uses movement and gesture to “speak” theologically. Ministry that extends compassion to those who live in society’s shadows—the poor, aged, and prisoners—communicates theological meaning not only to those served but also to those who hear of such service. Notice the impact Mother Teresa has had on theological discernment. Once again borrowing words of Ellen Charry, “The life of prayer and study will ring hollow unless illuminated by service. And in service to children, the elderly, the poor, the weak, the sick, and the imprisoned, one worships and glorifies God and comes to know the Lord and perhaps to touch his wounds, so that doubt is stilled.”<sup>28</sup> Theology (God-knowing) frequently emanates through compassionate contact and action.

**Affect/Emotion:** Concepts and ideas, story and myth, music and poetry, actions and behavior frequently awaken emotional responses. The feelings can range from deep gladness to profound sadness, joyful alleluias to “depart-from-me” trepidations. Human affect, carefully guided, motivates the creation of meaning. Knowing God draws on reason, imagination, action, and emotion to re-envision and reform theology in supporting life-giving faith.

27. David Ford, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 105.

28. Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 242.



**Constructive, systematic, dogmatic, or doctrinal theology:** Coherence drives the work of this approach to theology. The aim is to express theological knowledge into a coherent whole and in turn connect that whole to other fields of knowledge. Current systematic/constructive theologians encourage diversity and differences to be present in theological writing. Most recently, this has meant that theology is best done within a community that brings diverse cultural, ethnic, and gender voices to the table. Additionally, in this time of rapid and continual change, they see their work as an ongoing process that moves through various revisions and amendments. The desire is to understand and encourage a life-giving faith for all people in today's world.

**Doctrines:** Simply put, doctrines are the major themes or teachings of Christianity. They refer often to major topics such as the “doctrine of God” and “doctrine of human nature.” In the Book of Common Prayer there is a section called “An Outline of the Faith—commonly called the Catechism.” The document is structured around major topics. The topics (themes) are the doctrines held as important to the Episcopal Church in the United States. A question-answer format follows each topic and expands the basic beliefs of each doctrine. Taken together the “answers” form a summary of the teaching (doctrine) under consideration.

**Dogmas:** In the nineteenth century, people thought of dogmatic theologians as people who brought comfort through theologies of certainty and stability. Their dogmas grounded people and provided security of knowing truth. Dogmas, somewhere along the way, became taught by finger-pointing teachers whose fear mongering permeated their teaching. Students avoided dogmatic theologians and the dogmas they professed.

Salvaging the word “dogma” is relatively easy. Simply put, dogmas are “authorized doctrines,” teachings that a community of believers hold through consensus. Dogmas carry more authority than thoughts conceived by a single individual. The reliability of the dogma in actuality rests on the trustworthiness of the community that commends the doctrine. Dogmas define essential teachings of a community.

Identifying dogmas for twenty-first-century churches is difficult. The difficulty lies in developing decisive definitions in complex, diverse, and pluralistic societies. Add to the mix the certainty of rapid change and instant communication, the development of well-stated dogmas is much like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall. Yet each community and communion has a network of dogmas that identifies essential elements necessary to their theology.

**Confessional theology:** In the Protestant Reformations of European Christianity, each fractured body of believers constructed an extensive statement of beliefs (their confession). The credal assertions helped establish a church's identity and made the particular church's ethos distinctive. Intellectual assent to beliefs became the measure of faith. One had faith whenever one

professed specific beliefs. Conversely, if someone could not give intellectual assent to theological statements, then they did not have faith and were no longer considered to be members of the community.

It remains important that people know what they believe and why they believe it; however, any theology worth its salt understands intellectual beliefs as the means to living faithfully, not the end. Basic Christian beliefs give voice to what it means for a person to live faithfully through loving God, others, self, and creation.

**Behavioral theology:** Behavioral theology refers to the theology evident in examples, actions, and deeds. It can be instructive to examine the theology implied or expressed through behavior. What does one's behavior communicate about the doctrine of God, humanity, society, and the cosmos? When St. Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words," he was advocating the construction of a behavioral theology.

**Hermeneutical skills:** Hermeneutics is a word that basically means interpretation. It refers to the set of skills necessary to explain or interpret theological concepts, theories, experience, and beliefs. In EfM most of those skills are organized around theological reflection, especially within the movements of identifying, exploring, connecting, and applying. Moving through the four-fold process of theological reflection requires specific skills. Listening, critical thinking, expressing oneself, and drawing implications are crucial skills in reflecting theologically. Effectively constructing a life-giving theology depends on the principles and skill of hermeneutics.

**Credo:** This Latin word is usually translated as "I believe." Much is lost in translation for the word holds a much richer meaning than the usual translation into English. It also means "setting one's heart," "pledging allegiance," "to love intimately," "hold dear," "to commit one's life." All of these meanings get wrapped into the meaning communicated when someone says *credo*. A mark of a quality theology is less about intellectual integrity and more about bringing head, heart, gut, and body together into a continual commitment to love God, others, self, and creation.

The word "creed" derives from the same Latin word. Creeds are more than a series of theological propositions. Creeds point a person to realities which undergird meaning, love, fulfillment, and purpose. The sublime goal of reflecting theologically is realized as a person knows God as the source of love, fulfillment, meaning, and purpose.

**Habitus:** The concept of *habitus* finds clear definition in the following statement by Mark McIntosh in *Mysteries of Faith*:

Learning to see the mystery of God's plan, to see in a way that illuminates the meaning of the world, requires you to develop some habits of mind and heart. The word "habit" comes from the Latin *habitus*, meaning condition or charac-

ter; it is a form of the Latin verb *habere*, meaning to have and to hold. So when theology becomes a habit, it becomes part of your character, a fundamental having and holding of who you are. Or we could say that theology “inhabits” you, that God’s Word comes to dwell within your heart by the power of the Spirit.<sup>29</sup>

### Constructing a Personal Theology

The coming weeks will provide ways to construct a holistic personal theology that includes concepts (ideas), images/symbols, emotional energies, and behavior. The intent is to enter the constructive process of identifying and exploring basic elements of your own understanding of God and creation. Constructing a theology is an ongoing dialogue between personal experience and Christian doctrines.

Christian doctrines often are organized around such categories as God, human nature, and the world (cosmos). Different qualities of God, humanity, and the cosmos can be found throughout scripture and Christian history. People utilize ideas (concepts), images (metaphors), emotion (feeling), and behavior (action) from the Bible, Christian literature, history, and the arts to develop their knowledge of God. Unexpected and unwanted events often shake a person’s theological foundations. It is important to know the sources that shape personal theology.

For example, two people were very active in their church. Both of them demonstrated the same behavioral theology in how they participated in church. Both were injured in the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City in 1995. After one year, one person, depressed and angry, stopped participating in any church activities and dropped out of almost all other activities as well. Her behavioral theology changed. She kept saying, “I was a faithful Christian. Why did God not protect me?”

Even while still recovering from wounds one year later, the other person continued and even increased her church activity, living with a profound sense of joy. She had never asked, “Why did God allow this to happen to me?” Since childhood she had held the belief that no matter what happened, God was with her.

Both behaviors prior to the tragic event communicated similar theologies. The difference was in the image and concept of God that shaped behavior. One viewed God as Father-Protector who kept safe those who served him. The other imagined God as Emmanuel (God-with-us) and held that nothing could separate her from God’s love.

Whenever a person recognizes the sources that shape beliefs and behavior, then in times of unrest and uncertainty these sources can be reexamined and either rejected or reaffirmed. Knowing the scriptural and theological basis for beliefs facilitates the affirmation process. Ignorance delays it.

29. Mark McIntosh, *Mysteries of Faith*, New Church Teaching Series (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2000), 12.



### Focus

Building a theology begins with identifying the ideas, images, feelings, and actions through which and by which a person knows God—and, for that matter, is known by God. “The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me; my eye and God’s eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing, one love.”<sup>30</sup> Theology builds from awareness of the points where one knows and is known by God.

Constructing a theology starts with two axioms: First, God is ineffable, and second, seeking to know God begins as a response to God. Ineffability means that however we express our knowing God, we know the words, images, intuitive sense, and behavior are incomplete—there is always more. While what is expressed rings of truth, the expression also is not true. All statements about God contain the qualifying phrase, “It’s as if. . . .” For example, it is one thing to say, “God is Father”; it is quite another thing to say, “It is *as if* God is Father.” Communicating with God always falls short, for God is ineffable. Faith is always the person’s response to God. Theology, understood as “faith seeking understanding,” arises as human beings respond to God’s initiatives. God acts and the person responds. The response may be done in an awareness of the presence of holiness. Or the response may be a dismissal of God as an illusion. Either way, the person makes a response.

The work of the following weeks will bring together perspectives and learning from the three previous units. This unit develops a three-step integration process of awareness, decision, and practice. Integrating belief and behavior starts with awareness of what theologies are operating.

When a gap between belief and behavior is identified, a decision-making process that incorporates exploring and connecting begins. Insights gained from the theological reflection are realized as they are put into practice. Awareness, decisions, and practice provide the essential ingredients for constructing theologies.

What did you learn about theology that you did not know? What was already familiar?

What was challenging for you in the essay?

### Respond

Review your spiritual autobiography and the assigned readings to identify and record ideas, images, emotions, and behavior you have experienced in response to God, self, others, and the world.

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30. Meister Eckhart, *Sermons of Meister Eckhart* (London: H. R. Allenson, Ltd), Kindle edition, location 199–212.

**Practice**

This exercise provides a way to become more aware of individual capacities and preferences in using the faculties of reason, imagination, affect, and behavior through which each finds the holy. No one person would employ all four ways equally, but likely all will be present when we do theology in community.

1. List as many responses as possible to each of the following:
  - a. Reason: What ideas or concepts of God do you currently hold? What ideas or concepts have matched what you have known of God?
  - b. Imagination: What stories, songs, art, and so forth have best helped you to sense something of God?
  - c. Behavior/Deeds: What actions, behaviors, and/or deeds help you experience something of God?
2. Sit quietly with your responses, recalling specifics of each. What emotions (affect) can you identify or recall in relation to your experience of reason, imagination, and behavior above? What emotions do you generally attribute to a sense of God's presence?
3. Based on what you discover, write a page on how you know and experience God, and how God reaches you.

# Week Twenty-three

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Ezekiel  
Collins, Chapter 18, “Ezekiel”

### Focus

State some noteworthy elements that distinguish the book of Ezekiel. Identify the two traditions that combine in Ezekiel’s opening vision. How does symbolic action figure into Ezekiel’s prophetic work?

Describe the impact of Ezekiel’s prophetic work on your personal beliefs.

## YEAR TWO

### Read

Ephesians  
Powell, Chapter 16, “Ephesians”

### Focus

Locate Ephesus and state its significance in Paul’s journeys.

What are some of the opinions about the authorship of the letter to the church at Ephesus?

What does it mean to you to “live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (Ephesians 4:1)?

## YEAR THREE

### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 16, “Perspectives on the True Church”

### Focus

With this chapter, MacCulloch returns to Western Christianity. Events, especially tragic ones, impact how people think about and know God. Describe how the Black Death influenced behavior and belief.

## YEAR FOUR

### Read

Sedgwick, Preface, Introduction, and Chapter 1, “Describing the Christian Life”

**Focus**

Given Sedgwick's presentation, reflect on how the study of ethics contributes to the formation of a theology.

What are the creative aspects of Sedgwick's views? What choices do his views present to you?

Reflect on how his views of ethics relate to what you see in the culture in which you live.

**ALL YEARS****Respond**

Incoherence between belief and behavior has a long history. In his letter to the Romans, Paul confesses:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. —Romans 7:15–20

In congested traffic, drivers may demonstrate an inconsistency between claiming love of neighbor and words or gestures directed at another motorist that suggest a different belief. Patterns of inconsistency or disjuncture between behavior and belief point to what might be termed “behavior theology.” Such theology is illustrated by the story about a fifth grade teacher who in the teachers’ lounge made pronouncements using a graphic image: “Human beings are the scum on the cesspool of life,” then among his students showed great patience, love, and commitment. His behavioral theology clashed with his professed theology. A Pauline-like confession or a blatant contradiction between his behavior and his opinion represent the *theology of professed beliefs* and the *theology of revealed actions*, and may cry out for reconciliation and agreement.

What is required to fashion a harmony between belief and behavior? Several factors must be kept in mind as one enters the integration process. First, theological positions and actions have fluidity. For example, in the early morning moments a person snuggling with a lover in a warm, comfortable bed will easily feel the poetry of praise. Later in the day, the same person being robbed in a dark recess of an urban skyscraper will voice a markedly different anthropological theology. Theological thoughts and actions morph in starkly different situations. Second, a person’s theology develops as the spiritual journey proceeds. The slogan “Be patient with me, God isn’t finished with me yet” encapsulates a reality of theological formation. In



addition, limitations imposed by the particularities of time and space necessitate partial knowing, which invites living by faith more than by certitude. Premature certitudes generate dangers that St. Gregory of Nyssa expressed well, “Concepts create idols; only wonder comprehends anything. People kill one another over concepts. Wonder makes us fall to our knees.”

Recall three or four personal incidents that indicate a gap that existed for you between a personal belief and your behavior. Select one and write a short paragraph that describes the incident.

### Practice

As a way to reflect theologically on belief and behavior, use a “wide-angle lens” to find a common thread in the incidents you identified in the Respond section above.

Why this title? Instead of the usual first step to **Identify** a focus from one of the four sources, the wide-angle lens is a pre-**Identify** step that begins with a variety of perspectives, then isolates a thread/theme/idea/image that connects them, which in turn becomes the focus for the reflection. A theological reflection beginning with a wide-angle lens can begin in any of the four sources. The key is that it requires initiation from something that could produce several themes or ideas. There are innumerable options. An individual can begin with movies, assigned readings, incidents from one’s life, or several personal positions. In an EfM group, the beginning point can be themes from the spiritual autobiographies, themes from the week’s reading, themes from any on-board time of the group, or some other starting point from which a variety of perspectives can be elicited. The initial step always is to list themes and find a thread that runs through several of them.

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION BEGINNING WITH A WIDE-ANGLE LENS (ACTION SOURCE)

This particular reflection begins in the Action/Personal Experience Source. Start by finding the threads or themes present in several personal incidents drawn from the Respond section above, several incidents that indicate a gap between belief and behavior.

### **Identify**

#### FIND A COMMON THEME OR THREAD

Begin with your several incidents identified in the Respond section of this week’s work.

What are the common themes or elements that emerge? A theme may be expressed as a simple statement, an image, a metaphor, or an issue.

Select one thread that connects various themes. For instance, a review of several incidents (either ones identified by an individual or those identified in a group) could yield themes of frustration, tiredness, hurry, and feeling overwhelmed. Those themes would have shown up in two or more of the



incidents. Asking, “What ties some of those themes together?” yields a thread that runs through some incidents. For example, “Having too much to do leads to impatience with others” could be named as a thread that ties two or more incidents.

### **Explore**

#### REFLECT ON SOME THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

What image could paint a picture of the thread identified from your incidents?

Describe or draw that image. Examine the image for what’s going on in it. Write about what’s going on in that image.

Use theological perspective questions to explore the focus. Which theological perspective (creation, sin, judgment, repentance, redemption, celebration, the doctrine of God, grace, or others you think of) comes first to mind? Consider several. For example, what would repentance look like in that image? Or redemption?

### **Connect**

Bring other sources into the conversation to help find meaning in matters of daily life and ministry.

#### CONSIDER CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Focus on one or two areas of your culture or society so that the reflection will not be too broad. These connections might come from your local community or the larger world; our work environment, our education system, our health care system, our grandmothers, movies, TV, literature, art, songs, artifacts, architecture, government, the press, to name a few. Just pick one area of contemporary society with which to connect.

What does the world in which you live teach you about dealing with the identified focus? Where do you find evidence of people dealing with tiredness and anger in the world around you?

What have you learned from your culture that helps you or challenges you regarding the theme?

How do areas of Culture/Society speak to or about this thread? For instance, what does the world of employment teach us about tiredness and anger? What about our health care system? What about advertising? Again, just use one aspect of our society.

#### CONSIDER THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Identify biblical passages or other elements from Christian Tradition in which this common thread is evoked or brought to mind. Provide time to find and read passages. Select one text that seems to speak most clearly to the thread that was evoked.

Examine the passage with these questions: What do you know about the meaning of the text in its original setting? How have others interpreted this text? What does this text mean to you?

#### COMPARE AND CONTRAST CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND CHRISTIAN TRADITION

From the perspectives of Culture and Tradition, what kind of a world emerges?

Where do these perspectives join or compete? Where do they clash or contrast?

Again use theological perspectives—creation, sin, judgment, repentance, redemption, celebration, the doctrine of God, grace, or others you think of—to shape your reflection. Likely, there is time to use only one or two of these themes during any one reflection. As an example, if the New Testament passage about Jesus cleansing the temple were used for the Christian Tradition and the work environment for the Contemporary Culture connection, how do those two perspectives compare and contrast? What messages do we hear from either or both?

#### CONNECT TO BELIEFS, POSITIONS, AND AFFIRMATIONS

What is your response to the messages from the Christian Tradition and Contemporary Culture?

What do you feel about where this reflection has led? What do you think about it?

Where are you in the reflection?

What positions or affirmations do you hold about this reflection?

#### **Apply**

#### IDENTIFY INSIGHTS AND PERSONAL IMPLICATIONS

What have you learned about coherence of belief and behavior? What moves or energizes you? What insights come to mind?

What are you personally called to do differently, to affirm, or to change? What prayer do you want to offer?

#### DECIDE ON SOCIAL AND CIVIC CONSEQUENCES

What actions will you take to carry out the implications you have discovered?

What will you investigate further in your community in order to make a difference?

Whom can you contact to join you or inform you? What action might you take?

# Week Twenty-four

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Isaiah 40–66  
Haggai  
Zechariah  
Malachi  
Joel  
Jonah  
Collins, Chapter 19, “The Additions to the Book of Isaiah”  
and Chapter 20, “Postexilic Prophecy”

### Focus

Prophets speak God’s truth to those in power and generally have the most to lose in speaking. Difficulties arise when prophetic voices do not agree on what the “truth” is. Two possible responses to the contradiction are either to wait to see which was speaking truth or to decide, in the midst of the uncertainty, which is correct and act accordingly. Reflect on how uncertainty impacts the consistency of belief and behavior.

What do the terms “major prophets” and “minor prophets” mean?

## YEAR TWO

### Read

Philippians  
Colossians  
Powell, Chapter 17, “Philippians” and Chapter 18, “Colossians”

### Focus

What are issues of behavior and/or belief in these two communities?

Note what passages Powell highlights from Philippians and/or Colossians.

Which passages did he not include in his discussion, but that you thought were important?

## YEAR THREE

### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 17, “A House Divided”

**Focus**

Describe the values that drove the actions of reformers. Think about how those values shape doctrines of God, humanity, and creation. How do those values relate to your personal experience and values? How are those values reflected in our contemporary society? What challenges or support are there for you in living faithfully with your values in today's world?

**YEAR FOUR****Read**

Sedgwick, Chapter 2, "An Anglican Perspective"

**Focus**

Faith as a way of life, the theological tradition, and theology and ethics are the three sections in this chapter.

Name one key idea in each section.

State your own beliefs around those ideas.

**ALL YEARS****Respond**

Rushmore Kidder, an ethicist, wrote *How Good People Make Tough Choices: Resolving the Dilemmas of Ethical Living*, in which he defined a dilemma as a choice between two "goods." The gap between a belief and behavior can be framed within the conflict between two values in a specific situation.

As in the preceding session, identify an incident or two in which you were in a dilemma of conflicting values, perhaps between two good choices; for instance, I planned to work on a necessary project one day and a neighbor suddenly appeared at the door needing help. What's the dilemma? What are my choices? What beliefs do I use to sift and decide among choices?

**Practice**

Reflecting theologically on dilemmas can move a person toward integrating beliefs and behaviors. Building a theology relies on the integration of beliefs with doctrines as experienced in the actions taken in everyday life.

Explore a Theological reflection that begins either with a belief (Position Source) or a behavior (Action Source). Use the example below, which begins in the Action Source, as a guide if you prefer to begin with a belief (Position Source). Set aside an hour or so if you can to work through the process and take your work to the seminar session. What might you share in the seminar about your experience of reflecting on a dilemma?

## THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION BEGINNING WITH A DILEMMA

**Identify**

DESCRIBE an incident for reflection, an experience in which you felt pulled in at least two directions over something, and for which there are no decisions pending. The incident is over.

Example: *I had looked forward to my best friend's wedding for months and had my plane ticket and my new outfit. We had plans to enjoy the sights and catch up and just have fun. And then my mother got sick. She told me I could go ahead with my plans but I felt so torn. There was no one else there for my mother.*

NAME the turning point in the incident. What is the central moment of the incident? Where is the tension greatest? What was happening? What were you thinking and feeling at that moment? Record the central moment in a short sentence.

STATE the dilemma. Try to state what is at stake or what the central issue is at the moment of greatest tension. To help clarify the dilemma, list declarative statements about what you wanted at that moment or what interests were at stake at that moment. Select a pair of statements that best represent the central tension, identifying what is at issue or at stake in that tension. Record the primary pair of tension statements as

"I wanted \_\_\_\_\_ and I wanted \_\_\_\_\_."

Remember that this is a difficult choice between two good things.

Example: *I wanted to attend my best friend's wedding and I wanted to stay to take care of my ailing parent.*

Note the central issue/what is at stake. Example: *Personal fun conflicting with caring for another*

[Note: In a group reflection, others would now be invited to recall a time when each experienced a similar dilemma.]

**Explore**

EXPLORE the dilemma. What is it like to live in that issue/tension? Use cost/promise ( or risk/hope) or the theological perspective of creation, sin, judgment, repentance, and redemption to frame questions about the dilemma.

Record your responses to the questions using either questions of cost/promise or questions drawn from theological perspectives.

Example: cost/promise

"I wanted \_\_\_\_\_ and I wanted \_\_\_\_\_."

Cost of this choice

Cost of this choice

Promise of this choice

Promise of this choice

Example: theological perspectives

Judgment—What choices are there?

Repentance—What might require a change of heart?

### **Connect**

**CHRISTIAN TRADITION:** Identify some stories from scripture or church history that relate to the dilemma. Or perhaps some prayers or hymns come to mind. Compare and contrast what the Christian tradition has to say about that dilemma. What choices would the tradition support? Not support? Why?

**CULTURE:** Where is this dilemma experienced in our culture? Have there been news stories about it? Have you read a book or seen a movie that dealt with the dilemma? Is there a political dimension to the dilemma?

**POSITION:** What do you believe about the dilemma? How is your belief in conflict in the issue? What do you hope for regarding the dilemma?

*[Note: If your reflection began in the Position Source, the connecting questions here would be focused on the Action Source. “What personal experiences can you recall that are related to this dilemma concerning belief?” or similar questions about personal experience will work.]*

### **Apply**

**INSIGHTS and QUESTIONS:** What do you see in a new way now? What have you learned from facing this dilemma? What questions do you have about the dilemma in your life?

**IMPLICATIONS:** What do you want or need to do about similar dilemmas when they arise? Are there social implications? Are there actions you could take? Is there something more to learn? What support would help? Where will you find that support?

# Week Twenty-five

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Ezra  
Nehemiah  
Collins, Chapter 21, “Ezra and Nehemiah”

### Focus

Sometimes a reform movement is tied to strengthening a community’s sense of identity. Why would this be important to the returning exiles? Where today do you see reform movements aimed at establishing or setting boundaries around religious identity?

## YEAR TWO

### Read

1 Thessalonians  
2 Thessalonians  
Powell, Chapter 19, “1 Thessalonians,” and Chapter 20, “2 Thessalonians”

### Focus

Note which doctrines are either implicitly or explicitly mentioned in the two letters to the Thessalonians. What light does Powell shed on the doctrines?

## YEAR THREE

### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 18, “Rome’s Renewal”

### Focus

Often, reforming led to examination and renewal among those to whom the protestations were leveled. As you read through MacCulloch’s account of the catholic counterreformations, consider what this renewal disclosed about the church’s understanding of the nature of God.

## YEAR FOUR

**Read**

Sedgwick, Chapter 3, “Incarnate Love”

**Focus**

In Chapter 3 Sedgwick uses sexuality, idolatry, and hospitality as elements to sketch a picture of incarnate love. What do you find challenging in this chapter? What can this chapter contribute to your own reflection on the nature of incarnate (or human) love?



## ALL YEARS

**Respond**

Christian theologians over the centuries have developed a long list of doctrines. The table of contents of most theological textbooks reflects an author’s arrangement of important doctrines. Often an author devotes an entire chapter to a particular doctrine or doctrines.

Each historical period prioritizes doctrines in response to the social and intellectual environment. For example, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most systematic organizations of theology began with the doctrine of God; the characteristics and actions of God. By the end of the twentieth century, Anglo-American theologians began by discussing the doctrine of human nature; what are the characteristics of humankind—how we act and who we are. John Macquarrie, a Scottish theologian who taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York City and at Oxford University, consistently asserted that contemporary theology must begin from the ground up. Thus, his *Principles of Christian Theology* begins with theological anthropology (i.e., the doctrine of human nature).

As a way to build a theology, create a list of fifteen or more doctrines. A denominational catechism would be a good place to start. For example, the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer (1979) beginning on page 845 presents “An Outline of Faith.” Each boldface heading names a doctrine.

Once you have collected a list of doctrines, arrange them in an order that reflects your interest in the doctrine, beginning with what interests you the most. Using the first three or four doctrines, review the reading assignments over the past few sessions, noting how the author dealt with one or two of the doctrines of interest.

Try to locate doctrinal statements of several denominations (Anglican, Methodist, Christian Science, or any others) or faith traditions (Judaism, Islam, and so forth). Constructive theology is essentially a conversation among Christian doctrines and an individual’s beliefs and actions (behaviors). Select one doctrine from your list, for example, the doctrine of God.



Find a statement from the Catechism of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer that addresses the doctrine. Then make your own statement of your belief relative to the chosen doctrine. Finally, recall your behavior that revealed a stance relative to the doctrine.

Example:

Question from the Book of Common Prayer: What are we by nature?

Answer from the Book of Common Prayer: We are part of God's creation, made in the image of God.

An individual's statement: I believe that we are all equal.

Behavior (action) that reveals an understanding of human nature:  
I cheered for my high school basketball team, shouting "We're Number One!"

Write about how the three statements support, challenge, or contradict one another. Reflect on images, emotions, or concepts that contribute to the threefold conversation. What other doctrinal statements from the Christian tradition speak to the conversation? What other position statements have you said or heard? Describe how different actions contribute to the conversation.

# Week Twenty-six

## YEAR ONE

### Read

1 Chronicles  
2 Chronicles  
Collins, Chapter 22, “The Books of Chronicles”

### Focus

The two books of Chronicles tell the history of the kingdoms from a slightly different perspective from how that history is related in First and Second Samuel and First and Second Kings. Collins notes that David and Solomon are idealized as cultic figures in the Chronicles. Where do you see evidence of this? For those who have returned from exile, what does the chronicler have to say about their relationship to the past? What might God’s promises to David and Solomon mean for them in their new life as a restored community?

## YEAR TWO

### Read

1 Timothy  
2 Timothy  
Titus  
Philemon  
Powell, Chapter 21, “The Pastoral Letters: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus,” and Chapter 22, Philemon

### Focus

Think about Paul’s struggle against “false teachings” while advocating “sound doctrines.” Compare how the same issues play out in the contemporary church.

The letter to Philemon is the shortest book in the Christian Bible, but is the subject of varying interpretations. Consider how Philemon has figured in the history of Christianity and the institution of slavery in the United States and other places. What light does Powell shed on differing scholarly interpretations of Paul’s attitude toward slavery? What sources do you draw on in forming your own understanding of how biblical interpretation is used in controversial questions today?

What do these books—First and Second Timothy, Titus, and Philemon have to say about the nature of Christian identity in relationship to culture?

**YEAR THREE****Read**

MacCulloch, Chapter 19, “A Worldwide Faith”

**Focus**

How might well-crafted histories aid in understanding the social and intellectual period in which contemporary theology has developed? What does a knowledge of the church’s past contribute to forming a theology that supports you in living faithfully in your world?

**YEAR FOUR****Read**

Sedgwick, Chapter 4, “Love and Justice”

**Focus**

Chapter 4 brings an important discussion of love and justice to the table. Note how these themes are addressed in the theology you are building. What does Sedgwick offer in this chapter that you might want to consider more closely? What do you find challenging in his chapter?

**ALL YEARS****Respond**

The construction of a personal theology may begin with study of the Christian tradition, or it may begin with the personal experience of God. Striving with God to know God is one way to describe how a theology develops.

Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob’s hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, “Let me go, for the day is breaking.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go, unless you bless me.” So he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” Then the man said, “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.” Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.” The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. —Genesis 32:24–31

Jacob’s experience changes him in a fundamental way, leading to a new understanding of his relationship with God. He expresses that theological shift in terms of wonder. St. Gregory is said to have noted that concepts create idols; only wonder comprehends anything. Wonder grounds prayer

and worship. Wonder encourages us to risk loving others, self, God, and God's creation.

Constructing a holistic theology incorporates prayer and worship as well as study. Prayer and worship frame theological reflection; study as a spiritual discipline opens the heart to God. St. Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions* was written as prayer through which he worked out his theology. St. Anselm also wrote his *Proslogion* as a prayer. Evagrius writes, "If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian."<sup>31</sup> Modern theologians continue to point to the relationship between theology and prayer. Sarah Coakley notes that prayer "has the power to change one's perception of the theological task."<sup>32</sup> Hans Urs von Balthazar uses the term "theology on one's knees (*die betende theologie* or *la théologie à genoux*)."<sup>33</sup>

Liturgical prayer and worship can provide impetus for theological reflection. Recall three or four experiences within the context of liturgy that moved you in some way. Worship can include the entire spectrum of emotion, so you may consider including both "positive" and "negative" experiences in your list.

Examples:

I was at camp and went to the front of the chapel to pray. I knelt for prayer with many other campers. I entered deep into prayer and lost track of time. When I became aware of where I was, I looked around and realized that all others had left. I had no sense of how long I had been there.

I remember the feeling of belonging that I experienced at the close of an Easter service when I was eleven years old. I felt that everyone there in the church was part of one group. It was a spiritual thing more than a social thing, like a family belonging together. I remember this closeness and I think of it as what religion should be. But it hasn't been.<sup>34</sup>

Singing the *Messiah* for the first time. Singing in a choral group is always a good experience for me, but that time it was more than music. I felt I discovered what religion is about. And I was glad I could sing it.<sup>35</sup>

Decide which one or two of your own experiences you are willing to consider as a beginning point for theological reflection. Again write out your experiences in a brief paragraph or two. What common themes, threads, or patterns do you notice?

31. Evagrius, "On Prayer," 61, in <http://desertfathers.blogspot.com/2011/06/works-of-evagrius-ponticus-on-prayer.html>

32. Sarah Coakley, "Prayer as Crucible," *Christian Century*, March 9, 2011, in <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-03/prayer-crucible>

33. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Theology and Sanctity," in *Word and Redemption: Essays in Theology 2*, English trans. (New York: Herder, 1965), 49–86.

34. Ira Progoff, *The Practice of Process Meditation* (New York: Dialogue House Library, 1980), 147.

35. *Ibid.*, 148.

**Practice****THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION BEGINNING WITH A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE**

**Identify** a focus for reflection

Choose one thread or theme from the exercise above as the focus for reflection. If you like, identify an image or metaphor that speaks to you about that theme or thread.

**Explore**

List five or six adjectives that describe the theme's "world." Is it a world of joy and wonder, a world of anger and resistance, something in between?

Deepen your reflection on the theme using two or three perspective questions like:

- What temptations or dangers are present in such a world?
- What, if anything, shocks or causes wonder?
- What does it say to you about human nature?
- What is celebrated in this moment?
- What does it say to you about the nature of God?

**Connect**

Notice when you connect to sources from culture and/or tradition: What doctrines surface in your reflection?

Select one or two specific pieces from the Christian tradition that relate to your reflection and proceed with closer examination. If the tradition piece is from scripture, find and read the passage to study it further. Perhaps a Christian doctrine is mentioned. If so, find how the doctrine is treated in the catechism in the Book of Common Prayer or the book of worship used in any denomination.

Note your personal positions or beliefs about the matter under consideration.

**Apply**

What have you seen that you had not seen before or that you are seeing in a new way?

Discuss what helps you understand better the relationship between prayer and theology.

What implications for ministry in daily life surface in this reflection?

# Week Twenty-seven

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Psalms 1–150  
Song of Songs  
Collins, Chapter 23, “Psalms and Song of Songs”

### Focus

Don’t try to read each psalm in depth, but read quickly through, pausing on a specific psalm as your attention is captured and noticing how the psalms are grouped. What strikes you about their arrangement? Which psalms are most familiar to you?

Identify a psalm that illustrates each of the following categories:

- complaints;
- hymns of praise;
- royal psalms;
- thanksgivings.

Psalms tell of the kingship of God, the human situation, the character of God, and the nature of human kingship. Notice two or three features of these found in the Psalms.

Given that the Song of Songs does not mention God, why would the compilers of the Bible include it as a sacred text? Make a case for why or why not the Song of Songs conveys a theology.

Reflect on when you have heard the Song of Songs read in church. What did you think?

## YEAR TWO

### Read

Hebrews  
Powell, Chapter 23, “Hebrews”

### Focus

Powell notes that “persistent Christians have found real substance in this [Hebrews] letter: teaching that not only reveals who Christ is but also discloses who they are (and can be) in relation to him.” What significance

does knowing who Christ is and who people are in relation to him have for developing a theology that undergirds the work of ministry in daily life? Notice especially the role faith plays in fostering ministerial identity.

### YEAR THREE

#### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 20, “Protestant Awakenings ”

#### Focus

Terms and names to note: covenant in the establishment of the church in North America; John Winthrop; congregational; Anne Hutchinson; Roger Williams; Quakers; John Eliot; John Locke; William Penn; Non-Jurors; pietism; Moravians; August Hermann Francke; place of hymnody and music; Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf; Methodism; John Wesley; evangelicals; George Whitefield; Gilbert Tennent; Great Awakenings

What aspects of North American Christianity’s growth are most evident in your religious heritage?

### YEAR FOUR

#### Read

Sedgwick, Chapter 5, “The Practices of Faith,” and Chapter 6, “The Call of God,”

#### Focus

Terms and names to note: kataphatic; sacramental acts; sacrifice.

Note any ways in which your reading of Sedgwick’s book has contributed to the building of your own theology.

Reflect on your answer to Sedgwick’s question, “What has been most significant in your experience of worship, and what has been most difficult?”(page 103).



### ALL YEARS

#### Respond

Spiritual disciplines described by Timothy Sedgwick in the reading for Year Four are meditation and contemplation, examination of our lives, denial and simplification of life, and action. How has your experience in EfM helped you in any of those practices and in building comprehensiveness and coherence in belief and behavior?

### **Practice**

Meditate on one psalm daily until your next EfM session. Describe any awareness you have as a result of this practice.

In his letter to the Romans (12:9–13), Paul directs followers of Christ to practice love, zeal, hope, and hospitality. Read this passage in the translation of your choice. What words or phrases catch your attention? What would it take for you to live that life today?



## SECOND INTERLUDE UNIT

# Ministry and the Church



# Week Twenty-eight

## ALL YEARS

### Read

Dozier, Chapters 1–3

### Focus

What is the Dream of God, as Dozier sees it?

Terms to note: the institutional church; the people of God; the sorry journey of the people of God from Us to Me; theology as meaning-making; the purpose of the biblical story/witness; the purpose of the church; the biblical idea of sin; love as justice in action; the problem of absolutizing the Bible; realized eschatology; the three falls

### Respond

Consider these questions from the Catechism in the Book of Common Prayer:

**Q. Who are the ministers of the Church?**

A. The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons.

**Q. What is the ministry of the laity?**

A. The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.<sup>36</sup>

How does Dozier define ministry? What images come to mind when you hear the word “minister”? The Episcopal Church teaches that we all are called into ministry through our baptism, yet how are we to understand the ministry of all in a church with ordained ministers, those who look to society around us like professionals, not unlike lawyers and physicians, whose occupation is “ministry”? It is frequently suggested that Education for Ministry should change its name because the term “ministry” has too clerical a connotation today in the United States. Some mistake the program for a course in preparation for ordained ministry. Lay persons may resist identifying themselves as ministers outside the boundaries of the church proper.

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36. The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer* (Church Hymnal Corporation and Seabury Press: 1979), 855.

In cultures where professional classes are privileged, there is sometimes an implied hierarchy of ministers, with the ministry of the ordained set higher than that of the laity. This clericalism, as Fredrica Harris Thompsett notes, can be a mutual endeavor.

“Clericalism” exaggerates the status of clergy while devaluing and patronizing laity. In this mutually disabling relationship, distinction among church people is turned instead into divisions between them. Such separations in function and status raise questions about how we can be different but not alienated, neither domineering nor passive, patronizing nor lazy. Symptoms of clericalism include intimidation, hoarding educational resources, controlling so-called real theological language, congregational passivity, and renunciation of authority. One clear example of clericalism is to describe a congregation that is searching for a new rector or vicar as “vacant.” In clericalist language laity are often invisible, even in those moments when their energy is most in demand.

Yet clergy and laity both participate in clericalism. There are laity who expect clergy to be elitist and who sharply separate church from society; there are clergy who see part of their role as giving laity jobs to do in church, and whose own theology of authority places them somehow closer to God than to the people of God. Clericalism thrives on low expectations of lay people. Ultimately it inhibits the mission of the whole people of God.<sup>37</sup>

What does Dozier have to say about the relationship of the call to ministry and the institutional church?

### Practice

Looking back over the work you have done this year so far, consider the following questions. Journal or make some notes as you wish.

What examples of any of Dozier’s three falls—separating from God, valuing the world over the kingdom of God, seeing the institutional church as the kingdom of God—do you find in your own spiritual autobiography? What examples do you remember from your or others’ readings this year?

What personal experiences have you had that support Dozier’s assertion that the institutional church can be too focused on preserving the institution?

What personal experiences have you had where you feel the church was true to its call to be the people of God living into the dream of God?

How do you respond to the idea that love is justice in action?

What implications for spirituality does Dozier’s idea that being created in the image of God is about *freedom* offer to you?

What would you like to share in the seminar from your reading of Dozier so far? What questions remain as you look toward the remainder of the book?

37. Fredrica Harris Thompsett, *We Are Theologians: Strengthening the People of the Episcopal Church* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1989), 97–98.

# Week Twenty-nine

## ALL YEARS

### Read (All Years)

Dozier, Chapters 4–5

### Focus

Freedom as the image of God in humans; Jesus as the Word of God; worshipping vs. following Jesus; central paradox of Christianity; the Christ of the Church; apocalyptic; love as solidarity; the eschatological present-future; anti-Jewish reading of scriptures; the body of Christ; exclusivity; traditional hallmarks of the spiritual life; baptism of Jesus; ministry as commitment to the dream of God; *laos*; restoration/reconciliation

### Respond

In a sermon at the ordination of a bishop, Verna Dozier reflects on vocations in the church:

The Church of God is all the people of God, lay and ordained, each order with its own unique vocation, the lay order to be the people of God in the world, to witness by their choices and their values, in the kingdoms of the world, in the systems of commerce and government, education and medicine, law and human relations, science and exploration, art and vision, to witness to all these worlds that there is another possibility for human life than the way of exploitation and domination; and the vocation of the ordained order is to serve the lay order, to refresh and restore the weary souls with the Body and the Blood, to maintain those islands, the institutional church, where life is lived differently but always in order that life may be lived differently everywhere.<sup>38</sup>

How is this congruent with Dozier's understanding of our call to participate in the dream of God? If you could talk to Verna Dozier, what would you ask her? What would you like to share with her about your own understanding of ministry?

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38. Verna Dozier, sermon preached at the consecration of Jane Holmes Dixon as Bishop Suffragan of Washington on November 19, 1992, published in *Virginia Seminary Journal*, April 1993, 33–34.

**Practice****THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION BEGINNING WITH A POSITION (CULTURE SOURCE)****Identify**

Dozier makes this position statement in Chapter 4:

The church missed its high calling to be the new thing in the world when it decided to worship Jesus instead of following him.<sup>39</sup>

**Explore**

What do you think Dozier means by this provocative statement? How is her assertion supported in the context of the book?

What theological perspectives—the world, sin, judgment, repentance, redemption—come most immediately to mind as you consider this assertion?

**Connect**

How is Jesus depicted in your contemporary culture? How is the church depicted? What messages about worshiping Jesus do you hear in the culture around you? What messages about or images of Jesus' followers are prevalent in culture and society? What theological perspectives—the world, sin, judgment, repentance, redemption—come to mind when considering one of these examples from the culture source?

What personal experiences come to mind that speak to you of worshiping Jesus vs. following Jesus? What is your response to this dichotomy?

What examples does the Christian tradition, especially the Bible and the history of the church, offer on this subject? What theological perspectives—the world, sin, judgment, repentance, redemption—come to mind when considering one of these examples from the tradition source?

What is your understanding of worshiping as opposed to following Jesus? What is your personal position on this issue?

**Apply**

What new understandings are forming for you now?

Where might you look for opportunities to exercise your own ministry as part of the church's "high calling to be the new thing in the world"?

If you are interested in reading more about and by Verna Dozier (1917–2006), *Confronted by God: The Essential Verna Dozier* is an accessible source.<sup>40</sup>

39. Verna Dozier, *The Dream of God: A Call to Return* (New York: Seabury Books, 2006), 74.

40. Cynthia L. Shattuck and Fredrica Harris Thompsett, eds., *Confronted by God: The Essential Verna Dozier* (New York: Seabury Books, 2006).



## UNIT FIVE

# Vocation



# Week Thirty

## ALL YEARS

### Read

#### Hearing and Responding to God's Call

Theological formation equips people to recognize the sacred in daily life by accessing concepts, images, stories, and actions drawn from the Christian tradition. By reflecting on knowledge and experience they can discover how to better contribute to God's dream (also known as participating in the *missio Dei*.)

John de Beer has had a long history of Christian service in many contexts: the church, EfM, and local communities. His essay introduces missiology (the church in service to the needs of the world) as a theological framework for thinking about vocation, call, and ministry.

## Mission, Vocation, and Gifts<sup>41</sup>

BY JOHN DE BEER

*The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. —Ephesians 4:11–13*

In order to do its work and find its true identity, the church is dependent on the gifts God gives its members. The apostle Paul associated God's gifts with the work of ministry, with the identity of the church as the body of Christ, and with the vocation of Christians to become the mature persons God calls them to be. Ministry is what the church does, Paul says, and the

41. The Common Reading was written by the Reverend Doctor John de Beer as the introductory chapter of his thesis *A Vocation Worthy of Our Calling: Gifts Discernment and Congregational Development*. It was submitted to the faculty of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Congregation Development. In addition to serving for eight years as the EfM Director of Trainers, during which time he developed the training network, he coauthored with Patricia O'Connell Killen *The Art of Theological Reflection*. After leaving Sewanee, de Beer developed the Klesis Project, which offers an adult curriculum of Christian formation. Information about Klesis is found at <http://www.saintmarksburlington.org/adulted.php>. The essay has been modestly adapted for use in Unit Five with the permission of its author.



identity of Christians is found as members of Christ's body. The mission of the church is to share in Christ's work (restoring all people to unity with each other and with God) and find a mature identity (measured by Jesus' full humanity). As members carry out the mission of the church, they mature into full human beings, with Christ being the measure of that maturity.

This chapter explores what is meant by the mission of the church, the vocations of its members, and how the gifts God gives are key to discovering and exercising vocation and mission. Paul has more than one list of gifts and there seems no reason to limit our understanding of gifts to those appearing in them.<sup>42</sup> There is a wide variety of gifts, but in each gift God's Spirit is active, guiding the mission of the church and calling its members to respond to their vocations.<sup>43</sup>

## Mission

The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ . . . through the ministry of all of its members . . . according to the gifts given them.<sup>44</sup>

The 1979 revision of the Book of Common Prayer explicitly links the gifts of the members with the mission of the church. This is very different from how mission was understood in the 1950s, when the church in North America assumed that the society in which it was located was itself Christian. Then the mission field was considered as being overseas, in cultures that were largely non-Christian. The role of most church members in mission was to support the overseas missionaries by praying for them and providing financial support. The revision of the Prayer Book in 1979 is linked to a changing understanding of the mission of the church and the role of its members. The growth of interest in identifying the vocation and gifts of church members is a result of this change.

In his book *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch described clearly and comprehensively how the understanding and practice of the church's mission shifted over the centuries.<sup>45</sup> Bosch was a New Testament scholar who grounded his thinking in the texts of the Bible. He argued that the scriptures witness to a God who is the source of all that is and whose loving purpose is to restore a broken world to wholeness in a new creation. Thus God's loving purpose, the *missio Dei*, is primarily directed at the world; the church consists of those who are called to consciously participate in and witness to this new creation. The church enunciates the good news that God's love embraces both church and world; the church is privileged to participate in that love. The church then is a sign to the world of the new creation that God intends.

42. Romans 12:4–8; 1 Corinthians 12:8–11, 27–28.

43. 1 Corinthians 12:4.

44. The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 853.

45. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991).

This way of considering mission emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. It functions as a paradigm that guides the missionary activity of a wide spectrum of denominations today. Bosch wrote, “We define [the church’s] mission—with true humility—as participation in the *missio Dei*. Witnessing to the gospel of present salvation and future hope we then identify with the awesome birth pangs of God’s new creation.”<sup>46</sup>

This way of understanding the church’s mission has had a huge impact on how the vocation of church members is understood. Here again, Bosch began with the Bible. He pointed out that the mission of those who follow Jesus is not defined in the New Testament, but expressed in images (e.g., salt of the earth, light of the world, city on a hill). Bosch developed his argument as follows: The images of salt, light, and city go to the heart of what it means to be disciples. To follow Jesus is to be in the world, not defined by the world, rather disclosing the true nature of the world.<sup>47</sup> Jesus begins his own mission by announcing that the reign of God is at hand. God’s reign is both personal and universal; it has come in the person of Jesus, and it is intended for all humanity. Jesus’ disciples are called to share in his mission as witnesses to what God is doing. Mission is integral to being the church; we are called out in order to share the good news. “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”<sup>48</sup>

Bosch helps us to see that there has been a profound change in the church’s understanding of its mission. Christ’s mission is to the whole world, not to the church only. The church is not primarily called to increase its own membership, or even to maintain its own life, but to point the way to the reign of God that is coming and is already here. When members of the church are true to this calling, they do not say to others, “Come and join us,” as though God’s love is to be found only in the church. Rather they say, “Let us follow him together,” as all share in the new world that God is creating. The vocation of church members becomes witnessing to and participating in the way God is changing the world.

An ecumenical group of scholars further developed the implications for the church in North America of this understanding of mission.<sup>49</sup> Their work, *Missional Church*, explored the challenges facing congregations in a society in the midst of rapid change, set in a culture that has lost confidence in the rational, objective, and managed world of the “modern” era. It is not yet clear what will replace the “modern” worldview; we are living between the times, in a “postmodern” condition. In the postmodern world

46. Ibid., 510.

47. John 17:18–19.

48. 1 Peter 2:9.

49. Darrell L. Guder and Lois Barrett, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998).

we inhabit, values are seen as relative and religious beliefs are simply a matter of personal preference. This postmodern context presents an enormous challenge to the church. Members of the congregation, as well as those who are unchurched, are affected by the culture of relativism in which we all live. The loss of connection to a center of meaning can easily lead to anxiety and depression. Congregations have been structured to function in a modern, “Christian” society. As the Church comes to terms with our postmodern, largely post-Christian society, congregations discover the mission field is right on their doorstep.

The conclusion of *Missional Church* echoes many of the themes developed by Bosch. The rapid changes and dislocations of our time call for a fresh understanding of mission. The authors invite the church to reclaim a sense of being subject to God, to again find the New Testament vision of being witnesses to the power of God’s love. Then, the authors say, “mission is founded on the mission of God in the world, rather than on the church’s effort to extend itself.”<sup>50</sup> The study defines a missional church as one called into being by an awareness of the reign of God; the response of a congregation to the reign of God defines the congregation’s mission. This understanding is grounded in the New Testament. The central teaching of Jesus is the reign of God, characterized as the “full prosperity of the people of God, living under God’s demanding care and compassionate rule.”<sup>51</sup> The reign of God is understood here not as something we create or extend, but rather receive and enter. The mission of the church, then, is to invite others to join us as we receive and enter the reign of God. We are to “speak boldly and often, so that the signs of the reign of God in the Scriptures, in the world’s history, and in the present may be clearly seen.”<sup>52</sup>

Thus the task of a missional congregation is to shape a people who demonstrate and announce God’s intention for creation.<sup>53</sup> The authors of *The Missional Church* envisioned the congregation as God’s pilgrim people in a particular context, drawn to enter into God’s reign. The local congregation organizes itself as the pilgrim people of God, with a covenant community at the leading edge, pointing the way to those who are drawn to accompany them. This wider body is defined not by its boundaries, but by the attraction of its members to the direction in which the covenant leadership group is moving, that is, by its mission. Each congregation has its own part to play in God’s drama of salvation. Each congregation is called to discern its particular mission, to proclaim the Gospel to particular people at a given time in a specific place.

What are the distinctive marks of a missional congregation? James Fowler approached congregational mission from his study of the stages of faith in the lives of individuals. Fowler proposed that in our postmodern society,

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50. Ibid., 82.

51. Ibid., 9.

52. Ibid., 109.

53. Ibid., 188.

adult faith is becoming less conventional and more individual and reflective. He attempted to imagine the nature of the church that God is calling into being, a church that will sustain the growth of individual faith in the emerging world of the twenty-first century.<sup>54</sup>

Fowler described three congregations that illustrated a missional congregation, though he used different words; “missional congregation” became “public church.” The “reign of God” became the “commonwealth of love and justice.” (Fowler assumed that all understanding is metaphorical, and further that the metaphor of God as a sovereign no longer functions well. Thus “kingdom of God” is freshly imaged as “the commonwealth of love and justice.” This evocative image is consistent with the biblical tradition. God reigns where justice and mercy have kissed each other.) Fowler described seven characteristics of a “public church.”<sup>55</sup>

1. A public church fosters a clear sense of Christian identity and commitment.
2. A public church manifests a diversity of membership.
3. A public church consciously prepares and supports members for vocation and witness in a pluralistic society.
4. A public church balances nurture and group solidarity with forming and accountability for public life beyond the walls of the church.
5. A public church evolves patterns of authority and governance that keep pastoral and lay leadership in a fruitful balance.
6. A public church offers its witness in publicly visible and publicly intelligible ways.
7. A public church shapes a pattern of formation for children, youth, and adults that works toward the combining of Christian commitment with vocation in public.

Fowler’s description of “public church” expands and gives specificity to the notion of a “missional congregation.” In doing so, he was clear that the vocational development of the members is a crucial element in this new paradigm of the mission of the church. The following section explores the meaning of vocation and argues that vocational development is a central component of the Gospel for people in a postmodern age.

## Vocation

When God calls a congregation, we speak of mission. When God calls an individual, we speak of vocation. It is the reign of God, experienced on an individual level, that constitutes vocation, just as the reign of God, experienced on a congregational level, constitutes its mission. In Fowler’s

54. James Fowler, *Weaving the New Creation* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991).

55. *Ibid.*, 155–62

words, “To be in vocation is to find a purpose for one’s life that is part of the purposes of God. Vocation is that response one makes with one’s total life to the call of God to partnership.”<sup>56</sup> It is possible to have a purpose for one’s life that is part of the purposes of God. This is very good news to a post-modern people lost in a sea of relativity (harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd).<sup>57</sup> God equips each person for a unique role in the drama of salvation. A person finds meaning in life by discovering and playing his or her part in God’s purpose for the world. Vocation is not chiefly an external duty or obligation, but the key to a life of abundant purpose and fulfillment.

Fowler expanded and intensified the meaning of vocation with four paradoxical illustrations:

1. The paradox illustrated in Psalm 139, that the Creator of all knows each one of us by name, formed us in our mother’s womb, and claims us as partners.
2. The paradox of Ephesians 4:1, that our freedom comes through choosing to be prisoners of the Lord. Our hearts are made to be captivated by God; only when we allow this to happen do we find our true vocation and live in a manner worthy of our calling.
3. We become true individuals only in community, in relation to God and neighbor. In community we discover our gifts and our call.
4. What we most deeply want for ourselves can guide us to what God wants for us.

What we most deeply want is often buried under layers of self-protection and false identity. Parker Palmer wrote of the connection between vocation and identity: “How much dissolving and shaking of ego must we endure before we discover our deep identity—the true self within every human being that is the seed of authentic vocation?”<sup>58</sup> Our vocation is to be our true self, to mature into the persons in whom God delights. Vocation, identity, gifts, ministry—these are all interconnected. The place God calls us to is the place where we feel truly ourselves, able to give the gifts we have in service to others.

The argument so far has been that vocational discernment is a core mission of the congregation in order to meet the deep need of individuals to find their identities in God’s purpose for their lives and to share in Christ’s work of reconciliation. How then do individuals know whom God is calling them to be? What can a congregation do to help?

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56. Ibid., 120.

57. Mark 6:34.

58. Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 9.

## Gifts

The Church of the Savior in Washington, DC, strongly influenced the vocational discernment work at St. Martin's-in-the-Field, Maryland. The Church of the Savior is an ecumenical congregation, founded after World War II by Gordon Cosby and his wife, Mary. Cosby was a Baptist minister whose experience in the war left him determined to gather a church that would genuinely transform its members.<sup>59</sup> The congregation was constituted by “mission groups” that provided innovative ministries in Washington, DC. These groups emphasized helping members discern their gifts for ministry. Although the membership was small, the congregation had a very large impact on struggling individuals and neighborhoods in the city.

Elizabeth O'Connor was drawn to the Church of the Savior and became active in its life. She wrote several books out of her experience with the congregation. One book in particular became the basis for the workshop at St. Martin's-in-the-Field.<sup>60</sup> Although she did not use the word, the following passage by O'Connor is all about vocation and how it is discerned.

When we talk about being true to ourselves—being the persons we are intended to be—we are talking about gifts. We cannot be ourselves unless we are true to our gifts. . . . We ask to know the will of God without guessing that His will is written into our very beings. We perceive that will when we discern our gifts. Our obedience and surrender to God are in large part our obedience and surrender to our gifts . . . A primary purpose of the church is to help us discover our gifts, and in the face of our fears, to hold us accountable for them so we can enter into the joy of creating.<sup>61</sup>

This passage goes to the heart of how the Church of Our Savior organizes itself for mission and became the basis for the Gifts Discernment program at St. Martin's-in-the-Field.

Jacqueline McMakin drew on O'Connor's writing as she created her own work on ministry and gifts.<sup>62</sup> She asked six questions that develop the connection between gifts and individual vocation:

1. What are my unique, God-given gifts?
2. How can I be a patron of another's gifts?
3. Which piece of God's vision is mine?
4. What is God calling me to do?
5. Is there a corporate dimension for my vocation?

59. Gordon Cosby, *Handbook for Mission Groups* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1975).

60. Elizabeth O'Connor, *Eighth Day of Creation: Gifts and Creativity* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1971).

61. Ibid, 119.

62. Jacqueline McMakin and Rhoda Nary, *Doorways to Christian Growth* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1984), 185.



6. How do my unique gifts and calling tie me into the larger body of believers?

Our gifts form one pillar on which our vocation is based. God calls us through our gifts, those things that we do well and love to do. We are connected to the church not primarily for our own comfort, but so we can contribute what we have been given in a community of support and accountability.

There is a second pillar for our vocation, though, alluded to in McMakin's question, "Which piece of God's vision is mine?" When we see with God's eyes, we care about what God cares about. Jesus taught us to pray, "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." God is bringing about God's reign, the commonwealth of love and justice, and each of us is called to be a part of what God is doing.

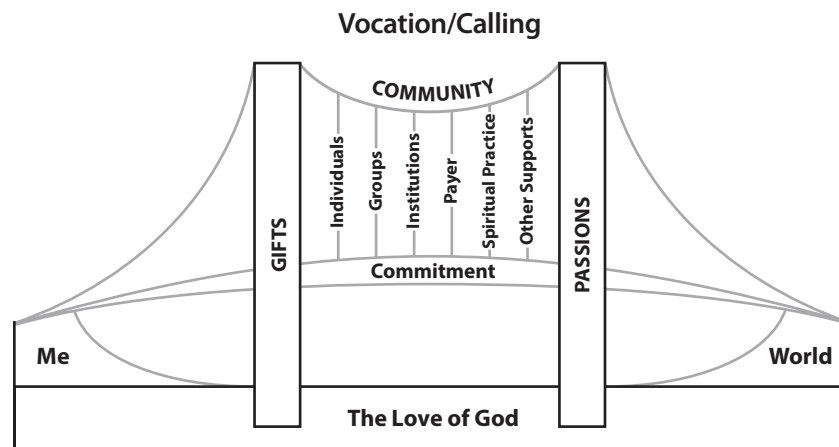
Frederick Buechner described how vocation arises from our gifts and what we care about. "The place God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."<sup>63</sup> When we are doing what we love to do and do well, there is a good chance that we are exercising our gifts. However, if we use our gifts for a trivial or selfish purpose, we are likely to be missing God's call. Similarly, if we are spending our lives in the service of others in a way that drains us, we are likely to be serving our own sense of duty rather than God's call. Vocation is discovered as the bridge between our gifts and the particular piece of the world's hunger that calls to us. Our culture does not normally associate the idea of *deep gladness* with either *the world's deep hunger* or the concept of *vocation*. To understand that vocation and ministry have a dimension of gladness is a revelation to most parishioners. Gifts discernment is about celebrating and enjoying each person's true vocation. This is a message that needs constant repetition because parishioners are programmed to expect that vocation means doing what is difficult and unpleasant. A further revelation is that the voice calling us resonates within us. True vocation is not experienced as simply doing what some outside authority desires or what the church needs. Just the opposite is true. Genuine vocation provides an authentic path that strengthens the sense of identity and freedom of those who respond to God's call.

### A Vocational Paradigm

The illustration below depicts vocation arising from the twin pillars of our giftedness, which is the source of our deep gladness, and our passionate connection to the world's deep hunger.<sup>64</sup>

63. Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

64. The illustration and following comments come from the *The Klesis Project: Hearing and Responding to God's Call* found at [www.saintmarksburlington.org/adulted.php](http://www.saintmarksburlington.org/adulted.php).



The components of the bridge are drawn from a slightly modified and expanded version of James Fowler's model of vocation.<sup>65</sup>

1. **CHERISHED:** The Creator knows each one of you by name, formed you in your mother's womb, and calls you as partners. (Psalms 139)
2. **GIFTED:** What you do well and love doing are gifts from God. (1 Corinthians 12:1–12)
3. **PASSIONATE:** Your passionate response to the needs of the world can guide you to what God wants for you. (Exodus 2:11–3:10)
4. **COMMITTED:** Your freedom comes through choosing to be prisoners of the Lord. Your hearts are made to be captivated by God; only when you allow this to happen do you find your true vocation and live in a manner worthy of your calling. (Ephesians 4:1–16)
5. **COMMUNAL:** You become true individuals only in community, in relation to God and neighbor. In community you discover your gifts and your call. (1 Corinthians 12:14–31)



### Focus

Terms to note: Ephesians 4:1–6; mission and the missional church; *missio Dei*; missiology; public church; vocation; gifts for ministry; discernment; “the bridge metaphor” of vocational discernment

### Respond

There is a direct correlation between God's mission and a person's vocation as response to that mission, the *missio Dei*. Answers to vocational concerns become easier to discern the more clearly one knows God's purpose and mission.

65. James Fowler, *Weaving the New Creation* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991).



Vocation can be expressed in many contexts. On the universal level of God's activities with all of God's creation, vocation is the response to God's call to participate in the *missio Dei*. Vocation also operates on the societal level, finding expression in roles and responsibilities. For example, once a person becomes a parent that identity remains even after the children are grown. If a person takes on a specific profession that experience, too, becomes part of who the person is, even after retirement. Vocation also operates on an individual, immediate level played out in the multiple exchanges a person has throughout a day.

A personal experience demonstrates how vocation operates on different levels out of a theology of mission.

Early one morning the doorbell rang, which was highly unusual. We found our elderly neighbor had come to the door because he needed to use the restroom. Once he was in the house and had attended to basic needs, he reported that he had locked himself out of his house and had slept all night in his car. As conversation continued, he revealed that he was very confused and unable to remember things that had recently happened.

During the next couple of hours we considered several options. First, he could be sent on his way back to his own property to solve his own problems. Or we could set aside our work for the day and attend to arranging the needed support for him. The decision we finally made was to talk with him, get names to contact, and keep him safe until family and church friends could provide long-term help.

Although brief, the example illustrates decision points on the three vocational levels. At the daily, immediate level a person faces decisions in specific, concrete moments. The elderly neighbor in need presents those around him with multiple ethical and vocational dilemmas. For example, one issue is how best to aid him and also respect his dignity. Another is how to respond appropriately to a complex situation in order to comply with the command to "love your neighbor as yourself."

On a societal level, the missiological question concerns what kind of community (neighborhood) God seeks to create. If the call is to participate with God in creating a "commonwealth of love and justice," what actions contribute to the vision and affect the quality of the community? Societal norms and conventions establish and support a quality of life. A "commonwealth of love and justice" grows out of customs that shape and protect just and loving relationships. Hospitality extended to a neighbor reinforces God's commonwealth.

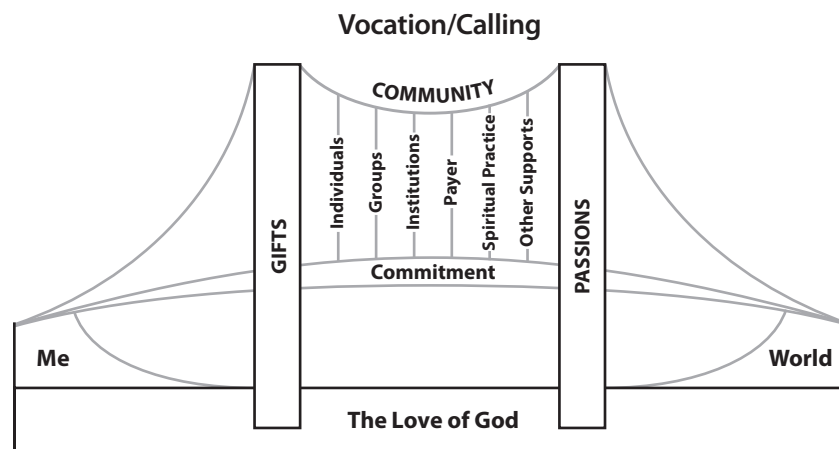
On the most comprehensive, universal level decisions made about how to help the elderly neighbor can point to the "big picture" where the church participates in God's mission "to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ."<sup>66</sup> The church in this example is called to help the

66. The Book of Common Prayer, 855.

neighbor put long-term solutions in place, providing a witness to God's loving care for all creatures.

Reflect on how you have experienced and observed the operation of the three vocation levels—universal, societal, and individual.

### Practice



Examine the bridge image presented in “A Vocational Paradigm” above as a metaphor that depicts the span between an individual and the world.

Explore the dynamics of the metaphor through some theological perspectives, such as: How do you describe the nature of the world shown in the metaphor? What dangers or difficulties are actually or potentially present? How is God revealed in the metaphor's world? What characteristics of human nature come to mind? What is a cause for celebration in that image?

Extend the theological reflection by connecting the bridge metaphor to the four sources of Tradition (the Christian tradition), Culture (contemporary cultural life and attitudes), Action (personal experience), and Position (personal beliefs).

Record your position statements, noticing insights. What do you see that you have not seen before? What do you notice that you have seen before, but perhaps now in a new light? What pattern emerges? Discuss how these insights illuminate your understanding of vocation and call.

Consider how this brief reflection contributes to ministry in daily life. Notice especially what potential difference(s) there might be now for living out your vocation as a minister in the world.

# Week Thirty-one

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Proverbs  
Collins, Chapter 24, “Proverbs”

### Focus

While the Psalms and Song of Songs (last week’s reading) are poetry, Proverbs mainly consists of ancient aphorisms, or wisdom sayings.

Notice the passages from Proverbs that appeal to you as well as passages that do not appeal to you.

What do you notice about the portrayal of wisdom in Proverbs 8?

Look back to a psalm and/or a passage from Song of Songs that moved or particularly spoke to you. Choose some of the wisdom sayings from Proverbs that ring true for you. Read your selections aloud, noticing what stirs in you. Reflect on how the passages you selected reveal something of your deeper self: your hopes, your concerns, your experience. What position statement would you like to make?

## YEAR TWO

### Read

James  
Powell, Chapter 24, “James”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: wisdom literature; dispersion; purpose of the Letter of James

What view of God and of Christian community does James promote?

## YEAR THREE

### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 21, “Enlightenment: Ally or Enemy?”

**Focus**

The Enlightenment produced a sea change in Western Christianity that continues well into the contemporary social and intellectual context. In what ways has the Enlightenment revolutionized the understanding of human nature? Think about the positive and negative impact the altered views of humanity have had on understanding vocational development.

**YEAR FOUR****Read**

Peace, Rose, and Mobley, Foreword, Introduction, and “Part I: Encountering the Neighbor”

**Focus**

In the Foreword to *My Neighbor's Faith*, Joan Chittister aptly describes what the book intends and why: “In this book all the languages of God are spoken—Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian and Muslim—so that we can learn from one another.”<sup>67</sup>

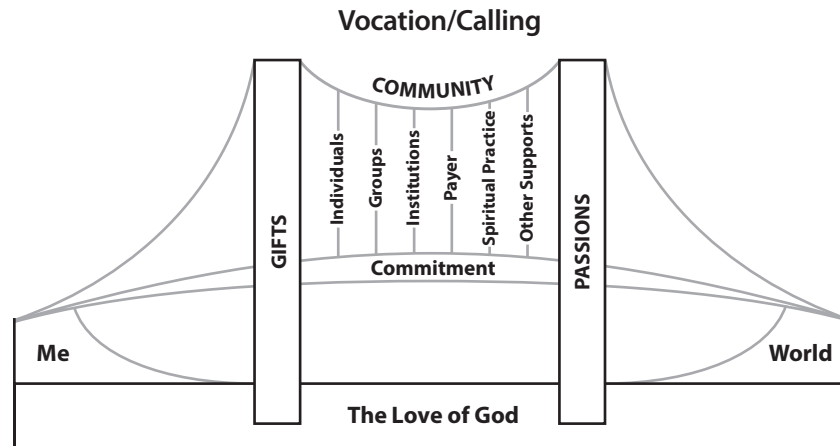
Much is to be learned in this book about God’s “commonwealth of love and justice,” also known as God’s reign or the kingdom of God. Identify ways the essays in “Part I: Encountering My Neighbor” contribute to developing a theology of mission and ministry in a pluralistic world. Also, what specific ideas, images, or stories foster vocational development?

**ALL YEARS****Respond**

The work done throughout this unit fosters vocational development within the context of a missiology that asserts that Christians are called to witness and participate in the way God is changing the world. To that end, review the work you have done this week and throughout the year. Identify key concepts, images (metaphors), stories, and actions that enhance your beliefs about what God is doing in the world, society, and individual lives.

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67. Jennifer Howe Peace, Or N. Rose, and Gregory Mobley, eds., *My Neighbor's Faith: Stories of Interreligious Encounter, Growth, and Transformation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), xii.



Note how what you have learned and experienced speaks to the “Vocational Paradigm” (bridge metaphor) from the unit essay in Week Thirty and how that metaphor illuminates what you have read and reflected on this year in regards to your own sense of ministry.

### Practice

Christian vocational development is grounded in scripture. One of the primary passages from the New Testament that has guided a Christian understanding of our call to ministry comes from the Epistle to the Ephesians. Read this passage several times and sit for a few moments in silence before identifying a point of focus for theological reflection.

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it is said, “When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.” (When it says, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom

the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. —Ephesians 4:1–16

#### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION BEGINNING WITH THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

**Identify** a focus from your reading of the passage above. What verse or phrase caught your attention? What idea or image stayed with you in the silence? Summarize or state the focus succinctly, or create an image or metaphor for the focus.

**Explore** the focus with theological questions:

*Creation:* How would you describe the world of this focal point? How does God disclose God's self in this world?

*Sin:* What constitutes a disconnect or brokenness there? What deep need is exposed?

*Judgment:* Where is the moment of recognition or what catches you up short? How is the need revealed?

*Repentance:* What would cause things to turn around? What possible responses to the need occur to you?

*Resurrection:* What would restore this world to God's "commonwealth of love and justice"?

Note any insights on the topic of vocation or ministry that may be surfacing for you.

**Connect** the focus to other sources:

*Experience:* When have you experienced a situation in your own life that relates to the focal point of this reflection? What contributed to your decision on how or whether to respond?

*Culture/Society:* Choose a single world from contemporary culture and society, such as employment, regional/local community life, or national/political life (you may think of others), from which to consider this question: What does this world have to say about responding to need?

*Position:* What personal opinion or belief does this reflection bring up for you? What is your statement regarding responding to needs or calls to service?

Use the same theological perspective questions above to explore at least one of these other sources. Compare the world of the focus as it is revealed in your consideration of the Christian tradition with that revealed in your consideration of the other source(s). Where are similarities? Where are significant differences? What insights are surfacing in this comparison?

**Apply** the fruits of this reflection, first by gathering the insights you have noted.

How do you understand vocation and call as the result of this reflection?

Note implications for your own vocational development.

Consider possible action steps for ministry in your local community.

Create a summary statement of what you have learned, especially with reference to vocation and ministry. This may be a private statement for continuing reflection, or it may be a position statement you can share with others on the topic of responding to God's call and the needs of the world.

*Note: This reflection has been presented for individual use, but is easily adapted to group reflection. If your group does reflect together, note for yourself any differences you find in the process overall, and in how other perspectives and experiences in the circle affect your own insights and application. What do you learn from group reflection about the role of community life in discerning vocation?*

# Week Thirty-two

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Job  
Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth)  
Collins, Chapter 25, “Job and Qoheleth”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: character of God; role of Satan; conclusion reached in Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes)

Like Proverbs, the books of Job and Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes) are considered Wisdom books in the Jewish tradition. What is their role in relation to the book of Proverbs?

What picture of God emerges in the story of Job? What challenges or supports your own theology of God? Put yourself in the story in the place of Job; what do you say to your friends and family about God’s part in what has happened to you?

In what ways does Qoheleth challenge Proverbs? What supports or challenges your own theology of creation/the world and the human condition?

## YEARTWO

### Read

1 Peter  
2 Peter  
Powell, Chapter 25, “1 Peter,” and Chapter 26, “2 Peter”

### Focus

What do 1 and 2 Peter contribute to developing a theology of vocation that can sustain you in difficult times, such as when a ministry that once brought joy now feels unrewarding?

What does Powell have to say that enhances your understanding of these letters and the world in which they were written?



**YEAR THREE****Read**

MacCulloch, Chapter 22, “Europe Re-enchanted or Disenchanted?”

**Focus**

This chapter lays out necessary components for setting the context of contemporary Anglo-American and European theology. Note what specific persons or ideas interest you, and how what you identify suggests about what gifts and passions you have.

**YEAR FOUR****Read**

Peace, Rose, and Mobley, “Part II: Viewing Home Anew” and “Part III: Redrawing Our Maps”

**Focus**

After spending time in another culture and openly embracing the differences, a person returns home and sees what once seemed “normal” with new eyes. Cultural dissonance sets in that requires redrawing of familiar boundaries. Which of the vignettes found in Parts II and III exemplified what de Beer described in the unit essay (Week Thirty) as “layers of self-protection and false identity”? Think about how the stories in these two sections affect your sense of self. When have you experienced a different perspective that caused you to conceive “a new normal”? What resistance in yourself did you encounter? What helped you overcome that resistance?

**ALL YEARS****Respond**

Review these position statements from this unit’s opening essay by John de Beer (Week Thirty):

When God calls a congregation, we speak of mission. When God calls an individual, we speak of vocation. It is the Reign of God, experienced on an individual level, that constitutes vocation, just as the Reign of God, experienced on a congregational level, constitutes its mission.

God equips each person for a unique role in the drama of salvation. A person finds meaning in life by discovering and playing his or her part in God’s purpose for the world. Vocation is not chiefly an external duty or obligation, but the key to a life of abundant purpose and fulfillment.

Think through how your assigned reading supports and/or challenges the vocational development perspective contained in these statements.

### Practice

The experiences a person has and how they are interpreted shape identity. Reinterpreting past experiences can uncover what a person most deeply wants. Reflecting theologically on selected experiences also can foster new understandings in light of theological themes.

The discipline of theological reflection contributes to the discernment and formation of a person's vocation and how that call is lived out in everyday life. One of the elements of the discipline of theological reflection is the selection of incidents that begin the reflection process. While any experience can be used, selecting experiences for which you find renewed interest and energy, or for which you sense a depth of unexplored meaning, can enrich and focus theological reflection. In addition, deeper reflection occurs when you choose experiences you sense may be rooted in theological concerns, such as mission, vocation, gifts, and ministry.

Recall two or three past experiences that you believe might be about vocation or call. For example, the unexpected visit from an elderly neighbor described in Week Thirty likely holds much to be learned about vocation and ministry. Another example might be how you responded to someone in the grocery store who unexpectedly revealed her struggle with cancer.

Once you have recalled two or three experiences, choose one to describe in writing. Include sufficient detail to capture the experience. The description need not be more than a half page or so.

Reflect on that experience using EfM's four movements of **Identify, Explore, Connect, and Apply**. Refer to other examples of individual reflection beginning with a personal experience from past weeks or in Part II of this Reading and Reflection Guide if you need help framing questions for the Explore and Connect movements. Since this reflection is centered on a particular theme (vocation, ministry, call, mission, or whatever you have chosen), be sure to adapt questions as appropriate to focus in on that theme. For instance, in the **Explore** movement a theological perspective question on "**sin**" might be framed as "What inhibits or blocks responding to a call?" A question for the **Apply** movement might be, "What insights or implications here contribute to your own theology of vocation?"

Reflect on the process of framing your own theological reflection without a worksheet. How did you do? What challenges did you encounter? How can you use this experience for reflecting theologically as you go forward?

# Week Thirty-three

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Ruth  
Jonah  
Esther  
Collins, Chapter 26, “The Hebrew Short Story”

### Focus

Imagine Ruth, Jonah, and Esther as three stories in a volume of fictional short stories. Now consider them as nonfiction stories that are to be taken as literally and historically true.

Notice what happens to the stories when read as fictional prose or as history. What contribution does each reading bring to developing a spirituality?

## YEAR TWO

### Read

1 John, 2 John, and 3 John  
Powell, Chapter 27, “The Johannine Letters: 1 John, 2 John, 3 John”

### Focus

Note how the Johannine letters make use of light vs. dark; children of God vs. children of the devil; truth vs. deceit; and good vs. evil. What are these letters saying about Christian identity?

Reflect on how the theme of “practicing love” relates to your theology of vocation.

## YEAR THREE

### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 23, “To Make the World Protestant”

### Focus

MacCulloch’s chapter covers over two hundred years of history that is likely familiar. As the historian’s work comes closer to the present, the line between history and journalism blurs. Identify a thread that runs through the chapter. In one or two sentences, describe it. Examine the thread using questions framed from the theological standpoints of human nature;

creation, sin, judgment, repentance, and redemption; the way God is disclosed; and the kind of future desired. What connections can you find with concepts, images, or stories from current culture and society? Name what truths and beliefs you hold. Consider what you now see that you have not seen before. Describe ways this reflection may inspire to make a difference in your daily life as a Christian seeking to serve the world in Christ's name.

## YEAR FOUR

### Read

Peace, Rose, and Mobley, "Part IV: Unpacking Our Belongings" and "Part V: Stepping Across the Line"

### Focus

Think back to any encounters you may have had with persons from other faith traditions than your own. What baggage did you need to unpack, what preconceptions did you find a need to let go of? If you have not had such an encounter, think of how non-Christians have been portrayed in the media you read or watch. When have you encountered a report that seemed contrary to your understanding or beliefs about persons of a faith not your own?



## ALL YEARS

### Respond

As Elizabeth O'Conner so aptly observes, a person's identity, purpose, and vocation are communicated through gifts. She writes, "We ask to know the will of God without guessing that His will is written into our very beings. We perceive that will when we discern our gifts."<sup>68</sup> Often awareness of gifts comes unexpectedly and unseen and therefore arrives unexamined.

O'Conner's observations grow out of a theology that takes seriously that human beings are created in the image of God. Within this theology, vocational discernment is intertwined with who a person is as that person lives in community, thus determining gifts is both individual and communal work.

In addition to self-knowledge, gift discernment involves looking for God's reflection. When a person asks, "What are my gifts?" the person also asks, "What of God is specifically and uniquely being reflected through my gifts?" From the perspective of this theology, gift discernment is a sobering process. Therefore, it is to be entered into prayerfully.

68. Elizabeth O'Conner, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 37.

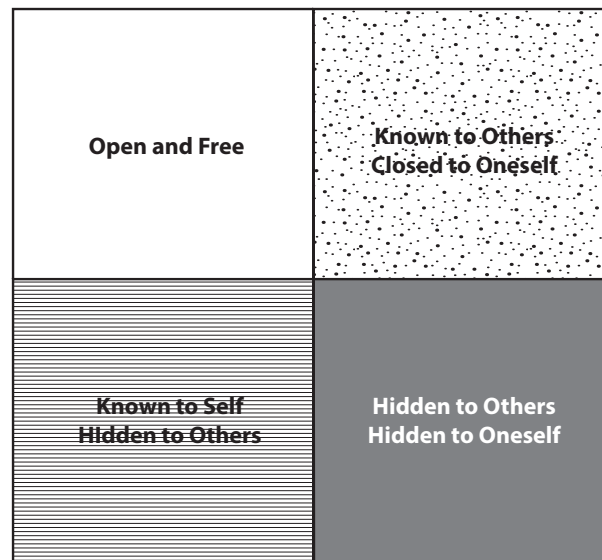
Discerning gifts can be something like trying to see your own face without the aid of another person or instrument. Others see a person's face directly, but the individual cannot. Even the best mirror or camera only approximates the reality.

This inability to see our own selves as others can is an argument for vocational discernment in community. The community may be intentional like an EfM group or unintentional like a chance conversation while standing in line to get a cup of coffee at Starbucks. On a wider level, the community that helps us discern our gifts also includes those who have lived before us. Study of the Christian heritage can be approached as an aid to discerning one's mission, ministry, and vocation. Reading Job, the Johannine letters, nineteenth-century Christian history, or encounters with people of different religions also can be approached as reading about identity, gifts, ministry, and vocation.

Review your reading assignments for this and the last few weeks, looking at the material from the standpoint of gifts discernment. What do you notice about your interests, concerns, values—your own gifts? What gifts and passions of members of your EfM group are reflected in what you have been studying?

### Practice

In the early 1960s Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham developed a deceptively simple model of self-awareness that became known as the Johari Window.<sup>69</sup> It is a simple model that distinguishes four features of self-awareness, arranged into a four-window diagram: 1) Open and free: what is known to the person and known to others; 2) known to self, hidden to others; 3) known to others, closed to oneself; and 4) hidden to others, hidden to self.



69. Wikipedia offers a basic description of the Johari Window and its application, including a helpful list of descriptive words. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johari\\_window](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johari_window)

The four windows are not fixed, but depend on the specific context under consideration, size being relative to the level of known and unknown aspects in a particular relationship. What the diagram between two good friends looks like is different from that between two acquaintances. A Johari Window you would draw representing your work situation would be different from that representing family members around the dinner table.

Think through how this model of understanding human nature can be used in vocational discernment. For example, state one interest/passion you have that others in the EfM group know about you as well. Next, name an interest you have that you have not disclosed to them. Third, if given an opportunity to ask what they have noticed about your interests, what would you ask them? Finally, reflect on thoughts and feelings things that are hidden from yourself and from others—those things known only to God.

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>70</sup>

In the essay that opened this unit on vocation, de Beer writes:

What we most deeply want is often buried under layers of self-protection and false identity. Parker Palmer wrote of the connection between vocation and identity: “How much dissolving and shaking of ego must we endure before we discover our deep identity—the true self within every human being that is the seed of authentic vocation?”<sup>71</sup> Our vocation is to be our true self, to mature into the persons in whom God delights. Vocation, identity, gifts, ministry—these are all interconnected. The place God calls us to is the place where we feel truly ourselves, able to give the gifts we have in service to others.

How might work with the Johari Window support and clarify your sense of vocation, mission, and ministry? What would you like to ask of your EfM group as you discern your gifts and calling? Who are others in your community you might ask to help you discern?

70. The Book of Common Prayer, 355.

71. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 9.

# Week Thirty-four

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Daniel  
1 and 2 Maccabees  
Collins, Chapter 27, “Daniel, 1–2 Maccabees”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: apocalypse; apocalyptic literature; Maccabee; pseudonymity as a literary device; martyrdom and militancy  
What messages about personal identity and relationship with God do you find in Daniel and in the Maccabees books?

## YEAR TWO

### Read

Jude  
Powell, Chapter 28, “Jude”

### Focus

What is a polemic? What examples of polemic do you find in your contemporary culture?  
What is the mission of the church for Jude?

## YEAR THREE

### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 24, “Not Peace but a Sword”

### Focus

Terms and names to note: the major events for the Church from 1914–1960; key aspects leading to both World Wars; the four Christian emperors at the beginning of the World War I; Bolshevik; Pius the IX and Christ the King feast day; Benedict XV; *Cristeros*; Bernardino Nogara; Charles Brent and Nathan Söderblom; Josiah Olulowo Ositelu  
How does your view of change in the church connect with MacCulloch’s?

## YEAR FOUR

**Read**

Peace, Rose, and Mobley, “Part VI: Finding Fellow Travelers”

**Focus**

Terms and names to note: Howard Thurman; *ru’ab hakodesh*; William Sloane Coffin

Do you have a story about finding fellow travelers as your own call to ministry has developed?



## ALL YEARS

**Respond**

From time to time it is important to retrace the year’s journey. This is particularly crucial when fostering vocational interests. Recall Frederick Buechner’s definition of vocation: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”<sup>72</sup> Deep gladness fuels and sustains mission, and motivates ministry.

Revisit your notes for the year and review some of the passages you have highlighted in your textbook(s). Notice what interested you and consider how those interests provide clues for your “deep gladness.” Review your spiritual autobiography to see what has delighted you. Recall any discussions that suggest what you love doing. Call to mind experiences that you celebrate and enjoy.

Write a short paragraph describing the deep gladness you have within you. It may take several drafts to reach some clarity.

People often have issues that “push their buttons,” causing them to jump on a “soap box” and rant in response to what they have heard or seen. Such rants can point toward what Buechner calls the “world’s deep hunger.” A rant usually grows out of a recognized profound need. Recall two or three of your “rants” and explore the yearning that provides the energy for the protestation. Describe the human and/or social need that often evokes your “soap box” speeches.

Issues and concerns that you are passionate about, coupled with your joys, may reveal God’s call. Name three or four contexts in which you experience the marriage of yearning and joy.

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72. Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*, 119.



**Practice**

Use the outline to reflect theologically on the issue that you have identified. After completing the worksheet, reflect on the ways in which the theological reflection sheds light on your vocation and ministry.

**THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION BEGINNING WITH A DILEMMA****Identify**

DESCRIBE a time when you experienced the tension of wanting two things simultaneously, such as a desire to try new things in life and a desire to remain where life is familiar, and for which there are no decisions pending. The incident is over.

*Example: I had just begun to work on a community project that I like doing when my phone rang showing that a friend was calling. I knew from an earlier conversation that he was living through a crisis. At that moment I had to decide whether to answer the phone or let it ring, hoping my friend would leave a message that I could respond to later.*

NAME the turning point in the incident. What is the central moment of the incident? Where is the tension greatest? What was happening? What were you thinking and feeling at that moment? Record the central moment in a short sentence.

STATE the dilemma. Try to state what is at stake or what the central issue is at the moment of greatest tension. To help clarify the dilemma, list declarative statements about what you wanted at that moment or what interests were at stake at that moment. Select a pair of statements that best represent the central tension, identifying what is at issue or at stake in that tension. Record the primary pair of tension statements as

“I wanted \_\_\_\_\_ and I wanted \_\_\_\_\_.”

Remember that this is a difficult choice between two good things.

*Example: I wanted to work on a project that brings me deep joy and I wanted to be available to a friend in need.*

Note the central issue/what is at stake. *Example: Addressing a community need conflicting with addressing an individual's need*

**Explore**

EXAMINE the dilemma. What is it like to live in that issue/tension? Use cost/promise (or risk/hope) or the theological perspective of creation, sin, judgment, repentance, and redemption to frame questions about the dilemma.

RECORD your responses to the questions using either questions of cost/ promise or questions drawn from theological perspectives.

“I wanted \_\_\_\_\_ and I wanted \_\_\_\_\_.”

Cost of this choice

Cost of this choice

Promise of this choice

Promise of this choice

Example: theological perspectives

Sin—What needs are present?

Judgment—What choices are there?

Repentance—What might require a change of heart?

### **Connect**

**CHRISTIAN TRADITION:** Identify some stories from scripture or church history that relate to the dilemma. Or perhaps some prayers or hymns come to mind. Compare and contrast what the Christian tradition has to say about that dilemma. What choices would the tradition support? Not support? Why?

**CULTURE:** Where is this dilemma experienced in our culture? Have there been news stories about it? Have you read a book or seen a movie that dealt with the dilemma? Is there a political dimension to the dilemma?

**POSITION:** What do you believe about the dilemma? How is your belief in conflict in the issue? What do you hope for regarding the dilemma?

### **Apply**

**INSIGHTS and QUESTIONS:** What do you see in a new way now? What have you learned from facing this dilemma? What questions do you have about the dilemma in your life?

**IMPLICATIONS:** What do you want or need to do about similar dilemmas when they arise? Are there social implications? Are there actions you could take? Is there something more to learn? What support would help? Where will you find that support?

# Week Thirty-five

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus)  
 Wisdom of Solomon  
 Collins, Chapter 28, “The Deuterocanonical Wisdom Books,”  
 and Chapter 29, “From Tradition to Canon”

### Focus

The books of Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus) and Wisdom of Solomon are not in all editions of the Bible. You will need a Bible that contains the Apocrypha. An online edition of the Oxford Annotated Bible (NRSV) with the Apocrypha is available on the Oxford Biblical Studies Online website. Information about logging in to this site is at the front of this Guide, following the reading assignments chart.

Terms and names to note: Ecclesiastes; apocrypha; female personification of Wisdom; theodicy; Stoics; *cosmos*; the role of the Scribe; *beth midrash*; eschatology; Plato’s *Republic*; Wisdom and the *Logos*; “natural theology”

## YEAR TWO

### Read

The Revelation to John  
 Powell, Chapter 29, “Revelation”

### Focus

State one new understanding and one thing that challenges you about the Revelation to John.

In what ways has the Revelation been appropriated in the culture of the United States? (Substitute your own nationality if you have encountered such appropriation.)

## YEAR THREE

### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 25, “Cultural Wars”

**Focus**

Reflect on how MacCulloch's context as an Oxford-trained British citizen shapes his understanding of history. How does his understanding compare with yours and the context from which you read history?

**YEAR FOUR**

**Read**

Peace, Rose, and Mobley, "Part VII: Repairing Our Shared World"

**Focus**

Describe one "deep gladness" and one "hunger of the world" that surfaced for you from reading the essays in Part VII.



**ALL YEARS**

**Respond**

Use the week's assigned reading to:

**Identify** the focus of what you read.

**Explore** the views of creation, sin, judgment, repentance, and/or redemption that may have been presented in your reading.

**Connect** by

Noting how the author(s) draws on contemporary culture in writing the chapter;

Noting the beliefs that the author seems to hold and how those intersect with your beliefs; and

Recalling personal experiences related to the chapter's focus.

**Apply** by considering how the material of this reflection on your text relates to ministry you can offer in the world each day.

**Practice**

Christianity has multiple voices expressing varieties of theologies. Consider how your beliefs resonate with theologies voiced in your texts and other readings across this year in EfM. What has resonated? What has challenged you?

How have your behavior, practices, and attitudes been affected by your experience in EfM?

Imagine you have only two minutes to answer the question, “What is your ministry and how do you determine if you are following God’s call?” [Okay, you have five minutes.] Write a response.

# Week Thirty-six: Closing the Year

*The mentor and group will decide how they want to incorporate this work and its sharing into any celebration of the year they might want to create.*

## ALL YEARS

### Read

We sustain each other in the constant interplay between absence and presence. A sustaining ministry asks ministers to be not only creatively present but creatively absent. A creative absence challenges ministers to develop an ever growing intimacy with God in prayer and to make that the source of their entire ministry.<sup>73</sup> —*Henri Nouwen*

Closure is a time to acknowledge what has been, to celebrate what now is, and to anticipate what will come. The time given to this depends on the length of time the group has been together and the personal styles of group members and the mentor. EfM provides an opportunity to form a close and supportive community that cannot be easily replaced. It is important for participants to acknowledge the blessing of the group's time together, while also helping each other shift to new forms of emotional, spiritual, and intellectual support for their ministry.

Closure includes telling stories about significant events in the life of the group and the ways the group has affected each person. Name any regrets or frustrations people have, look ahead to what steps seem to be in view, and help one another plan for alternative forms of support for future life and ministry. The following work combines closure with a focus on ministry going forward.



### Focus

Review notes you made during the year, material you studied, reflections and discussions and celebrations with the group, and your spiritual autobiography.

### Respond

This year's theme is "Living Faithfully in Your World." With that theme in mind and your review of your EfM work, respond to the following.

73. Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1977), 77.

Experience in EfM has helped me:

- let go of . . .
- adopt . . .
- affirm . . .
- focus on . . .

### Practice

Read the following before you begin so you can have a sense of the process.

Set a timer for whatever period you wish to remain in silence. You may want to use your journal to note your responses to the questions below.

Begin with prayer.

Still yourself. Allow yourself to become present to the Spirit of God. When the timer alerts you, continue with the following.

What feelings did you experience?

Write about anything that came to your awareness in the silence.

Read through what you wrote to consider:

- what movement(s) of the Spirit carried you during your silence with God;
- where the movement(s) took you;
- what images arose;
- who came to mind;
- what possibilities stretch before you;
- what you sensed about God.

Complete the following:

Directions I sense for my ministry as I practice living faithfully in my world are:

- for the next three months . . .
- for the next year . . .

The spiritual practices that sustain me at this time are . . .

Go forth in peace to love and serve the Lord.



Plan with your seminar group a way to celebrate your time together as a community this year. As a way of acknowledging the sending out of those who will not be part of the group next year, whether graduating or for another reason, you may wish to incorporate this litany as part of your closing of the year together.

## A Litany of Farewell

Fellow Christian ministers, let us pray for the saving presence of our living God.

**In this world:**

*Christ is risen.*

**In this community:**

*Christ is risen.*

**In this gathering:**

*Christ is risen.*

**In the hearts of all faithful people:**

*Christ is risen.*

We pray and give thanks now for [name(s)], leaving our community.

**For expectations not met:**

*Lord have mercy.*

**For grievances not resolved:**

*Lord have mercy.*

**For wounds not healed:**

*Lord have mercy.*

**For anger not dissolved:**

*Lord have mercy.*

**For gifts not given:**

*Lord have mercy.*

**For promises not kept:**

*Lord have mercy.*

**For this portion of our lifelong pilgrimages which we have shared  
in this place:**

*Thanks be to God.*

**For friendships made, celebrations enjoyed, and for moments  
of nurture:**

*Thanks be to God.*

**For wounds healed, expectations met, gifts given, promises kept:**

*Thanks be to God.*

**For trust and confidence shared; times of good humor and  
moments of gentle leadership:**

*Thanks be to God.*

**For bread and wine, body and blood:**

*Thanks be to God.*



And so, to continue your ministry with other members of the family of Christ:

*Go in peace.*

To continue to live faithfully with new companions and new adventures, new gifts to give and receive:

*Go in peace.*

To offer wisdom and experience, competence and compassion, in the ministry to which you are called:

*Go in peace.*

With whatever fears, whatever sadness, whatever excitement may be yours:

*Go in peace.*

With our faith in you, our hope for you, our love of you:

*Go in peace.*

[Offer intercessions, petitions, and thanksgivings, closing with this prayer said together.]

*Now, we pray, be with those who leave and with those who stay; and grant that all of us, by drawing ever nearer to you, may always be close to each other in the communion of your saints. All this we ask for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.*



## PART II

# Resources





# Supplemental Readings in the Christian Tradition

# Week Three, Reading Assignment for Year Four

## On Being Theologically Literate<sup>74</sup>

### I. On Being Literate

At its simplest, to be literate is to be able to read and write. But there is a stronger sense to the word. To be literate is to be well read in, or at least familiar with the literature of a particular subject. It is this sense that interests us: that is, with being literate in the field of Christian theology; of having a grasp of the tradition through its written deposit.

This could suggest merely an attempt to provide an annotated select bibliography, or a Cook's tour of key theological debates. Such an enterprise would, indeed, have its value. However, the intention is to explore a more fundamental implication. It is important to ask, what is the purpose of being literate? How fundamental is it to Christian believing? But to be literate has also meant to be a member of the literati, an aficionado, a member of an elite. Are we merely trying to boost the standing of the specialists in theology, professional or amateur, who play an esoteric game, far apart from ordinary discipleship? Or is it relevant to a core Christian concern that affects us all?

The basis of my argument is that Christianity sees itself as historical in a unique sense and that therefore tradition is an essential part of living in and with that historical reality. Of course Christianity shares the basic human experience of finding identity in historical continuity embedded in story and culture. There are also, as with many other religions, foundational events which are normative for its existence. But Christianity, taking further its Jewish heritage, has classically affirmed that revelation and salvation were uniquely embodied (incarnate) in these particular events. Thus the historical is not merely the stage for religious discovery or the medium for a religious idea but essential to the substance of Christian faith. The human experience, therefore, of being historical is of the heart of Christian existence and that tradition, in all its ambiguity, is necessary to Christian self-identity, part of being caught up in the drama of salvation. Therefore, to have a sense of the past is a key element in Christian awareness; and being literate is very much bound up with that. There are bound to be wide variations among Chris-

74. Paul H. Ballard, "On Being Theologically Literate," *Modern Believing* 38 (3), July 1997, 34–42. When this article was written Ballard was head of the department of Religious and Theological Studies at the University of Wales, Cardiff, where he taught practical theology.

tians as to how this is experienced and expressed. There are different callings and concerns: for some it is at the centre of their ministry as theologians but for most literacy is a backcloth to their particular Christian obedience; some will have grown up on the stories of the past heroes and heroines, but others will have only just begun to explore their new found faith. There is no 'national curriculum' that everyone must meet, but all can begin to recognize and draw on the spiritual, intellectual and artistic resources to which all in fact are indebted.

## 2. The Issue Today

The idea of theological literacy only becomes an issue when it appears to be under threat. Otherwise it is taken for granted. I am continually alerted to this year by year as I have to recognize that it is less and less possible to assume a basic cultural background as the starting point for teaching. The present generation seems to have lost the western (British) classical tradition which included some debt to Greece and Rome as well as to Shakespeare, the Prayer Book and the Bible. There may be a new tradition emerging but a hiatus, a complete break, will cut future generations off from their heritage.

Our society has, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, been going through a significant cultural sea change. Thomas Kuhn has taught us to use the phrase 'paradigm shift' to describe the transition from one world view, with its fundamental cultural patterns and assumptions, to another that will express itself in new habits, customs and intellectual norms. It has been widely argued that we are going through such a Copernican revolution, watching the end of the Enlightenment of the Modern era and the emergence of Postmodernism, some kind of New Age.<sup>75</sup>

It is never possible, however, from the midst of events to see precisely where history is leading. We cannot be sure whether what we are experiencing is a total 'paradigm shift', like the emergence of the modern world out of the middle ages, or merely a further out-working of the process of modernization. At the same time it is important to ask how total any historical change can be. There are always elements of continuity as well as discontinuity. Perhaps we are only going through a period where the latter, discontinuity, is temporarily dominant and the continuities will again reassert themselves.

Nevertheless the last decades have been a period of far-reaching social change which are significant for this and subsequent generations. In a number of ways basic attitudes have changed. This is, of course, significant for Christianity, for the Church, too, is inevitably caught up in the process. And this poses a problem for, to paraphrase the words of Reinhold Niebuhr,

75. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970). See also theological explorations of this idea in Hans Kung and David Tracy (eds) *Paradigm Change in Theology, a Symposium for the Future* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989) and David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Mary Knoll: Orbis, 1991).

it is necessary to distinguish between what cannot be changed and has to be accepted, indeed affirmed, and what has to be resisted and possibly changed, and that always carries risk and courage.<sup>76</sup>

### 3. Significant Trends in Contemporary Culture

What then are some of the characteristic features of the present that are significant for our theme? These may or may not be mutually compatible, which is not surprising in the maelstrom of history.

#### 3.1. *We live in an increasingly pragmatic society*

Francis Bacon recognized that knowledge is power. In our generation the experiential growth of scientific understanding of the mechanisms of the universe suggest that we can unlock the key to existence. However, there has been a change in the relationship between science and technology. Science is increasingly harnessed to technology. Knowledge is valued in relation to its uses. This can be seen in the emphasis at all levels of education on learning for economic and social purposes. The question thus becomes ‘What can we do?’ and moral truth is dependent on being able to do what we want. Kant’s ‘I ought therefore I can’ can be so easily inverted into ‘I can therefore I ought’. All problems that might arise are susceptible to solution by further applications of technology whether by producing new techniques and more sophisticated tools or by social management. The computer is the model of life. Appeals to past wisdom or alternative lines of argument are regarded as outdated and retrograde.

#### 3.2. *Paradoxically, there is a new emphasis on holism*

The analytical methodology of classical enlightenment thinking has led, it is argued, to mechanistic fragmentation. It is necessary to recover the inter-relatedness of all things. This ranges, on the one hand, from the physicist’s interest in cosmology to the biologist working on the ecological structures of habitat, including our own. On the other hand it has also stimulated a quest for more religious and mystical ways of looking at existence, a feature that frequently rejects Christianity because that has been too closely bound with the destructive tendencies of Western science. Instead there is attraction to the unities of the Indian religions or the nature mysticism of traditional tribal religion. There is, thus, an increasing desire to search for inclusive ways of thinking about our world that will give a framework for the resolution of the confrontational attitudes that seem endemic to the modern world.

#### 3.3. *There is a new romanticism*

The rationalism of modernism has, from time to time, been challenged by forms of romanticism. Romanticism emphasizes the intuitive and emotion-

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76. This reflects the well known prayer used by Alcoholics Anonymous.



al. There is a sense of the immediacy of knowledge whose truth is grasped through inward conviction. The creative freedom of the human spirit has to be given free rein. The artist is the priest of humanity, the channel for expressing the power of the human spirit. Tradition and the past are often seen as inhibiting, quenching the flames of human potential.

Since the late 1960s there has been a resurgence of romanticism. There has been a flowering of religion, mainly of a mystical kind, frequently rejecting the apparent formalisms of Christianity for the esoteric possibilities of the East and elsewhere. This has been heralded as a new era, the Age of Aquarius or the New Age or the Age of the Spirit. Within Christianity itself there has been a renewed emphasis on these elements in the tradition that look to immediacy and religious experience. Most clearly this has been found in the Charismatic movement, which has its exaggerated and sometimes dangerous side; but it can be found in more Catholic forms and in the interest in the search for spirituality in non-Western traditions such as Orthodoxy or Celtic Christianity.

### ***3.4. We live in an increasingly pluralistic and relativistic society***

The pluralism is most clearly seen in the ethnic and cultural mix found in our inner cities. But pluralism is much more pervasive. The cohesions of our common history are more and more tenuous as religions and ideological traditions disintegrate. There is an increasing fragmentation which begins, in places, to threaten social cohesion. People are being forced to find security and identity through belonging to different, often embattled, associations.

This fragmentation has been boosted by the advocacy of personal rights and the consumer society. Diversity and choice are seen as the supreme social good. In the competitive market of the enterprise culture, everything is up for grabs. Marketing has taken over, even in the area of values and faith, seeking to catch the attention of the passing customer who may be more attracted to the wares next door.

### ***3.5. There is a belief in the future at the expense of the past***

Part of the mind set of the modern person is the explanatory value of history. Something can be understood when seen in its historical context. But there is a conflict here. The emphasis can be on the importance of origins or of destiny. Today our eyes are on the future. This has been true of technology which promises a brighter tomorrow and of policies that, especially in Marxism but also in Capitalism, hold up the possibilities of a renewed society. It has also become a marked feature of contemporary theology, especially political and liberation theology: the promise of the Kingdom of God already present in the resurrection of Jesus and the life of the Spirit. But such a drive can downgrade the past, relegate it to an irrelevant curiosity. History or tradition has today to justify itself as having a positive contribution to make to human welfare.

Alvin Toffler and others warned about ‘future shock’.<sup>77</sup> It may appear that some of their expectations were exaggerated. Many of the old traditional perspectives persist, and the future is never entirely predictable. Yet a lot of what they foresaw has come about. And we are just on the threshold of the electronic revolution. The new world would seem to be markedly different from the old.

As has been indicated from time to time, this cultural shift has affected religion along with the rest of society. Religion is not dead but is a many-headed hydra which grows two heads where one is cut off. As Madeleine Bunting in the *Guardian* expressed it, ‘it’s DIY; forget tradition, just find a few friends and make it up as you go along’.<sup>78</sup> This is confirmed by Rosalie Osmond in her study of contemporary religion, i.e. Christianity. She detects a sharp separation between tradition and faith. The former is embodied in the burdens of old dead intellectualism, ritual, buildings and social trap-pings. The new faith is immediate, personal, experiential, God in the un-usual and exciting. It is all rather simple and naive.<sup>79</sup>

#### 4. The Importance of Literacy

For Christianity there is an obvious and crucial dilemma. The Gospel has indeed to be proclaimed in ways that connect with and are accessible to the new cultural context. Indeed the present time has seen a great flowering of new forms of worship and presentation—even if some go well over the top! But it cannot be at the expense of forgetting the tradition, for that threatens to reduce faith to mere sentimentality.

The importance of being literate is precisely because it addresses this fundamental relation between the present and the past. By definition a literature is the cumulative deposit of the tradition. And Christianity, as an incarnational religion, is essentially rooted in history. There is a focal point in past time—the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—to which the Christian community is anchored. There is also a commitment to being part of a community that has forged its self-awareness and identity in the course of a pilgrimage of faith—a cumulative storehouse of wisdom that cannot be cast aside. The present can only be understood in the light of the past and, normatively, knows itself to be Christian by its loyalty to its origins. That is, history is part of the existence of faith.

But this is not to advocate mere traditionalism. Tradition can be a dead weight, an unadventurous reproduction of a received pattern of faith. To talk about all this in terms of literacy, however, also insists on the hermeneutic imperative; the need to be critically aware of the past in a discerning and open way so that there is a creative and liberating dialogue with tradition.

77. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (London: Bantam, 1984).

78. *The Guardian*, 24th December 1995.

79. Rosalie Osmond, *Changing Perspectives* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1993).

Past and present are knit together in a living obedience to the faith that has fed and nurtured the saints.

#### **4.1. *Being literate makes one aware of one's roots***

Arthur Hayley's book and television series *Roots* highlighted for so many what it meant to search for origins and to understand the tradition.<sup>80</sup> This is a basic human motivation. In a cosmopolitan and often hostile world it helps to provide an identity. So for the Christian, it is important to secure identity with the household of faith, not only in the Bible but subsequently, as part of world history and the history of nations.

#### **4.2. *Being literate also gives a sense of belonging***

To begin to know the story is to discover that one is a member of the household of God, enfolded in the communion of saints, both down history and across the globe. It is indeed a motley crew, with skeletons in the cupboard and episodes of which properly to be ashamed. But it also includes great heroes and heroines of the faith, martyrs, confessors, doctors, evangelists and countless ordinary people who, like ourselves, just get on with being obedient. From them can be drawn inspiration and wisdom, challenge and vision.

#### **4.3. *Being literate widens our horizons***

Even in an age of mobility and television, we remain parochial in Christian experience. But there is a whole world out there of spirituality, service and witness that can fill out and challenge our limited perspective. Like the householder in the Gospel it is possible to bring out treasures old and new. We will, thus, begin to understand our own tradition, appreciate its positive strengths, set it in a wider context and review it in the light of the wider tradition. It was precisely out of such exposure in such bodies as the Student Christian Movement that the ecumenical quest arose. Sometimes it may be necessary to take a stand but each affirmation can also be the loss of another truth by denial. We need each other. One of the saddest trends of recent years has been the diminution of the ecumenical imperative, a theme that needs to be re-woven into the counterpoint of Christian living.

#### **4.4. *Being literate brings new resources in our search for Christian understanding***

Other cultures, past or present, often see things very differently from the way we do. Their experience is not ours; their ways of thinking can be strange to us. But this sets up a dialogue between us, for their seeming oddity may hide wisdom that illuminates and challenges our assumptions in surprising ways. Especially at a time when so much of our inherited wisdom seems to be running into the sand, it is valuable to explore alternatives that may open up new possibilities. For example, the Orthodox tradition of the East is meeting the quest for a greater mystical emphasis; Evangelicals are

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80. Arthur Hayley, *Roots*.

rediscovering their spiritual and radical roots, not least by looking at the early and medieval Church; or Christians in Korea are exploring traditional spiritualities to understand better the communion of saints.

#### **4.5. Being literate helps us recognize that our problems are not unique**

Others have been there before and may help us in our situation. Of course circumstances are never the same but there is no need to reinvent the wheel. A good example is the issue of cultural pluralism. For us, after so long a period of Western hegemony, it comes as a shock but this was precisely the situation of the early Church. They had to ask what to make of the traditional paganism, the mystery religions and minority faiths. They also had to discover how to enter into dialogue with the dominant philosophical traditions of their day as we do with the rationalist and postmodern culture of our own. It is also the situation of Christian minority groups in the ancient cultures of the far east—India, China, Japan. The surprising thing is that these are seldom cited in our debates, yet they have experience of struggling to find their identity in a culture that is both theirs and yet not theirs.

#### **4.6. Being literate means that we can faithfully reappraise the past**

The hermeneutic dialogue also allows us to question the past on the basis of our own situation. The striking example of this is the concern for the status of women in the Church which has traditionally, within the social conventions, been male dominated. But once the question is asked, then it is possible to look afresh at the tradition and to discover that there is a hidden strand waiting to be discovered of women's spirituality; a strand which itself interacts with the contemporary dialogue.

### **5. How to be Literate**

To be literate, therefore, enables us to relate to the tradition with a freedom and creativity that both strengthens faith and, through a critical solidarity, opens up a creative dialogue, exploring new avenues of believing and obedience. But how do we become literate?

#### **5.1. A word of caution**

Modernization has eroded the possibility of living in a tradition based society. From time immemorial a tradition was handed down through the normal social structures of family, communal customs, rites of passage, peer group activity, education, religion, folk arts. Ideas, vocabulary, etiquette, expected roles and customs were picked up accidentally and absorbed subliminally. Now it has to be a conscious effort. Faith has to be kept alive, traditions deliberately sustained. The Church is in the business of creating and sustaining a counter culture. But absorbing a tradition takes time. There is no quick fix. To become literate is a time consuming, deliberate, demanding effort. It is not possible to rely on it happening naturally anymore.

### 5.2. To become literate means, therefore, entering into a journey

Christian initiation is admission into the community of faith, including its tradition. This, as part of the journey of faith, is a life-long process. At its heart is a participation in the drama of salvation, focused in the scripture and the communion. But it is also to seek to be steeped in the traditions of the Church. Hymns and prayers and other means put before us the resources of the past. Preaching and teaching draw on the wisdom of others. The Prayer Book, missal and hymn book are treasure stores from which we can each, variously, learn. Beyond this there are the other activities of prayer and study, of reading and shared witness and service that give shape to Christian discipleship both locally and in the wider Church. It is important, therefore, to pay attention to the routine of daily life in the Church for it is this that will create the images of Christian commitment and mould the lives of those that participate.

### 5.3. There are indeed classics

For Christians this is, first and foremost, the Bible. But we live in a generation for whom the Bible is a closed book, no longer the basic literature of education and culture. The plethora of new translations may not have been helpful. Even for practising Christians the selected readings heard weekly hardly begin to offer any real insights. We have to find our modern equivalent of systematic daily reading through the scriptures. Moreover it has to be done in the light of two hundred years of critical historical scholarship. The Bible has to become both a living scripture and an historical resource in the religious quest of humanity.

There are also other Christian classics that have traditionally been used for devotional reading, a source of inspiration and wisdom: Augustine's *Confessions*, Julian's *Shewings*, Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Bonhoeffer's *Cost of Discipleship*, Henri Nouwen's *The Wounded Healer*, and many others.<sup>81</sup> There are convenient anthologies that open up wide selections very quickly, and many modern writers not only draw on them but offer introductions and commentary. Indeed this age is producing its own literature, some of which will themselves become classic.

Theological literacy is not primarily a matter of erudition—though the Church needs its theological high flyers. It is first and foremost about having an open and inquisitive spirit that is glad to become engaged with the Christian story because that is the family to which we belong. Besides there is a great sense of reward and it is often real fun. James Stewart, in his classic on preaching admonishes his readers.

81. Augustine, *Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Julian of Norwich, *Shewings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978); Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956); John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1989); D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM Press, 1959); Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Doubleday, 1972).

There is another resource which will come powerfully to your aid . . . your fellowship with the great minds of the centuries. . . . Keep alert to what theology is saying. Refresh your soul with the living waters of the spiritual classics—all these and many more are your rightful heritage: and who could dwell there and not be ‘strengthened in the inner man’ . . . Such intercourse will impart new qualities of breadth, insight, dignity and precision to all your work. Therefore, in the words of the Apostolic injunction, ‘give heed to reading’.<sup>82</sup>

Stewart may have had the preacher in mind, but the preacher is enabling the congregations to enter into its heritage. This is a promise for the whole people of God.

#### **5.4. *There is a growing and continuing need to stimulate Christian reading and learning***

It is encouraging to recall how many are engaged in various forms of theological education from evening classes and public lectures to degrees and research. It is also interesting that the present demand seems to be precisely to obtain familiarity with the foundational elements—Bible study, doctrine and spirituality. It seems that there is an instinctive awareness of a need to rediscover the tradition and to dig new foundations in a strange and changing world. And there is an increasing volume of good literature and other aids on the market; though there is also a ready supply of doubtful rubbish. Perhaps the greatest need is at the level of the local congregation where more could be done to introduce a sense of critical yet challenging exploration.

All this, however, cannot be left as a form of antiquarianism, of curiosity about their past. Our society is very good at creating theme parks and calling it heritage. Rather it is an engagement with the Gospel in the realities of the world. To be Christianly literate, like all theological activity, is an act of prayerful obedience, an offering of ourselves to God that we may be guided and used by his Spirit in the place where we have been set. Maybe something of what has been attempted here is summed up in the versicle and response from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, itself a quote from scripture:

O Lord, save thy people and bless thy heritage.  
O Lord, Govern them and lift them up forever.

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82. James S. Stewart, *Heralds of God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1946), p. 197.



# Week Five, Reading Assignment for Year One

## The Priestly Creation Story<sup>83</sup>

The Priestly creation story in Genesis 1–2:4a is one of the shortest and yet most tightly packed theological statements in the Bible. In its present form it dates from the time of the Restoration in the fifth century BCE. It had developed, however, over a much longer period and had been polished smooth by the time P gave it its final working. We must study it line by line in order to unpack the many levels of meaning in it.

Let us go over the main points.

First read **Genesis 1–2:4a**.

Then read again the biblical reference for each point in conjunction with the discussion.

1. God alone is the creator of all, with no divine helpers. The world is not simply shaped by God. (1:1)
2. God creates by speaking; God simply says, “Let there be . . .,” and what is spoken comes to be. (1:3, 6, 9, etc.)
3. God creates light; it is not the gift of the sun, which shines only with the light God has given it. (1:3)
4. God keeps the waters of chaos in their place by calling for a firm dome to keep out the waters that are above and by gathering the waters below into the seas so that the dry land appears. (1:6–10)
5. The heavenly bodies—sun, moon, planets, and stars—which were thought to be gods by many cultures in the ancient Near East, are only creatures of God. (1:14–18)
6. The earth shares in the task of creation, though only at God’s command: the earth brings forth vegetation. The waters also bring forth sea creatures and the earth, animal life, but not in the same way as the earth brings forth vegetation. God creates the higher forms of life. (1:11, 20–21, 24–25)
7. God creates humankind in God’s own image and gives it dominion over all the creation. (1:26)
8. God creates humankind male and female, and this fact is connected closely with humankind’s creation in the divine image. (1:27)

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83. *Education for Ministry—Year One: Old Testament*, 4th edition, ed. Patricia Bays (Sewanee, Tennessee: The University of the South, 2006), 29–46.

9. God blesses humankind with sexuality and the gift of children. (1:28)
10. The final work of creation is God's rest on the seventh day. (2:2)

### The First Words

Even from this brief outline we can see some of the things that were on the mind of the author. First, one important aspect of this story cannot be seen in most English translations. Grammatically, the Hebrew begins in the middle of a sentence. What could this mean? Is it a mistake? Was the first corner of a manuscript lost? No, there is a theological meaning. Beginning a sentence in the middle is a way of saying, "We do not know what God was doing before our world came into being. Our knowledge cannot pry before the beginning of our world; God's beginning is unknowable to us."

### God and Creation

Next, it is important to say, above all else, that God is completely different from everything else. Other religions may have said that there were all sorts of divine beings: animal monsters, heavenly bodies, the seas, storms—anything that seemed powerful or mysterious. For the P writer, nothing in the world is divine. Rather, the whole universe is God's creation. Some religions may have thought of at least part of the universe as being made out of the substance of the divine, flowing forth out of the god. For P, nothing of God flows into the universe; God is God, and all else that exists is not God and is not divine.

Third, there is no need to look to lesser gods for the fertility of the earth. Vegetable crops and animals are included in God's design for the world, and the earth brings forth her increase at God's command. The worship of Baals (fertility gods), with all the gross practices that went with it, is not necessary; indeed to worship them would be to deny the power of the one Creator.

Fourth, the whole creation leads up to the creation of humanity. Life has not been created in order to provide playthings for the gods nor to act as slave-servants to the gods. Humanity, man and woman, is created to be God's representative in governing creation. It is a position of great dignity and worth.

### Israel, the Chosen People

Each of these points was important in the life of Israel. She had been chosen to be God's people; God had made a covenant with her and had promised that, through Israel, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The covenant was the basis for all of Israel's religious faith. After the Israelites had settled in Canaan, they were tempted and led away from God to the worship of the Baals and the *astral deities*—the sun, moon, planets, and stars—which the other nations worshiped. The prophets constantly tried to



overcome the worship of these false gods so that Israel would be faithful to the covenant. When the northern kingdom was destroyed and the leaders of Judah (the southern kingdom) were carried into exile, the warnings of the prophets were shown to have been correct. Thus we can see the P writer—in the circumstance of exile—expressing in this story the true dignity of humankind and the complete sovereignty of God as these facts had been learned in Israel's life and taught by the prophets. All of what Israel stood for was expressed by the covenant. This was how Israel knew God; God was the God who had made the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and who had sealed it at Sinai through Moses. This God, and this God alone, had created the nation of Israel, and this God alone had created the heavens and the earth and all things.

The creation story expresses the faith of Israel learned by her experience as the people of God's covenant. Just as God had made Israel God's people at Sinai, so also God had made all of humanity in God's own image at creation. Both the covenant story and the creation story say the same thing: God has given humanity dignity and worth and dominion; therefore, the creation story reaches its climax in the creation of humankind.

## The Sabbath

The P author does not end the story with the creation of humanity. The final day of creation is not the sixth, on which human beings are created, but the seventh, on which God rests. This rest does not mean only a mere recuperation from the exhaustion of creation. Rather it is a cessation of regular work in order to enjoy the fruits of that labor. God rests in order to enjoy creation. The P author, with special interest in the *cult*—the practices of worship—leads us to the practice of the Sabbath. This is not, however, a contradiction of what we have just said about the creation of humanity as the climax. The covenant, the basis of Israel's faith in the dignity of all people, is what the Sabbath is all about. The Sabbath is the celebration of the covenant. Therefore, the story leads to two ends, both of which refer to the same central point of Israel's faith: (1) God's gift of life and authority—a people under God—and (2) the Sabbath, which is the celebration of this people under God through the covenant.

You are not expected at this point in your studies to be able to feel all that is involved in the covenant. The point you should be able to grasp at this stage is that the P creation story sums up the experience of Israel and is not a simple childish story. You will come back to this story again and again, and the more you become familiar with the rest of the Old Testament, the more you will feel the power of it. Now look back again to the beginning of the story, and we will go over it more closely.

## The Priestly Creation Story

This verse, which looks so simple in the English translation, is very strange in the Hebrew because it begins mid-sentence. The text can be translated, carrying it on through verse three, in several ways. (1) “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness. . . .” (2) “When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void, and darkness. . . .” (3) “In the beginning of God’s creating of the heavens and the earth—(when) the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the wind of God was moving over the face of the waters—God said, ‘Let there be. . . .’” None of these translations really fits the text as we have it, but each one is possible. Somewhat closer might be to start with an ellipsis “. . . .” and then use the wording of option 3 above.

What difference would it make which translation we pick? Some people have argued that if we use the first one, there is nothing before God creates. God creates the heavens and the earth, and they are formless and empty until God then shapes and fills them. While it is fine theology to believe God created from nothing—*ex nihilo* is the Latin phrase that is used—Genesis 1 does not make such a claim. If we take the second or third translation, there is already a formless empty abyss and God begins to create; God shapes and fills a chaos that already existed.

## Dualism

Later theology, especially Christian theology, has insisted that God created out of nothing not simply as a way of choosing one of these translations over the other. Theologians have been trying to oppose a point of view which was very common in the world of the first few centuries of the Christian era and is still very much with us. This point of view is called *dualism*. It says that there are two aspects of the world: the material and the nonmaterial, sometimes called the “spiritual.” The material is usually regarded as less good, sometimes evil. Theologians have not wanted to say that there was something, anything, already existing when God began creation, because this already existing something, chaos, could be used by the dualists to refer to matter, the material stuff, which God shaped. They could then say that this matter is the source of evil. So the theologians said that God created *ex nihilo*, out of nothing; anything and everything that is, matter included, is created by God and is good. You can begin to see here that many beliefs, many truths, are not stated explicitly by every biblical passage on a similar theme.

Dualism had a great effect on the thinking of the early church. It came from eastern roots. In Persia the religion of Zoroastrianism taught that there were two gods, one evil and one good. The good god was the god of light; the evil god, the god of darkness. (The name of the god of light, Mazda, is known to many people although they may not know where it originated.)

A man named Mani, who was greatly influenced by Zoroastrianism, developed a religion, dualistic in nature, that prescribed ways of combating the power of the material world and escaping into the world of spirit and light. His religion, usually called *Manichaeism*, flourished in the third and fourth centuries, especially in North Africa, and influenced many Christians. St. Augustine, one of the greatest theologians of the church, was a Manichee before he converted to Christianity.

## Plato

The teachings of the great pre-Christian philosopher Plato have also led to dualistic conclusions. Plato taught that, although individual things in this world come and go—they are born and they die, they come into being and they decay—there lie behind the individual things the *ideas* of them. There are many individual trees, each different to some degree from the others and each destined to die and decay, but each is a partial representation of the idea Tree. The idea contains all that it is possible for a tree to be; it is complete and single, not needing many separate examples of itself to express its completeness; it lasts forever, eternally existing while the individual representations of it come and go. Why Plato said this, what problems he was trying to understand, we shall look at later. The fact that he said it, however, allowed people of a later time—during the third through the fifth centuries CE—to develop a religion that was dualistic in a much more subtle and sophisticated way than was Manichaeism. The *Neo-Platonists* taught that the ultimate *One* lies beyond all things, and it is impossible to speak of that One at all. The *via negativa* is all that is possible. From the One all the rest of the universe emanates as light emanates, flows, or shines from a light bulb or a candle. The farther away from the source, the less like the One a thing becomes, until finally, at the farthest remove, there is matter. A human being, according to Neo-Platonism, is really spirit, akin to the One, but the spirit is trapped in a material body. Below humanity there is no spirit; all is merely material. Only by mystical exercises can humankind rise above the material body and reach union with the One. This point of view has influenced much of Christian piety. Augustine was also a Neo-Platonist before becoming a Christian.

Whatever the correct translation of this verse may be, theologians were right in thinking that the Old Testament opposed dualism. The Hebrews did *not* make a distinction between matter and “spirit.” As we shall see in the JE (Yahwist-Elohist) creation story, the first human being is made from the dust of the earth and has life breathed into him so that he becomes “a living being.” The entire creature, without division into body and spirit, is a living being. When the Christian church said that Jesus is the word of God made flesh, it also spoke against any kind of dualism.

This is why many theologians prefer the reading of verse one that says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” But there is no way to decide on the basis of the text itself. The P writer has other ways of dealing with the problem of dualism.

## Genesis 1:2

Whichever way you translate the first verse, when the earth appears it is without form and void—that is, it is chaotic, empty of all form, design, or meaning—and darkness is upon the face of “the deep.” “The deep” is a translation of the Hebrew word *tehom*. Behind this word there lies a whole mythic tradition. In the ancient world of the Mesopotamian basin there existed a story of the creation of the world by means of a great battle between a warrior god and a dragon, a sea-monster, who represented watery *chaos*. To many peoples who lived in desert lands far from the sea, the sea was fearsome. Its great storms were powerful and destroyed ships and houses built close to the shores. Stories of sea monsters were told by returning sailors. So “the deep,” the waters of the sea with its monsters, was a symbol of chaos to the ancient people.

The Babylonian creation myth is a long story about the birth of various gods and about the eventual conflict between the god Marduk and the goddess Tiamat. In the course of the conflict, Tiamat is slain, and it is from her body that the firmament, the great dome of heaven, is made. It is worth noting here that the name Tiamat is closely related linguistically to *tehom*. By slaying Tiamat, the chaos monster, the monster of the deep, Marduk makes it possible for order to reign.

Much has been made of the common background out of which the Babylonian and the Hebrew creation stories come. The differences between the stories are more important—and more instructive—than their similarities. The Babylonian myth is an involved story of the birth of the gods and of the struggles among them for supremacy. Human beings are created almost as an afterthought, to serve as slaves for the gods, tending the earth so that the gods might have leisure. In the P story, the reference to “the deep” is virtually the sole remnant of this older myth. There is no birth of God; God is there before the story begins. Only by taking a broad meaning of myth as we have done can the P story be called a myth at all. P has stripped the narrative of all features of a “story about the gods” and has reduced it to a statement of doctrine, using the older myth as a framework only. By using an older framework with which people were familiar, the writer is also able to “start where they are” and show them greater truth.

The capriciousness of the gods and the denigration of humanity in the Babylonian myth stand in complete contrast to the picture of the sovereign and loving God of the Hebrew story. Nothing is told of God except God’s acts toward the world he is creating. No questions of God’s origins are raised; no relationship to any other god is assumed (until we get to the plural pronouns in verse 26); and the dignity of humankind toward which the whole story moves is a contradiction of the Babylonian estimate of human worth.

Still, the symbol of chaos, *tehom*, the deep, like Tiamat—the monster of the deep—is important. Chaos, or the threat of chaos, is always present in life. We know that we are insecure in the world we live in. We feel the threat

of destruction. The world itself is not secure. The ancients felt this, too, in the dark, a storm at sea, a tornado, wild forces of any kind. As the P story of creation unfolds, by bringing order to chaos, God takes possession of it and subdues it. In Hebrew thought, it is God alone who keeps chaos under control. In the story of Jonah, a man who refuses to obey the word of God finds himself thrown back into chaos where he is swallowed up by the very monster of the deep herself. Jonah returns to dry land when he promises to obey God.

There is an additional level of meaning in the use of *tehom*/Tiamat. Since the Priestly account comes to us through the experience of exile, using the term may be a subtle way for the Israelites to remember that ultimately the Lord and not the Babylonian gods is the source of all creation. (We see another example of this with the creation of the sun and moon.)

The wind or storm of God was moving over the chaos. The word that the English Bible translates “spirit” is *ruach* (pronounced ROO-ahk). This word can mean “spirit,” but also means “wind, breath, or storm.” In this verse, the picture is that of the great divine wind blowing storm-like over the sea, or “hovering” over the deep like a great bird about to light on its nest, especially one incubating its eggs. The “spirit” of God here should not be thought of as acting to create; it is simply there, a storm, almost part of the chaos itself in wildness, yet showing forth the presence of God about to create, to bring order into the chaos. The image of the “hovering” of the spirit is one of almost-life, of the care and tending immediately before birth.

### Genesis 1:3

Light is created. It is not some god-like stuff that flows from God into the darkness. Some religions have thought of light itself as a god. With the fear of darkness that most people have, it is understandable that light should be thought of as divine, as saving in some way and giving safety. In Genesis light is from God. God alone is the source of the safety that light brings. Notice also that light is created before the sun, stars, and moon. Light does not come from them, according to this story, but directly from God.

The form of words in verse 3 is important: “God said . . .” God creates by his word. In the P account God creates by speech alone. This shows God separated from his creation and speaking to it. It portrays God with such immense power that it takes only a word for there to be a creative response. Later philosophers and theologians speak of both the transcendence of God and immanence of God. Transcendence refers to the separateness of God from God’s creation; immanence refers to God’s nearness. The creation-by-speech here in Genesis 1 shows God’s transcendence. In Genesis 2 the immanence of God is evident in the manner of creation, for God shapes the clay.

Thought about God swings between these two poles. On the one hand, if God is not transcendent, God tends to become confused with the rest of the world. Pantheism is a form of religion that overemphasizes the



immanence of God at the expense of transcendence. The term means literally “all is God.” Stoicism is an ancient religion, prominent in the world of the first few centuries of the Christian era, which is pantheistic. Much modern thought tends also toward pantheism, confusing nature with God. Unless God is not the world, God loses the dimension of divinity.

On the other hand, if God is not immanent, near to us, then God is irrelevant. A merely transcendent god who was not accessible to his people could not even be known, let alone worshiped. In the eighteenth century, when people were supremely confident in the power of human reason to know and understand all things, a view of the world developed that did not allow God to have any significant relationships with the world. The universe was thought to be like a huge machine, operating according to the laws inherent in it. A theological school of thought called deism pictured God as a clockmaker. God designed the universe and made it as a clockmaker makes a clock, in such a way that it could continue to run on its own. Then God withdrew from it, allowing it to run in accordance with its inherent laws, never intervening again. This is a doctrine of God that overemphasizes the divine transcendence. If it be true, there is no point in praying to God or expecting any relationship with God other than adoration for the work that the almighty has done in time long past.

By saying that God creates both by the word and by handling the stuff of creation, the biblical writers express both the transcendence and the immanence of God. God is the one who stands over against us, completely different from us, and speaks the divine word to us; God is also the one who is immersed deeply in the world with the stuff of it clinging to God’s hands. God is not the world, but God is deeply involved in it.

There is one further point that P wants to make: the world is “good.” It is like a refrain in a song. Here, God declares the light to be good. This does not simply mean that it is pleasant or beautiful. God also creates the great sea monsters and creeping things and calls them good. When God calls them all good, the meaning is that they fit in with the great overall purpose of creation. They have their place in the grand design. The goodness of creation is based on God’s purpose, not on our sense of beauty.

## Genesis 1:4–5

Notice that although God creates the light, darkness is not created. God separates the light from the darkness, but darkness continues. Primitive people, like many of us moderns, feared the darkness, especially when there was no moon or when it was cloudy so that there were no stars. Evil spirits—and evil people—can work their wills in the darkness.

Notice also that, even though God does not create darkness, God calls the light “day” and the darkness “night.” In naming the darkness God takes possession of it. Throughout our study of the Old Testament we become aware of the power that ancient people ascribed to the act of naming. If you were able to name something, you had power over it. Even today we see

something of this. A parent gives a newborn child her or his name; the child has nothing to say about it. When children grow up, they can legally change their names, but while they are children, it is the parents who decide what they shall be called. It may be that the custom that teenage children have of taking a nickname by which their friends know them is an unconscious attempt to break loose from the bonds of parental control. A remnant of this control-by-naming can also be seen in the care with which some people try to ensure that coworkers never discover that childhood nickname. To know someone's embarrassing nickname would be tantamount to having a certain degree of control over the person.

In the Old Testament we see events in which God changes a person's name: Abram is changed to Abraham, Jacob to Israel. The meaning of the name is not as important as the fact that God has changed it and has thereby claimed the person. When God names the darkness "night," God claims it, takes possession of it, and thereby restrains it by his power. We said earlier, in discussing the first verse, that P had ways of combating dualism: This is one of them. The possibility of chaos taking control of God's creation is overcome because God takes possession of darkness and is Lord of the night as well as of the day.

The final sentence in verse 5 shows the Hebrew system for counting the days: A day goes from evening to evening, not from morning to morning as ours does. In Jewish custom this is still so; the Sabbath, for example, does not begin on Saturday morning, but on Friday evening at sundown. In the Christian church holy days are first celebrated on the evening before. Christmas eve and Hallowe'en (which is "All Hallows' Eve," the eve of All Saints' Day) are well-known examples, but the rule applies in all cases. Worship services held on such "eves" characteristically contain prayers and scripture readings concerned with the theme of the holy day itself.

## Genesis 1:6–8

The word translated "firmament" means a hammered metal bowl; the firmament is like a great upside-down metal bowl that separates the waters. In this imagery we have the ancient view of a three-tiered universe, which was held, with modifications, until the sixteenth century CE when Copernicus put forth his theory of the motion of the planets around the sun. In the Genesis picture, the earth is a disk with waters beneath it and the firmament above it holding back the waters. So the three tiers are the waters under the earth, the earth, and the waters above the firmament. We see this cosmology (picture of the earth) again in the second of the Ten Commandments, when we read, "You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. . . ." The reason for this commandment is that all the things in this three-tiered universe are creatures, not God.

Notice that heaven is not the sacred dwelling-place of God; it is simply the firmament. God dwells above heaven. The important point about this

is not that it tells us where God is, but that it says God is not to be localized in any point within creation.

The creation of the firmament to keep the waters in their proper place reflects the ancient fear of water in large quantities; a deluge of water symbolizes chaos. Once again, the P writer deals with chaos and dualism. Chaos is held in check by the firmament, which God has made. Humankind is dependent only on the good God for safety. In the P account of the story of Noah and the flood, God opens the windows of heaven and the springs of the deep and releases the waters of chaos to destroy a large part of creation. As we see when we study that story, God makes a covenant with Noah promising never to do that again—God’s creation shall stand and the watery chaos be held back forever.

### Genesis 1:9–10

Again we see the fear of water, and God sets the proper limits of the seas so that the dry land appears. This is a different form of the creative act of God of withholding the power of chaos.

By having God name the dry land “Earth” and the waters that were gathered together “seas,” the P writer is using the names of powerful gods in ancient religions. Because God both creates and names these, we are to see that they are merely creatures, not gods. The P writer thus combats the influence of polytheism (belief in many gods). Once again comes the refrain: “And God saw that it was good.”

Notice that the refrain did not occur at the end of the second day when the firmament was constructed. This formula of approbation does not reappear until the seas and the dry land are created. This is because the creation of the firmament is only part of the complex work of creating the world of cosmos within which the rest of creation will take place. The formula of approbation designates the completion of an act. On the second day a creative act is left incomplete, and on the third day two acts occur. The fact that two days are spanned shows that P is using older traditional material, fitting it, sometimes awkwardly, into a seven-day scheme. The liturgical interest of P, the concern that the whole story leads up to the Sabbath, compels the use of a seven-day scheme and the fitting of material into that scheme as neatly as possible.

### Genesis 1:11–13

In the ancient world, wherever the growing of crops took the place of hunting or herding as the chief means of life and livelihood, people became concerned about the fertility of the earth. Without the proper mixture of good soil, water, and sunlight, the crops would not grow. Almost all agricultural societies have religions that try to bring about the fertility of the earth. In the ancient Near East these religions often tried to do this by practicing sacred prostitution. By having sexual relations with a temple prostitute, one



guaranteed that the land would be fertile. In these verses the P writer combats this kind of religion.

Plant life is created by God. But notice how this happens. Previously, God has created by his word. Here God speaks to the earth, commanding it to “put forth” vegetation. P does not try to deny the obvious fertility of the earth. The wonder of the seasonal rebirth of green things from the earth is too clear to be denied. But P has the earth act at God’s command. The earth’s fertility is God’s gift.

The reference to “plants yielding seed and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit in it” is to grasses and herbs that yield seed directly, and those plants and trees that have their seed inside a fruit or nut. That is, all kinds of plants have within them the means of reproduction. The earth is fertile and plants have the power to reproduce, due to the command of the word of God. The self-contained powers of nature to bring forth life are not nature’s own; nature is a creature. And it is good.

Agricultural fertility cults frequently have in their mythology a dying and rising god. When scholars of the history of religion noticed this, and especially when they saw the forms it took in the Near East, many of them suggested that this accounted for the Christian belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus. This, they thought, was simply a variant on the dying and rising god of the agricultural fertility cults. In fact there is much of the symbolism of the rebirth of nature in the proper celebrations of Easter. The lily, the rabbits, Easter eggs, all speak of the rebirth of natural life. (But for those of us who live in the northern hemisphere, it is too easy to drift into a belief that Jesus’ resurrection was somehow part of the natural order, rather than a gracious act of a loving God.)

The ancient Hebrews were surrounded by these kinds of religions, particularly in the myths surrounding Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility, and Anath, his sister. The myth tells of the death of Baal. The god of death, Mot, holds Baal in the prison of death. Anath goes to Mot, slays him and cuts up his body, casting it about over the land, and Baal comes back to life. The prophets of Israel constantly fought against Baal worship. Israel had been created as a nation by God and must remain faithful to him. Still, the need for successful agriculture was obvious. In the P creation story the author maintains that the God of the deliverance from Egypt is also the one who gives fertility to the earth. Faithfulness to the covenant will suffice to ensure the fertility of the land.

The figure of Jesus comes out of this kind of background. There can be no possibility of adequately describing his death and resurrection in the terms of the fertility cults. His death was a once-for-all event and his resurrection has its meaning only in connection with the promises God made to Israel in the covenant. It speaks not of life coming naturally out of death, but of God being faithful to God’s promises.

**Genesis 1:14–19**

On the fourth day the heavenly bodies are created. Worship of the astral deities—the sun, moon, stars, and planets—was widespread in the ancient world. Indeed, almost anywhere you go around the world you will find evidence of such worship. The stars and planets are one feature of nature that is there for all to see. Hunting tribes may not be concerned with growing crops; different animals that have been worshiped may not be known in places far from where they live; oceans may be unknown to inland dwellers, and deserts with their sandstorms may be unfamiliar to people who live along the coasts. But the lights of the heavens can be seen anywhere in the world.

One of the things about the stars that impresses people who pay close attention is that they move with such regularity. We are sometimes amazed that our astronomers can predict with accuracy where a particular planet will be at a specific time, but the ancient astronomers could do this, too. Ancient people were impressed with the fact that, although much in life was uncertain, the movement of the stars was always the same.

Because of the regularity of the heavenly bodies, many believed that the stars controlled everything else and determined what was to happen on earth. Even today astrology, the study of the stars to see what they tell of life, is popular. Some people really believe what their horoscopes say. Others may view astrology as mere superstition, but in ancient times it was a serious matter. All of life was thought to be governed by the astral deities. Men and women, in this view, simply live out lives that have already been determined at the time of their birth. They have no freedom and nothing much matters, since all is determined in advance.

For Israel, however, this could not be so. God had called the people Israel and made a covenant with them. God would be their God and bless them, and they were to keep God's commandments. Israel could be faithful to God or unfaithful. Israel was free—to obey or disobey. Therefore, Israel was responsible for what she did. To believe in the astral deities and their control over life was a denial both of the lordship of God and of human responsibility.

The P editor says that God created the lights in the firmament—they are not gods. Although P used the names of the gods Earth and Sea, “Sun” and “Moon” are not used. By using the clumsy expressions “greater light” and “lesser light,” P makes it plain that these, too, are creatures of God. We may have here another example of the exiled Israelites being able to find a “safe” way to jeer at their captors. “You worship ‘big light’ and ‘little light,’” they are saying, “while we worship the creator of all that is.”

The heavenly bodies are creatures of God, and they have quite simple jobs to do. They do not control the lives of people: they are the means by which to tell time! They divide the day from the night and they mark off the seasons and the years. They also give light on the earth, but it is not their own light, but the light that God created first of all creatures. This, too, is good; another act of creation is completed. With this, the cosmos (the universe itself) is finished.

**Genesis 1:20–23**

On the fifth day living beings are created, beginning with those that are least like humans and moving, on the sixth day, to humankind, which is created in the image and likeness of God. Living creatures are treated in a special way in this story. The plants, which were brought forth from the earth, are not thought to be forms of life. They have their seed and reproduce, but they are not called living creatures. When we look at this first creation story, we see that humans were allowed to eat vegetables but not meat. The life given to God's creatures is sacred and is not to be taken away by any other creature.

There is a Hebrew word used in this chapter that is not translated into English in every instance. When used of human beings, the word *nephesh* is usually translated “soul.” But when used of other members of the animal world, it is often left out. This is unfortunate, for the P writer's use of *nephesh* makes some important theological points. There is no simple English word or phrase to cover the two aspects of *nephesh*. It refers to the life force that separates animals from rocks, for instance, or stars, and also from plants. *Nephesh* also refers to the individuality of each creature. We are accustomed to recognizing each human being as unique; the P writer believes every animal—even the “creepy crawlies”—is unique to God.

Of the living creatures, first the sea monsters are created, then the rest of the sea creatures and the birds. The seas have been separated from the dry land and held in their place—chaos has been controlled. Now even the fearsome monsters of chaos are discovered to be creatures of God and are called good; they are nothing to fear. These living creatures are then given the gift of procreation as a blessing. Even for living creatures, fertility is not simply a power contained within them but is a special gift from God. Only God is the source of creativity.

Verse 21 uses the verb *bara*: create. This is a different verb from those used before, except in verse 1 when *bara* is used for the whole process of creation. This verb never has anyone or anything except God as subject. Both God and people can “make,” “shape,” “form,” and so on; only God is said to *bara*.

**Genesis 1:24–25**

On the sixth day the earth brings forth living creatures: domestic animals (cattle), wild animals (beasts), and creeping things—all the forms of life on dry land. All are connected very closely with the earth, which acts as mediator of God's creation. There is no blessing or command to be fruitful; apparently, as with the plants, this is part of their nature. Perhaps the blessing was necessary for the creatures which came from the sea because the sea was not given the ability to give power to reproduce. This is the suggestion that Gerhard von Rad makes in his book on Genesis. He says, The absence here of divine blessing is intentional. Only indirectly do the animals receive the

power of procreation from God; they receive it directly from the earth, the creative potency of which is acknowledged throughout. Water, by creation, stands lower in rank than the earth; it could not be summoned by God to creative participation. (p. 57)

Yet in verse 20 it seems that the same command is given to the waters as was given to the earth: “Let the waters bring forth. . . .” This is a case in which the English translation is somewhat misleading. In the Hebrew three different verbs are used in those places where the English reads “bring forth.” In verse 11 the verb is *dasha*, “to yield tender grass,” and it is in the causative form—“cause to yield tender grass.” In verse 12, the verb is *yatsa*, “to go out,” again in the causative—“cause to go out.” Thus in the case of the earth’s “bringing forth” vegetation, the verb is in the causative: the earth causes the grass to come forth. In verse 2 also the verb is *yatsa* in the causative, so the earth causes the living creatures to come forth. In verse 20, however, the verb is *sharats*, “to swarm,” and it is in the simple form not indicating causation. Verse 20, therefore, means, “Let the waters swarm with living creatures. . . .” God created them directly, without the mediation of the waters, and gave them the power to reproduce.

The real significant contrast seems to be not so much between the creatures of the water, the birds of the air, and the animals of the dry land, but between the animals and human beings. The animals are closely tied to the earth, whereas humans are more intimately related to their creator.

## Genesis 1:26–28

This is the climax of the story. In all the other acts of creation the form of words is very direct: “Let there be . . .”; “Let the earth put forth . . .” Here, God takes counsel with God’s self for a more deliberate and important act: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” This is a very strange expression. The name for God in this story is Elohim. When we discussed this before, noting that it is the name which the E writer uses and also the P writer at this point in the story, we mentioned that the word is in the plural: the gods. We also said that there was no doubt that both E and P believed in only one God. All through this story of creation the word Elohim has been translated “God,” but now, in verse 26, the plural is used: “Let us . . . in our. . . .”

In the ancient world the idea of a heavenly court was common. The main god was surrounded by other heavenly beings the way a king or queen is attended by the members of an earthly court. In most of the old religions the court was made up of lesser gods. In the Old Testament there was only one God, but God was frequently pictured as being served by a court. In some present-day eucharistic liturgies this same imagery occurs: “Therefore with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven. . . .”

God is submerging God’s self in the heavenly court. “Man” is made in God’s image. “Man” is like God, but is also quite distinct from God. The P writer in this whole section seems to be saying these two things about humankind. On the one hand P uses the words “image” and “likeness”:

An “image” is a copy of the original, like a statue, and a “likeness” is an outline or silhouette. This would indicate a very close likeness to God, even in a physical sense. On the other hand, God is submerged into the heavenly court, so the likeness to God must be somewhat blurred.

In addition, the Hebrew word for man used here is *‘adam* (the same word that later will be used as a proper name, Adam). This word is closely related to the word for earth, *‘adamah*. Thus P also shows that though humankind differs from the animals, it remains tied to the earth and therefore to the animals and indeed the rest of creation.

The result of this very subtle use of words is to give a picture of humankind (“man,” male and female: see below) as a being who is very much a creature, not to be confused with God, but one who stands in a very special relationship to God and is very much like God. It would seem that the point here is not so much to say that humanity, as the image of God, can give us an idea of what God is like, as it is to say that humanity is to act like God in the world: God gives human beings dominion over all the living things in the world. Their purpose is not to rule, but to act as God’s agent or steward.

It was a common practice in the ancient world for statues of a king to be set up throughout his realm. These were not regarded simply as carved statues, but as the king’s representatives, looking out for his interests in those places where the king himself could not always be. This seems to be the idea expressed here: Humankind is God’s representative, looking after God’s interests in the world. This authority, dominion over God’s creation, is given in the creation.

*‘Adam* is not a sexually specific word. There is another word for a male person: *‘ish*. In spite of the male domination of ancient society, P means both “man” and “woman” when he uses *‘adam*. (Notice the change of pronouns in v. 27: “In the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.”) In the P account, sexuality, male and female together making up *‘adam*, is a direct creation by God from the outset. (The JE story has woman made after man.) God blesses and commands humankind to procreate: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.” Sexuality, then, is a gift of creation, a blessing, and a command.

## Genesis 1:29–31

Notice that there is a limit to human dominion: Only vegetables may be eaten. Both humans and beasts are given vegetables for their food, though to humans both herbs and fruit are allowed while the animals have only herbs (green plants). The shedding of blood is not part of the divine plan for creation. In the Old Testament it is a basic belief that “in the blood is the life.” God alone gives life, and it is not to be taken. Those who spill blood put an end to what cannot be revived. Later visions of the perfect time that will come when God brings in the kingdom show animals and humans living without shedding blood. The P writer, of course, knows that both animals and humans eat flesh, but a complete respect for life leads the writer



to say that this is not part of God's plan. We shall see that P has God give animals to humans for food at the time of Noah. Even then the blood is not to be eaten. It is to be poured out to God as giver of life.

The final refrain is emphatic: "... indeed, it was very good." The world as it comes from the hand of God is perfect. This is the basic faith expressed in the Old Testament: whatever evil there is now in the world is not due to God. As God created the world there was no evil in it, and no dualistic power of evil. As the JE account will go on to show, evil comes when human beings overreach their assigned role. Not content to be God's representatives in the world, humans aspire to be as gods themselves.

### Genesis 2:1–3

We would expect the P writer to say that creation ended on the sixth day, but this does not happen. God finished the work by resting on the seventh day. Rest is part of creation. To us rest sounds like doing nothing. To those who have to work until they are exhausted, to fight for the very possibility of life, leaving the old to die by themselves because there is no time to tend to them and still carry on the struggle for life, rest is an activity of sheer bliss. This is the kind of life that was usual for the ancient people, and is still true for most of the earth's people now. Rest, for them, is a necessary activity of life; without it, life is ground down into death. Thus the seventh day is not a day apart from creation, but the time of the creation of the act of rest. The Sabbath, in the Israelite calendar, is not a day of inactivity, but a day when work is not done so that rest may be done. As a celebration of the covenant, the Sabbath was especially seen as the day of recreation, of being restored to the very basis of life. God has hallowed, set apart, this day for this use. Verse 4a says that all this is a genealogy, the generations of the heavens and the earth. P usually puts this kind of verse first as a title. Here, since the creation story has its own introduction, it had to be put at the end.

### Summary

1) *Dualism is rejected.* Light is created and comes from God. Though light is good and necessary, it is not to be worshiped. Darkness, though it is fearsome because it conceals evil action and makes it easier to commit evil, is not in itself to be feared; God claimed it and is Lord of it when God named it "night." The waters of chaos are set within their proper limits by God: the waters above are held out by the firmament and the other waters are gathered together as the seas and kept in their place by God's command. The monsters of the deep are like playthings to God, who created them and gave them the seas in which to roam. All this may sound very far from our way of thinking, but its message to us is clear. Biblical faith does not allow us to call anything that God has made evil or unclean, nor does it support our fears of the unknown. God is behind all that is, and we need fear nothing but God's absence.

2) *God is both transcendent and immanent.* God is the absolute Lord over creation. Nothing else is to be mistaken for God and worshiped. This means that we need not bow down before anything in the world! But God is also very near to everything in the world. God is involved in creation, so that we cannot treat anything that God has made as though it did not matter. The immanent side of God is presented more explicitly in the creation account of Genesis 2.

3) *There is freedom in the world.* Nature acts as God has created it to act, but it does so in respect to God's command to it. Human beings are given a role to play in God's design, but they must respond from their own freedom. The sun, moon, and stars do not control the things that happen. Nothing is decreed beforehand and sealed in fate. The astral bodies measure time, but they do not control it.

4) *Creation is fertile by the gift of God.* Ancient people thought that the powers of nature that gave or withheld fertility had to be worshiped. P says that fertility is from God, and God alone is to be worshiped. This belief, by assuring us that nature is not sacred, has allowed us to subdue it and bring it under our control. Much mischief has been done under the auspices of this word "subdue." The notion is one of responsible stewardship, not at all one of exploitation. We need now to remember that it belongs to God and brings its resources to us as a gift; ours to control, it is not ours to plunder.

5) *Humanity is in the image of God.* Humankind is shaped after the pattern of the *elohim*. This strange imagery both expresses the dignity of humankind and sets its limits. "Man," male and female, is like God, but is not to be confused with God.

6) *"Man" includes woman.* Sexuality is not simply a sign of our kinship with the animals and therefore a lower bestial function to be concealed and denied as unworthy of us. Humankind, 'adam, is not complete as male or female; neither is humankind originally a complete being, solitary and alone, who later "falls" into sexuality. From the outset God created humankind so that both sexes were needed for completeness. The modern notion of the self-sufficient individual is ruled out by this, as is the idea of male superiority. (This is quite remarkable since the place of women in ancient society, Hebrew included, was definitely lower than that of men. We can see this, and how it was made somewhat better, when we turn to the JE creation story.)

7) *Human beings are God's representatives.* Although the blessing of reproduction is given to humankind and animals alike, only human beings are commanded to fill the earth and subdue it. This has sometimes been taken to mean that we are given complete ownership of the world, but this is not the case. Humanity is God's steward. It is to fill the earth so that God may be

represented everywhere and to subdue the earth for the purposes of God. In spite of being made in God's image and being given the dominion, 'adam is still connected to 'adamah: that is, 'adam is of the earth and thus has limits set.

In these terms the P writer sees a perfection in humanity's original relationship to God and to the world. There is no downgrading of humanity as a mere puppet or slave to a tyrannical God; "man" (male and female) has great dignity and value. The terms of human dignity are clearly spelled out. The P writer was well aware of the fact that humankind had sunk to a level lower than that of the beasts, that we had denied our own dignity and taken it away from others, that we were such as to be worthy of complete condemnation before the righteousness of God. This merely points up the rightness of the terms of human life which humankind has violated. All, even the downfall of humankind, is set within the order which God has created.



# Week Thirteen, Reading Assignment for Year Four

## God as Trinity: An Approach through Prayer<sup>84</sup>

### I. Why The Neglect Of The Doctrine Of The Trinity Today?

Christians confronted with the claims of other religions may be aware that their faith can be distinguished from other brands of theism by its particular kind of trinitarian structure. It is neither bald, undifferentiated monotheism, nor is it polytheism. Yet the majority of Christians in the West today, it must be admitted, would be hard pressed even to give an account, let alone a defense, of the developed doctrine of the Trinity as expressed in Christianity's historic creeds and the documents of its Councils. Most professing Christians know how to use the language of Father, Son and Spirit in the varied and unsystematic way that we find in the New Testament. There are 'rules' for this language that are generally acknowledged in the Church. Christians know that there is something wholly inappropriate, for instance, in saying that 'God the Father died on the cross', even if they cannot give a coherent explanation of the reason. The way Luke unfolds the story of God's salvation is the dominant influence here in controlling our use of the language of Father, Son and Spirit: at the historical level there was first the Father God of the Old Testament, then the Son, then, at the Son's 'departure', the Spirit.

What many perhaps do not realise is that efficiency in operating the 'rules' of this New Testament language is still a very far cry from acknowledgement of God as Trinity. Even Paul's familiar grace in 2 Cor. 13.14 is not trinitarian in this stricter sense: 'the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit' clearly indicates that 'God' here means the Father alone, despite the close (but theologically unclarified) juxtaposition of Son and Spirit.

The developed doctrine of the Trinity, then, is another matter. This was enunciated by the end of the fourth century, and is implied by the Nicene creed, the creed used today in most celebrations of the eucharist. Here God is seen as eternally triune, which means that in the Godhead there are united three 'persons' ('hypostases'), who are distinguishable only by number and relation to one another, and inseparable in their activity. It is this latter understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity with which this chapter

84. Sarah Coakley, *God as Trinity: An Approach through Prayer* in *Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, We Believe in God* (London, Church House Publishing, 1987), 104–121. Written while Sarah Coakley was a lecturer in Religious Studies in the University of Lancaster.

is concerned; and it is this that seems to have lost its allure for the majority of contemporary Western Christians, so that Karl Rahner has justly marked that ‘Christians, for all their orthodox profession of faith in the Trinity, are virtually just “monotheist” in their actual religious existence’ (*Theological Investigations* IV. 79). Many, that is, if asked to describe ‘God’, would give a description of the Father only.

Why is this? Many factors have contributed to this quiet anti-trinitarian tendency in Western Christianity, and cumulatively they are certainly powerful. As far back as the medieval period, scholastic theology made philosophical discussion of God as *one* a prior and preliminary task to discussion of his revelation as three-in-one; and this in itself, it has been argued, implicitly promoted an undifferentiated monotheism at the expense of trinitarianism. But even more significantly, people today are now heirs of the Enlightenment. They are not afraid of a critical approach. Many are less prone to believe a doctrine simply because it is taught or because it is part of our tradition. ‘The wise man apportions his belief to the evidence’, wrote David Hume. Free enquiry must take place, and if it does not lead to orthodoxy, then this is part of the liberty that must be granted to the human mind. ‘Whosoever will be saved . . . (must) . . . worship one God in Trinity’ is not the kind of constraint which Christians of this generation are likely to heed.

In modern theology, too, there is a good deal to militate against belief in the doctrine of an eternally triune God. As we have seen, it appears at first sight to have been built up from the inherited belief in the Father God of Israel as the one supreme God, through the growing awareness of Christ as God, and of the Holy Spirit as co-equal with the Father and the Son in his divinity. To explain how all three could be God and yet affirm belief in the one God without ‘confounding the persons’ or ‘dividing the substance’ was the task of the leaders of the early Church. But today it is nothing like so clear that the evidence provided by the New Testament and related sources demands this belief in the divinity of Christ and the distinctness and divinity of the Holy Spirit in the way it was understood in the early Church. Historical-critical study of the New Testament has here been the major force for criticism and change; and the portrait of Jesus of Nazareth which emerges from nearly two centuries of enquiry has for many become far more alluring than the seemingly alien formulas of fifth-century Chalcedonian orthodoxy.

Furthermore (in the Western Church in particular) the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has received limited attention. For centuries orthodox trinitarianism led to the inclusion of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son in doxologies, prayers, ascriptions and most artistic representations. But in speaking of the Spirit of God at work in the cosmos, were Christians perhaps really just meaning God the Father at work in a particular way? Is there any need to apportion a separate ‘hypostasis’ to the Holy Spirit? Is this not basically a question of imagery and language? Even in the most charismatic circles today the experience of the Spirit is the experience of God with us.

Do we then really need ‘another Paraclete?’ Or is John making this distinction simply to account for the difference between the historical experience of Jesus among his disciples and the continuing presence of the risen Christ in the church?

There is therefore a good deal in modern Western theology to dispose people towards the undifferentiated monotheism which has been detected in twentieth-century Christians. Some would argue that the experience of dialogue with other faiths makes abandonment of traditional trinitarianism an even more compelling possibility. A further consideration, highly significant for an age intent on authentication by direct experience, was put classically by Schleiermacher (*The Christian Faith* II 738): ‘The Trinity is not an immediate utterance concerning the Christian self-consciousness.’ That is, or so Schleiermacher claimed, the doctrine of the Trinity is not apparently verifiable through religious experience. But this is an assertion which calls for careful enquiry.

## II. Rediscovery Of The Triune God: An Approach Through Prayer

Most Christians would probably say that their experience of God is not obviously or immediately perceived as trinitarian in structure. But does a deepening relationship to God in prayer, especially prayer of a relatively non-discursive or wordless kind, allow one to remain satisfied with a simple undifferentiated monotheism? Naturally there are all sorts of tricky philosophical difficulties about this line of approach. The phenomenon of prayer is varied, and certainly not easy to describe with exactitude. Further, its interpretation is inevitably affected by certain cherished concepts (e.g., biblical ideas, tradition and liturgy), so that there is some circularity in the attempt to capture in terms of doctrine what may be happening. Moreover, competing interpretations abound for so-called ‘contemplative’ experiences (including the Buddhist way of eliminating the concept of God altogether). But this does not mean that it is impossible to find in the activity of Christian prayer some telling experiential basis for trinitarian reflection.

What is it that Christians who attend silently to God discover? We are not talking of some ‘contemplative’ elite, but of anyone who regularly spends even a very short time in a quiet waiting upon God. Often, it must be admitted, what will be encountered is darkness, obscurity and distraction. It is no wonder that the experience has such a strange lack of obvious content, for the relationship is one unlike any other, one that relates those who pray to that without which they would not be in being at all. It is (and here Schleiermacher was surely right) a relationship of ‘absolute dependence’. Yet perhaps, amid the obscurity, a little more may be said. Usually it dawns bit by bit on the person praying that this activity, which at first seems all one’s own doing, is actually the activity of another. It is the experience of being ‘prayed in’, the discovery that ‘we do not know how to pray as we ought’ (Rom. 8.26), but are graciously caught up in a divine conversation, passing back and forth in and through the one who prays, ‘the Spirit himself bear-

ing witness with our spirit' (Rom. 8.16). We come to prayer empty-handed, aware of weakness, inarticulacy and even of a certain hollow 'fear and trembling', yet it is precisely in these conditions (cf 1 Cor. 2.3–4) that divine dialogue flows. Here then is a way of beginning to understand what it might be to talk of the distinctiveness of the Spirit. It is not that the Spirit is being construed as a divine centre of consciousness entirely separate from the Father, as if two quite different people were having a conversation. Nor, again, is the Spirit conceived as the relationship between two entities that one can assume to be fixed (the Father and the person praying), a relationship which is then perhaps somewhat arbitrarily personified. Rather, and more mysteriously, the Spirit is here seen as that current of divine response to divine self-gift in which the one who prays is caught up and thereby transformed (see again Rom. 8.9–27, 1 Cor. 2.9–16).

Now if this is so, then, logically speaking, what the one who prays comes first to apprehend is the Spirit in its distinctive identity, and only from there do they move on to appreciate the true mystery and *richesse* of the Son. This too is of course a Pauline insight (1 Cor. 12.3: 'No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit'), but needs spelling out further. For the apprehensions to be made in the light of prayer about the second person of the Trinity are varied, and only indirectly lead one back to the human career of Jesus of Nazareth, although they do indeed lead there.

First, and most fundamentally, when Christians pray like this, their experience of participation in a divine dialogue is an experience of a God who actively and always wills to be amongst us, God Emmanuel. This being so the very structure of prayer is already 'incarnational' (in one sense of that admittedly ambiguous word), and thus immediately focuses attention on the second person in the Godhead.

But second, and more specifically, in allowing the divine activity of prayer to happen, the one who prays begins to glimpse what it might be to be 'in Christ' or to 'have the mind of Christ' (1 Cor. 2.16), or to be 'fellow heirs with Christ' (Rom. 8.18). It is to allow oneself to be shaped by the mutual interaction of Father and Spirit; and in praying the prayer of Christ, in letting the Spirit cry 'Abba, Father' (Rom. 8.15, Gal. 4.6) to make the transition from regarding Christ merely as an external model for imitation to entering into his divine life itself. Paul does not idly say, 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2.20). To discover this posture of prayer is to be remodelled by the activity of God in the redeemed life of 'sonship' (Rom. 8. 15). It is to become nothing less than 'other Christs' in the particularity of our lives, not by any active merit of our own, but simply by willing that which already holds us in existence to reshape us in the likeness of his Son.

But thirdly (and here the reference to the historical life of Jesus of Nazareth again becomes vital), the God whom Christians meet in this prayer is also one who appears, sometimes for very long periods, to desert us; or worse still (as in St John of the Cross's 'Night of the Spirit') to press upon us with apparently negative pressure, causing disturbance, deep uneasiness, the

highlighting of sin and even the fear of insanity. Such are the death-throes of the domineering ego. But only in the light thrown on the activity of the Trinity by the story of Christ is this endurable. If we are being ‘conformed to the image of (the) Son’ (Rom. 8.29), it is precisely aridity and disturbance that we should expect. Only through suffering comes glorification (Rom. 8.17). If we take our cue from the agony in the garden, or from the dereliction of the cross, then the authentic cry of ‘Abba’ (Mark 14.33–6) indicates that the most powerful and active presence of God is mysteriously compatible with the all too human experiences of anxiety and desolation. Only afterwards do we come to see that what we had thought to be divine absence was in actuality the grace of divine hiddenness. Fidelity to prayer in times such as these, though not always perhaps very consciously Christ-centred, is the measure of our Christ-shaped love.

Fourth, and equally significant in its ‘incarnational’ implications, is the disconcerting discovery in this kind of prayer that the God who acts thus in us wants us whole conscious and unconscious, soul and body. ‘We await redemption of our mortal bodies’ (Rom. 8. 11, 23), for the test of the authentic activity of the Spirit is the apprehension that Jesus Christ has ‘come in the flesh’ (1 John 4.2). Though Christian tradition is notoriously littered with those who have evaded these implications, it is truly an effect of this prayer that we are gradually forced to accept and integrate those dark and repressed strands of the unconscious that we would rather not acknowledge, and along with these, all aspects of our sexuality, both bodily and emotional.

But it is also true, fifthly, that to find ourselves ‘in Christ’ is gradually to break through the limitations of the individualism and introspection that often characterise prayer in its earliest stages. The Pauline language about being ‘in Christ’ describes a mode of being or a status rather than an experience. But because it is corporately shared, it calls in question the supposed absoluteness of the self as an individual or self-contained entity. For all prayer has its corporate dimension; and to pray ‘in Christ’ is to intuit the mysterious interpenetration of individuals one with another, and thus to question our usual assumptions about the boundaries of the self. It is to discover that central aspect of Pauline christology, the notion of the mutual interdependence of the members of the ‘body of Christ’ (1 Cor. 12); it is to perceive the flow of trinitarian love coursing out to encompass the whole of humanity.

Sixthly and lastly, the whole creation, inanimate as well as animate, is taken up in this trinitarian flow. To make such a claim could be reckless. Yet it has often been the perception of the mystics to see creation anticipatorily in the light of its true glory, even while it is yet in ‘bondage to decay’ and ‘groaning in travail’ (Rom. 8.21–22). Although concern with prayer experience may at first sight reflect a peculiarly modern obsession with direct personal authentication (and indeed carry with it dangers of a kind of narcissistic introversion), nonetheless sustained prayer leads rather to the building up of community than to its dissolution, to intensification rather than atrophy of concern for the life of the world.



The attempt has been to indicate an experience of prayer from which pressure towards trinitarian thinking might arise. As such it is simply a starting point, and no more. But it is clear that we do not here begin with two perfect and supposedly fixed points, Father and Son, external to ourselves and wholly transcendent, with the Spirit then perhaps (rather unconvincingly) characterised as that which relates them. (That, of course, is a caricature of the 'Western' doctrine of the Trinity, but it is a prevalent one.) Rather, we start with the recognition of a vital, though mysterious, divine dialogue within us, through which the meaning and implications of being 'in Christ' become gradually more vivid and extensive. Thus the Trinity ceases to appear as something abstract or merely propositional. It is not solely to do with the internal life of God, but has also to do with us. The flow of trinitarian life is seen as extending into every aspect of our being, personal and social, and beyond that to the bounds of creation.

This approach has strong roots in the thought of Paul. Despite this fact, reflection on prayer is often thought not to have constituted a significant resource for trinitarian discussion during the tortured years of controversy which led to a normative statement of the doctrine at the end of the fourth century. But was this really so? To this question we now turn.

### III. Roots In The Tradition

Many accounts of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity pay limited attention to the personal encounter with God through prayer. A good deal of the material available for a study of this development was provoked by challenge and controversy, and it is understandable that historians of the doctrine should focus their attention on the proceedings of Church Councils and the writings of theologians attacking or defending particular positions, as well as emphasising the political considerations that often became entangled in the debates.

Yet the resulting account of how the church came to profess first the faith of Nicaea in 325, when the Son was declared to be 'of one substance' with the Father, and then that of Constantinople in 381, by which time the doctrine of the Trinity was given normative expression, is sometimes tidier than it deserves to be. The New Testament, after all, presents varied traditions of early Christian belief about the person of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. It is all too easy to take, for example, the Luke-Acts sequence of the revelation of the God of Israel through the story of Jesus to the day of Pentecost, and to see the pre-Nicene church first establishing Christ's identity with, yet distinction from, God the Father, and then in the wake of Nicaea doing the same for the Holy Spirit. Considerations as to whether the Spirit is in fact regarded by the New Testament authors as a separate Person tend to be brushed over in the light of the strong emphasis on his full acceptance as such in the late fourth century. The tendencies of the second-century defenders of Christianity to think in terms of only two divine Persons, the Father and the Son, are seen as a fumbling after truth. Whatever happened *en route*, the faith

of Nicaea is assumed to be at least embryonic in the earliest traditions of the primitive church.

The study of controversy however, is not without its purpose. Councils concerned with faith in the Trinity were not periodic bureaucratic reviews of a continuing theoretical problem, but were urgently called to meet passionate demands. What was the source of this passion? Why did it manifest itself only rarely in academic circles but all too frequently at congregational level, in the gossip of the court, or in banter over the shop counter? Were all the Lord's people theologians? Or was their argument about their own experience of God as Trinity, and the variety of the interpretations of this experience?

It is important in the first place not to underestimate the degree to which Christians of the first three centuries at least were committed to the regular practice of prayer and worship. People in the ancient world would never have called themselves Christian simply because they believed themselves to be clean-living citizens who dropped into church on family or civic occasions. Baptism marked a clean break with the past. Preparation for baptism lasted two and sometimes three years, and a strict watch was kept over the candidates by their sponsors. The end of the course demanded daily attendance at church; and throughout they were directed to pray at least twice a day (morning and evening, and in some places also at the third, sixth, and ninth hours of the day), and were urged to attend the assemblies of the church in the mornings (Hippolytus), where they would be assured that angels and saints prayed with them (Origen). In other words Christians of this period tended to spend a good deal longer in prayer and reflection than many of their twentieth-century counterparts, and the idea of 'the spiritual life' as something only seriously practiced by a special group of professionals was wholly alien to the outlook of the period.

Second, the public prayer of the church allowed considerable opportunity to the congregation for being receptive, for listening and for being 'prayed in'. Congregations at the liturgy for the first four centuries were for the most part silent. There were some responses, but very few. Responsorial psalms were introduced, hymns were composed, but the tendency to leave all the music to the choir increased as the years went by; and, with the increasing gap between the language of the liturgy and the vernacular, people no longer 'followed the service' in detail but simply allowed themselves to be caught up in the flow of the eucharistic action, which was felt by them to unite heaven and earth and to bring them through Christ by the Holy Spirit to the Father. If we were to say then that the understanding of God as Trinity grew in the early centuries through the Christian's experience of God in prayer, then the opportunity for this was not inconsiderable, and we must now look at this experience in more detail.

1. *The public prayer of the church.* Two examples may be given to illustrate the intrinsic connection between eucharistic prayer and trinitarian reflection, and thus to indicate how liturgical usage was operative in fostering and guarding some sort of trinitarian notion of God.

- (a) The introductory dialogue to the eucharistic prayer in the Western liturgy begins with the words 'The Lord be with you'. Recent scholarship has suggested that this phrase is either a statement or a prayer, meaning probably 'The Spirit of the Lord is with you' or 'May the Spirit of the Lord be with you'. The reply from the congregation is 'And with thy spirit' ('and also with you'), praying that the celebrant may be given the Spirit of God in order that he may properly celebrate the eucharist. For a long period the eucharistic prayer was prayed extempore (Justin, *I Apol.* 65 ff), and presidents of the eucharist were chosen (among other reasons) for their recognised gift of offering prayer of this kind. Hence the importance of invoking the Spirit of God as Trinity, since 'we know not how to pray as we ought' (Rom. 8.26). In another example, this time from the Byzantine liturgy, before the eucharistic prayer begins there is a dialogue between priest and deacon in the course of which the priest prays, 'May the Holy Spirit come upon you and the Power of the Most High overshadow you' (as at the Annunciation), to which the deacon replies, 'May the same Holy Spirit celebrate with us all the days of our lives'. This echoes the same theology, even though by this time the central prayer of the eucharist is no longer extemporised. The experience attested by St Paul therefore (1 Cor. 2, Rom. 8) is here highlighted in the liturgy. We do not presume to come to the Lord's table by our own efforts. We are brought to the presence of God through Christ by the Holy Spirit.
- (b) It would of course be equally true to say not only that the celebrant of the eucharist is conscious of being prayed in by the Holy Spirit, but that the prayer which he offers is not his but the prayer of Christ—in other words, Christ prays in him. This, however, needs to be understood carefully. We could say that the celebrant of the eucharist in Justin Martyr's time was conscious that the eucharistic gift of the body and blood of Christ was given in virtue of 'the prayer of the Word who is from him' [*sc.* God the Father] (*I Apol.* 66.3) (and not by any mystical incantation of the celebrant as the emperor might have heard about the mysteries of Mithras). In this case the response is to the prayer of Christ who prays through his mystical body, the church. In this connection, Origen also notes that this too is the experience of Christians who prepare themselves by obedience and devotion for prayer, who will then 'participate in the prayer of the Word of God who stands in the midst even of those who know him not, and never fails the prayer of anyone, but prays to the Father along with him whose mediator he is' (*De Oratione* 10.2). Thus Christ himself in this instance does the praying, and Christians who pray (cf. *ibid.* 22.4) become like Christ through their prayer: like him they are sons, like him they cry 'Abba, Father', and all this by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. So that Christians being 'the image of



an image', i.e. being like Christ, who is the 'image' of God (*De Orat.* 22.4), pray *as* Christ and pray Christ's prayer. 'Now you became Christs', writes Cyril of Jerusalem, 'by receiving the . . . Holy Spirit; everything has been wrought in you because you are the likenesses (i.e., images) of Christ.'

2. *Prayer in general.* If in liturgical prayer it is possible to discern the pattern of a trinitarian experience of God, of being brought to the Father through incorporation into the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit, then we should expect the same to be true of accounts of prayer in general. This is certainly the case in some authors. Origen's treatise on prayer belongs to the latter part of his life and was written at Caesarea. We have already given some indication of his understanding of the dynamic of prayer, and it is significant that the introductory chapter is given to an exploration of the themes of 1 Cor. 1.30–2.11 and Rom. 8.26 ff. It has already become clear that, for Origen, it is the Spirit who initiates prayer, who makes us Christ-like, and so brings us to the Father. Origen is also insistent that 'we may never pray to anything generated—not even to Christ—but only to God and the Father of all, to whom even Our Saviour himself prayed as we have already said, and teaches us to pray.' Christ for Origen is always High Priest, always intercessor, always Son as we become sons, so we never pray to him but only through him. Origen's teaching on prayer here is clearly linked with his trinitarian theology, in which the Son is not truly co-equal with the Father, and for which he was later censured. It cannot therefore be claimed that those who pray aright end up inexorably in trinitarian orthodoxy. But it can at least be said that any genuine experience of Christian prayer involves an encounter with God perceived as in some sense triune.

Basil the Great's treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, on the other hand, recounts a similar experience with a modified conclusion in the direction of a more traditional orthodoxy. On first reading it is a keenly dogmatic work written in the heat of controversy, with a good deal of invective against the poor logic of the heretics. Well known (and often greatly disliked) for his defence of Nicene orthodoxy, Basil appears here as a staunch defender of tradition, not least of the baptismal formulas of the church, with the result that one could read him as a person with 'party' interests and a merely intellectual grasp of the position he feels bound to defend. From what we know of his life, this is clearly to underestimate him. Given to the monastic life from an early period, and never as archbishop abandoning his ascetic practices of prayer and self-discipline, it is not surprising that something of personal experience emerges in the course of his defence. The following passage reflects his personal discipline as well as his vision of truth:

The Spirit comes to us when we withdraw ourselves from evil passions, which have crept into the soul through its friendship with the flesh, alienating us from a close relationship with God . . . Then, like the sun, he will show you

in himself the image of the invisible [*sc.* the Son], and with purified eyes you will see in this blessed image the unspeakable beauty of its prototype [*sc.* the Father] . . . From this comes knowledge of the future, understanding of mysteries . . . a place in the choir of angels, endless joy in the presence of God, becoming like God, and, the highest of all desires, becoming God (*On The Holy Spirit*, 9.23).

The significant feature here is that through this direct encounter of the individual's spirit (or soul) with the Spirit of God (cf. 1 Cor. 2, the spiritual with the Spiritual) we are enabled first to see Christ and through this perfect Image to behold the Father, and secondly, as a consequence of our inner illumination, to become spiritual ourselves through God's gracious act of deification. The entire experience, in other words, is trinitarian; and Basil here is setting out a distinct logic and progression in the roles of each divine 'person' in assimilating the Christian to God. Hence, although all three 'persons' do indeed act together, it is important to note that Spirit and Son cannot be seen as mere alternatives.

#### IV. Conclusions

What then, may be concluded from the analysis of these Pauline passages and their spiritual and trinitarian significance for the early Greek fathers? We have seen that the development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the early church, though so often and necessarily described in terms of theological controversy and the activity of Councils, has its roots firmly in Christian experiences of God through liturgy and personal prayer. The technical trinitarian formularies that were eventually agreed in the fourth and fifth centuries grew in part out of that experience. Nevertheless they were primarily intended as defences against theological alternatives that were deemed misleading, and in themselves rarely conveyed much to inspire and reveal the true nature of the Godhead. Nor indeed did their original exponents propose them as descriptions of their trinitarian God. Rather, they provided the best available means of protecting from erroneous interpretation something that was to a large degree intellectually overwhelming. Only two centuries after the Council of Constantinople, Maximus the Confessor could express his profound dissatisfaction with the use of the term *ousia* ('substance') about the Godhead at all. His objection was spiritually motivated: the reality of God must of necessity transcend all attempts to capture it, even in these hallowed conceptual terms.

If then it is the experience of prayer, both personal and corporate, which is our primary access to God as Trinity, several important conclusions accrue for today. First, we become aware that prayer must have priority, and that no amount of sheer intellectual effort on the one hand, or authoritarian bludgeoning on the other, will effect a lively belief in a trinitarian God. One may undergo the regular discipline of reciting the Athanasian creed; but to no avail if 'the one thing needful' is lacking.

Secondly, the experience of being mysteriously caught up by divine dialogue into the likeness of Christ, while indicating the necessity for thinking in some sort of trinitarian terms, will never in itself yield hard-edged conceptual certainty. The actual business of prayer is itself so varied that the fact that there are differences between various conceptual models for the Trinity should not so greatly surprise us, nor should the constant impression, especially when examining the mystics of the church, that their experience continually chafes at the limits of the traditional and authoritative formularies. This is not to say that it is impossible to establish workable and agreed criteria for distinguishing good from bad doctrinal accounts, or even for effecting some rapprochement between Eastern and Western traditions. But it does mean that any desire for crude and absolute certainty is likely to go disappointed.

If this is so, then, thirdly, light may also be thrown on the pressing contemporary issue from which this chapter started: that of Christianity's relation to other world religions. For here we confront a paradox. On the one hand, the approach to the Trinity through prayer does indeed point up differences between Christianity and other forms of faith. Not only does the Christian who prays, if the account given here is sound, come to discover some felt need for a particular sort of threefold differentiation in the Godhead, a feature unique to Christian theism; but there are also the further ramifications of the 'incarnational' characteristics of prayer—the positive attitude to the body and to the material world on the one hand, and, even more significantly, the haunting image of a God exposed in Christ crucified, of divine presence mediated precisely through weakness and dereliction. These, surely, are the central distinguishing features of Christian theism. Yet from the same experience of prayer emerges the other side of the paradox. For the obscurity, the darkness, the sheer defencelessness of wordless prayer usually lead rather to a greater openness to other traditions than to an assured sense of superiority; and the experience of God thus dimly perceived brings about a curious intuitional recognition of the activity of 'contemplation' in others, whether or not the concept of God to which they adhere is congruous with the Christian one. This latter factor we can surely ill afford to ignore, however difficult it is to incorporate it into a convincing intellectual solution to the problem of vying religious truth claims.

Fourthly, an approach to the Trinity through prayer has implications for the currently vexed issue of masculine and feminine language as applied to God. This is neither a digression, nor a purely contemporary fad, as any comprehensive survey of trinitarian thought would quickly make plain. It has again and again been the insight of those given to prayer that description of the triune God which is not fatally inadequate must somehow encompass, as a matter of balance, what we are conditioned to call feminine characteristics—patience, compassion, endurance, forgiveness, warmth, sustenance and so on—no less than the strength, power, activity, initiative, wrath and suchlike that our society has tended to regard as peculiarly masculine. Sometimes in the Christian tradition this insight has led to a somewhat

curious compensating for the assumed masculine stereotyping of the Father by the use of feminine language to refer to one of the other Persons—Spirit or Son. (In the early Syriac theology and in the pseudo-Macarian homilies, for instance, the Spirit is feminine and motherly; in Julian of Norwich, as is better known, Christ is described as ‘Our Mother’.) At other times, and perhaps more convincingly, there has been a primary insistence on the ultimate unknowability of God, transcending all categories of gender, combined with a secondary realisation that Prayer also forces us to recognise, at the level of anthropomorphic description, the need for a balance of so-called masculine and feminine characteristics in the undivided activity of all three ‘Persons’. (Gregory of Nyssa at times approaches this position.)

Just as it is a not uncommon experience among those who give themselves seriously to the practice of prayer that sooner or later they have to face their own need of an integrated sexuality, and of an inward personal balance between activity and receptivity, initiative and response, so too prayer may bring us to a deeper, more comprehensive and more satisfying doctrine of the triune God. Through prayer God can be recognised both as the creative power on whom all depend for their existence, and also as the one who in the dereliction of Christ’s cross is disclosed as enduring in patient weakness, and coming perilously close to defeat. The Spirit who prays in us and is known in prayer is indeed Lord and Lifegiver, but also one who cries ‘Abba, Father’ with us in doubt and darkness and in the sharing of Christ’s sufferings. Both man and woman are ‘in the image of God’, and God is the fullness of the Trinity. The ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ qualities (as we call them) which we all share in varying admixture are both of them for us clues and glimpses of the wholeness of divine life and love.

# Week Twenty, Reading Assignment for Year One

## Micah<sup>85</sup>

This section on Micah is extracted from John J. Collins's longer text, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, because Micah is not addressed in the *Shorter Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, our current text for Year One.

Roughly contemporary with Isaiah was Micah of Moresheth, a small town about twenty-three miles southwest of Jerusalem. According to the superscription of the book, he prophesied in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, and his oracles concerned both Samaria and Jerusalem. In contrast to Isaiah, Micah was a rural prophet and not so closely engaged with the Davidic dynasty. As in the case of all the prophetic books, however, we must reckon with a process of edition and supplementation that may have gone on for centuries. A clear example of this is found in Mic 4:10, where Zion is told to writhe like a woman in labor, "for now you shall go forth from the city and camp in the open country; you shall go to Babylon. There you shall be rescued, there the Lord will redeem you from the hands of your enemies." The initial prophecy that the city would be undone, and that its inhabitants would have to camp in the open country, may well have been uttered by Micah. It is quite compatible with the critique of the ruling powers by the rural prophet. The extension of the prophecy to include the Babylonian exile and the subsequent restoration must have been added by a postexilic scribe, who felt impelled to update the oracle in the light of subsequent history.

The actual extent of the supplementation of the oracles of Micah is a matter of controversy. One scholarly tradition, developed in Germany in the late nineteenth century and still widely influential, attributes only material in chapters 1–3 to the eighth-century prophet, and that with minor exceptions, most notably the prophecy of restoration in 2:12–13. These chapters consist primarily of judgment oracles. The more hopeful oracles in chapters 4–5 are usually dated to the early postexilic period. Chapters 6–7 are also regarded as later additions. At least the conclusion in 7:8–20 was added to adapt the collection to liturgical use. This kind of analysis may go too far in denying the prophet any hope for the future. At least a few passages in chapters 4–7 are likely to come from the eighth century. In contrast to this approach, some recent commentaries have tried to defend the essential unity

85. John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 321–324. Used by permission.

of the book (Hillers, Andersen and Freedman). There can be little doubt, however, that the oracles underwent a process of transmission and that the book, like those of the other pre-exilic prophets, was given its present form after the Babylonian exile.

## The Social Critique

The opening oracle invokes an old tradition of the theophany of the divine warrior. In Judges 5 the imagery of storm and earthquake were used to express the terror caused by YHWH going to help his people in battle. In Micah they describe the terror of YHWH coming to judge his people. The wrath is directed against both Samaria and Jerusalem. The focus on the capital cities is significant. The offenses are primarily charged to the ruling class. Jerusalem is derisively called a “high place.” Micah makes no distinction between the guilt of the two kingdoms. In 1:6 he prophesies that Samaria will be made a heap. In 3:12 he predicts that “Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins.” The latter prophecy is cited in Jer 26:18, where its nonfulfillment is explained by the fact that Hezekiah repented. Micah says that he will go naked and barefoot as Isaiah did, but where Isaiah symbolized the captivity of Egyptians and Ethiopians, Micah’s action is a gesture of mourning for the destruction of Judah. The statement that “it has reached the gate of my people” recalls the invasion of Sennacherib (cf. Isaiah 1), but it more likely refers to the Syro-Ephraimite war, in view of the date ascribed to Micah and his concern for Samaria as well as Jerusalem.

The initial charge against Samaria and Jerusalem is idolatry. Jerusalem is compared to a high place; Samaria is accused of prostitution (cf. Hosea). More typical of Micah, however, is the accusation of injustice. The statement that “they covet fields, and seize them; houses and take them away,” refers to the same phenomenon noted in Isa 5:8, which is addressed to those who add house to house and field to field. The punishment will fit the crime. Their own houses and fields will be seized by the invaders. Micah’s condemnation of the exploitation of the poor is more biting even than that of Amos. The rich “tear the skin off my people and the flesh off their bones; eat the flesh of my people . . . chop them up like meat in a kettle” (3:2–3). The punishment to come will be a response of YHWH to the cry of the poor. Like Amos, Micah disassociates himself from the professional prophets (*nebi’im*, 3:5–12). These people, we are told, give oracles for money (3:11; rulers and priests are similarly venal). They cry “peace” when they have enough to eat, and mislead the people by saying “surely, the Lord is with us” (3:11). If Isaiah saw this Davidic slogan as ambiguous, Micah sees it as a misleading illusion. We have no narrative of the call of Micah as we have of Amos. It seems safe to assume that he did not consider himself to be a *nabi’*. Like Amos, his preaching encountered opposition and some people tried to suppress it (2:6). It has been noted that the formula “thus



says the Lord” occurs only once in chapters 1–3, and that Micah sometimes speaks in his own name (3:1). Nonetheless, he also speaks in the name of the Lord (e.g., 1:6: “I will make Samaria a heap”), and he claims to be filled with power, with the spirit of the Lord, to denounce the sin of Israel (3:8).

The critique of the cult in chapter 6 is also in line with what we have seen in the other eighth-century prophets and is plausibly attributed to Micah. This passage is cast in the form of a *rib*, or legal disputation, and can be viewed as a covenant lawsuit. God reminds his people Israel that he brought them up from the land of Egypt and redeemed them from slavery. There is a clear implication that Israel should have responded by serving the Lord with justice and has failed to do so, but the offenses and consequent punishment are not spelled out. While the exodus played no part in the preaching of Isaiah of Jerusalem, it figured prominently in the oracles of Amos and Hosea, even though Amos, like Micah, came from the southern kingdom. Micah too addressed Israel as well as Judah. Many scholars assume that the appeal to the exodus here is the work of a Deuteronomistic editor, but this is not necessarily so.

Micah 6:6–8 considers the misguided reasoning of an Israelite, or Judean, worshiper. The assumption is that God will be impressed by the cost of the sacrifice. Even human sacrifice is contemplated. As we have seen in connection with Genesis 22, human sacrifice was practiced in ancient Israel and Judah. King Manasseh of Judah, son of Hezekiah, was said to have made his son “pass through fire,” which is to say that he sacrificed him as a burnt offering (2 Kgs 21:6). Human sacrifice, however, is much less likely to have been an option in the postexilic period. Micah’s critique of sacrifice is essentially the same as that of the other prophets we have considered. It indicates a misunderstanding of what YHWH wants, which is “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (6:8). Most of the positive oracles in chapters 4–5 are likely to have been added by postexilic editors, when the time of judgment had passed and the need was for consolation and hope. Micah 4:1–5 repeats an oracle found in Isaiah 2:1–5, with a variation in the concluding verse. The imagery of *tôrāh* going forth from Jerusalem and the peoples streaming thereto fits better with the aspirations of Second Temple Judaism than with what we know of the eighth century. The oracle probably circulated anonymously. That it is associated with two eighth-century prophets is striking, but probably coincidental. A more difficult case is presented by Micah 5:2–5, which predicts the advent of a ruler from Bethlehem of Judah, the ancestral home of David. Many scholars take this as a postexilic prediction of a restoration of the Davidic line, and the obscure statement in v. 3, “the rest of his kindred shall return,” can be read as supporting this interpretation. But the focus on Bethlehem, as opposed to Zion, may be significant. Micah of Moresheth may have felt that the Davidic monarchy could be redeemed if it returned to the humble roots symbolized by the ancestral village. The prediction of a ruler from Bethlehem would then be a rejection of the ruling king and the Jerusalem

court, but not of the Davidic line. The oracle would still have been read in a messianic sense in the postexilic period. In the later context Assyria would be understood as the archetypical enemy. The fantasy of a final defeat of invading nations appears frequently in the later prophetic and apocalyptic books (e.g., the prophecy of Gog in Ezekiel 38–39).



# Resources for Listening and Spiritual Autobiography

# Spiritual Autobiographies: Some Guidelines

A spiritual autobiography is your life story—the telling of your journey told with the purpose of discerning and proclaiming how your experience has shaped your relationship with God. Each year in the program you are asked to recall your life story. Later, you are given an opportunity to share what you think is appropriate with your seminar group. A different structure is provided for your use for each of the four years of the program. These structured methods allow you to look at the whole sweep of your life. Constructing your autobiography provides a firm foundation for the continuing work of integrating the content of your year’s study with the events of your life. Your experience is a primary resource for your theological education; the yearly review of your life story enables you to hear how the timbre and direction of that story has changed in the last twelve months. Your call, discernment, vocation, and ministry are imbedded in your spiritual journey. This process of telling and retelling your story helps those themes come more clearly into your consciousness.

A spiritual autobiography may contain both religious material—significant people or times within the religious community—and everyday material like people and times in your life that have influenced who you are now and how you understand God’s presence or absence in your life.

The work you do on your spiritual autobiography is private, “for your eyes only.” This allows you to be free, without concern about how others will interpret either the context or expression.

Preparing a spiritual autobiography each year provides a way to deepen your understanding of both the Christian life and ministry. By virtue of your baptism you were called to ministry, guided and pushed by personal gifts, passions, skills, experiences, and interests.

Once you prepare your spiritual autobiography, you need to decide what you want to share with your seminar group. Martin Buber, a twentieth-century philosopher and Jewish theologian, is reputed to have said that he could never hold a significant conversation with another person until he had heard the other’s life story. The purpose of sharing autobiographies is to build trust and understanding within the group and to begin to make connections within your own story. We need the experience of hearing other life stories to know that we are not alone in God’s world. By sharing appropriate stories of our lives we form learning communities that can challenge and support us throughout our lives.

Your mentor will relate her or his own story and help the group structure the time for sharing of autobiographies. Most groups give each member **around ten minutes** to tell his or her story, followed by time for the rest of the group to respond. Spiritual autobiographies are the focus of most of the

seminar time for the first few meetings of the year. This is a special time for your group. This component of your group's life will carry you to the next phase of your year together. This may be the first time to tell your story in this way. It may seem a bit daunting at first. Remember that you should offer what you feel comfortable sharing in the group. This is not an opportunity for "group therapy" or psychologizing, so the group should not engage in raising questions about motives or probe for information beyond what you share. Feel free to say "no" or to say that you do not wish to explore questions that others may raise out of curiosity or concern.

Sharing your "spiritual autobiography" is a way to say, "Here I am," and to join your EfM group as a full participant. Over the years in EfM you will probably find that your spiritual autobiography changes. You may find yourself free to talk about things which were previously guarded. You also may find that your freedom to "be yourself" will grow as your personal story, the life of the group, and the story of God's people relate to each other.

# Listening Skills

Listening is one of the greatest gifts we can give one another and a key component of a functioning group. Often we primarily focus on what we plan to say next rather than really listening to what others say.

For effective listening, make eye contact without staring at the other person. When you listen to the other person, listen to four things:

- What the person describes (what facts, events, situations, or information the person is trying to convey);
- How the person feels (what emotions accompany the information);
- Where the person places emphasis and shows energy;
- What the person's body is saying (sometimes one is unaware of the mixture of reactions and important information the body gives).

Effective listening is undermined by the following:

- *Answering emotions with logic.* When someone is excited about something, he or she does not want the first response to be a critical analysis. The speaker wants the other person to share some of their excitement.
- *Bringing in old issues.* When people want to discuss a problem, they do not want to be told that they always have similar problems or that they failed to do something about the problem three months ago.
- *Using sarcasm or cynicism,* or not taking the other person's issues seriously.

## Types of Listening

Types	Purpose	Examples
Clarifying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To get additional facts</li> <li>To help explore all sides of a problem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Can you clarify this?"</li> <li>"Do you mean this . . . ?"</li> <li>"Is this the problem as you see it now?"</li> </ul>
Restatement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To check out meaning and interpretation with someone else</li> <li>To show you are listening and that you understand what he is saying</li> <li>To encourage someone to analyze other aspects of matter being considered and to discuss it with you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"As I understand it then your point is . . . ?"</li> <li>"This is what you have decided to do and the reasons are . . . ?"</li> </ul>
Neutral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To convey that you are interested and listening</li> <li>To encourage person to continue talking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To convey that you are interested and listening</li> <li>To encourage person to continue talking</li> </ul>
Reflective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To show that you understand how he feels about what he is saying</li> <li>To help persons to evaluate and temper their own feelings as expressed by someone else</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"You feel that. . ."</li> <li>"It was a shocking thing as you saw it."</li> <li>"You felt you didn't get a fair shake."</li> </ul>
Summarizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To bring all the discussion into focus in terms of a summary</li> <li>To serve as a spring board for future discussion on a particular problem.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"These are the key ideas you have expressed. . ."</li> <li>"If I understand how you feel about the situation. . ."</li> </ul>

## Practice for Developing Effective Listening Skills

### 1. Ways Not to Listen

*PURPOSE: To demonstrate how non-listening techniques reduce the sense of individual participation, detract from group cohesiveness, and contribute to conflict.*

Divide your group into smaller groups of four. Each person will share something good and exciting that has happened to him or her in the past few months. The others in the group will demonstrate the following non-listening methods:

- a. *Passive listening*: not concentrating on what the person is saying. One person in the group shares for two minutes while the others demonstrate passive listening—no eye contact, no responses, etc. After the two minutes discuss what speaker and listeners felt about passive listening.
- b. *Happy hooking*: constantly changing the subject to center the conversation on you and not on the speaker. Many times people become very competitive and try to devise a topic that is similar but more exciting than the speaker's. After the two minutes discuss what speaker and listeners felt about happy hooking.
- c. *Mind reading*: completing the other person's sentences, acting as if you understand what they are saying, giving advice before you have heard them through. After the two minutes discuss what speaker and listeners felt about mind reading.
- d. *Inappropriate body language*: jiggling your foot, clicking a pen, staring at the person, touching them without being sensitive to whether they want to be touched, saying you are interested while showing the opposite with your body, showing aggression and impatience with your body while saying you are concerned. After the two minutes discuss what speaker and listeners felt about inappropriate body language.

### 2. Improve Your Listening Skills

*PURPOSE: To provide an opportunity for people to practice listening skills.*

Each person pairs off with one other person. Each of the two has ten minutes to share while the other person practices listening. The topic for sharing is a childhood event that was important or enjoyable.

At the end of each ten-minute sharing period the listener in the pair tells the speaker:

- a. A synopsis of the sharing;
- b. What he or she heard as the speaker's feelings about the event and about sharing the event;
- c. Words, images, and metaphors that stood out;
- d. What one thought the speaker was saying with his or her body.

The speaker confirms or corrects the listener's perception. Then the speaker tells the listener what he or she liked and what he or she wished were different about the other's listening style. The speaker's comments should emphasize:

- a. How the listener asked questions;
- b. How the listener's body posture encouraged sharing;
- c. What other listener responses helped the speaker feel understood and helped the speaker clarify what he or she was saying.

After analyzing how each spoke and listened, the speaker becomes the listener. The same process of sharing and analyzing is repeated.

# The Art of Framing Questions

Ministry begins in relationship. Relationship begins in sharing our own stories and listening to the stories of others. You can learn to frame questions that invite others to open up and share themselves more deeply. You may find it useful to differentiate between three levels of such questions.

“Who, What, Where and When” are foundational or Level 1 interrogatives. Ask questions framed with these interrogatory pronouns first to encourage the narrative to begin. However, if these questions are probing at delicate areas, there may be obfuscation, evasion, or avoidance. These questions may describe an action: What happened? Two cars collided, one was red and one was blue. They may be emotive: What did you feel when two cars collided? I was frightened. They may be intellectual: What did you think when two cars collided? I thought the blue one was driving too fast.

Level 2 questions, which begin with the interrogative “How,” seek to analyze the information in a narrative. If such questions are asked too early, they may put the teller on the defensive. When we ask the question, “How did that happen?” we may communicate an accusatory tone that shuts down any possibility of openness.

Why did you do that? Level 3 questions beginning with “Why” invite explanations and defensive responses because they aim at our motives. Motives for our actions tend to be mixed. Sometimes we may not even know them. Some motives may be acceptable, and others are very difficult to admit because we are ashamed of them. When the invitation to share a story begins by asking questions about motives, using the interrogative “why,” we may be perceived as asking for an apology, a defense, or an explanation. While this may be useful in certain circumstances, it is best to avoid questions aimed at motivations. The question may be better phrased in terms of “what,” such as: “What led you to make that conclusion?”

## Helpful Questions

1. Build trust: “Can you give some examples so that we can understand your idea better?”
2. Open varied data: “Has anyone an example he or she can tell us about?”
3. Give possibility of creativity: “Who can play a musical instrument of some kind?” “Anyone for getting up some games on the lawn this afternoon?”
4. Give an opportunity for a self-revelation of the answerer: “Would some of you like to share your ideas of what you would do?”



5. Lead to data of possible common interest: "What high schools are represented in our class?"
6. Raise morale or interest level: "Shall we brainstorm for some program ideas?"
7. Move the group toward decisions: "What can we draw from the discussion?"
8. Elicit helpful feedback: "What did I do that caused your head to hit the dashboard?"
9. Help the group establish its norms: "What things would you like to schedule for the weekend?"
10. Help leader learn what the group and individual standards are: "What are some dating standards you feel some kids agree on?"
11. Facilitate drawing learning from within group: "How might we plan for next time so that everyone can get more out of it?"
12. Help to free the silent member: "Would you like to tell us your feelings on this, Mary?"

### Unhelpful Questions

1. Threaten: "What do you mean by that?"
2. Limit area of response: "What does the scripture say?"
3. Predetermine the response: "Can anyone play the piano?" "Tennis anyone?"
4. Allow only for structured or content responses: "What ought to happen in a case like that?"
5. Start sub-group conversations: "How many of you go to Broughton?"
6. Encourage pessimism or disinterest: "What can we talk about this year?"
7. Block movement of group: "Is this getting us anywhere?"
8. Bring only reinforcement of unhelpful behavior: "I haven't been very helpful, have I?"
9. Force norms without consensus: "How many times will we go to church?"
10. Imply standards that may not be accepted: "Shouldn't we list some rules for the party?"
11. Predetermine learning by implications: "Doesn't all of this indicate that sex is a no-no?"
12. Drive the silent member farther out: "Why so quiet, Mary?"



# Resources for Reflecting Theologically

# Primary Aspects of Theological Reflection<sup>86</sup>

How did the process of theological reflection evolve? We all from time to time have conversations that are memorable. When these conversations lead to satisfying insights, result in life-altering decisions, and leave participants feeling and thinking that the Spirit of God has been among them, then something special has happened. The EfM seminar is designed to be a focus for such conversations.

When we reviewed these conversations, we began to ask questions. Why did they proceed so well rather than degenerate into gossip, arguments, or unproductive prattle? We tried to identify the significant interventions and then replicate the experience in a new way. Three things emerged from our efforts: a four-source model, the recognition that certain elements were necessary to the conversation, and the knowledge of how to replicate the process.

The Four-source Model has become central to the EfM method of theological reflection.

The four sources are:

- Our actions, our personal lives, the things we do every day—We are part of the text of Christian experience.
- Our personal beliefs—What each of us holds or affirms as the way we think and what we think motivates our behavior.
- The culture—The world in which we live in all its complexity of languages, ethnic groups, and secular diversity.
- The tradition of the church—The Holy Bible, the liturgies, the imagery, and the historical tradition of the church as it has come to us through custom, texts, and monuments.

The elements necessary to make the discussion flow are:

- The personal engagement of the participants (the conversation cannot remain abstract);
- A love of the subject under scrutiny (in this case, all that comprises theological studies);
- A method to abstract and image the crucial aspects under scrutiny (metaphors, images, and issues);
- An examination of the matter at hand using theological categories (i.e., creation, sin, judgment, and redemption);

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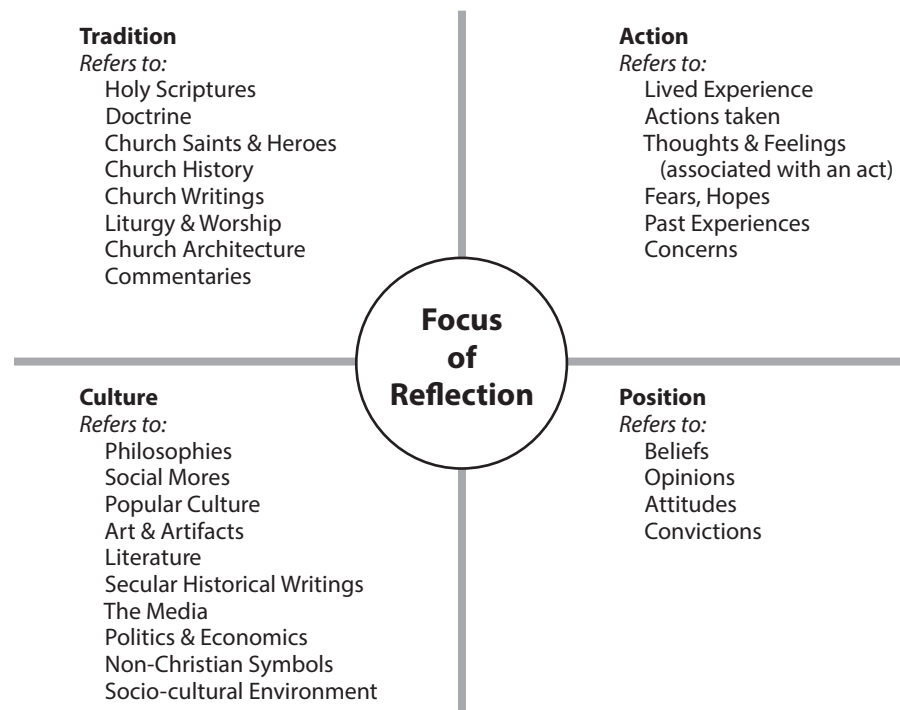
86. This and other material in this section adapted from *Common Lessons and Supporting Materials* (2006), previously published by Education for Ministry.

- The ability to compare and contrast the various voices (our own lives, our religious tradition, the culture, and our personal beliefs or positions);
- A time to draw insights and reach conclusions that lead to implications, first on a personal basis, and then for our community and the world we inhabit;
- An opportunity to draw all this together within a supportive atmosphere of trust and support, rooted in a full life of prayer.

To sustain our learning activities the seminars normally contain three aspects:

1. The community is maintained through sharing our lives and prayer, both expected to be a regular part of the life of the group.
2. There is an opportunity to reflect on what we learn in the texts as we read about Christian Tradition. This is a time to raise questions, perhaps argue with the text, and look for themes that connect the past to itself and to us so that our stories may become woven as one with the story of God and the people of God.
3. There is opportunity for reflective activity that may encompass our spiritual autobiographies, as we engage in theological reflection, deepen our spiritual connections, or examine the meaning of the ministry we all share by virtue of our baptism.

## The EfM Four-source Model



# Theological Reflection in EfM

A theological reflection in EfM begins in one of the four sources: personal experience/**Action**, the **Tradition** of the faith, personal beliefs/**Position**, or **Culture**/society.

The movement of theological reflection is: Identify a focus, Explore the focus, Connect the focus to other areas/sources, and Apply learning.

A reflection takes on theological strength by viewing the image/picture, issue, or matter through some theological lenses, asking questions concerning the nature of the world, the relationship of God to the world, the nature of repentance and forgiveness, the nature of human community, or the quality of redemption and restoration of relationship. These are also known as **theological perspectives**, sometimes identified by the traditional systematic terms of Creation, Sin, Judgment, Repentance, and Redemption/Resurrection. Theological perspectives may also be framed in everyday language that carries the themes of the traditional terms, such as wholeness, brokenness, recognition of brokenness, reorientation, and restoration.

Theological reflection remains only an interesting exercise if learning is not embodied in ministry. It is important to ask what can be carried forward from the reflection.

In the following pages you will find several different ways of explaining and depicting the way EfM does theological reflection in four movements, drawing from four sources. Some may be more helpful to you than others; we all have different learning styles. The best advice is to use the approaches that are helpful, and don't agonize over the ones that aren't.

## Select Bibliography for Theological Reflection

Killen, Patricia O'Connell and John DeBeer, *The Art of Theological Reflection*, New York: Crossroad, 1994.

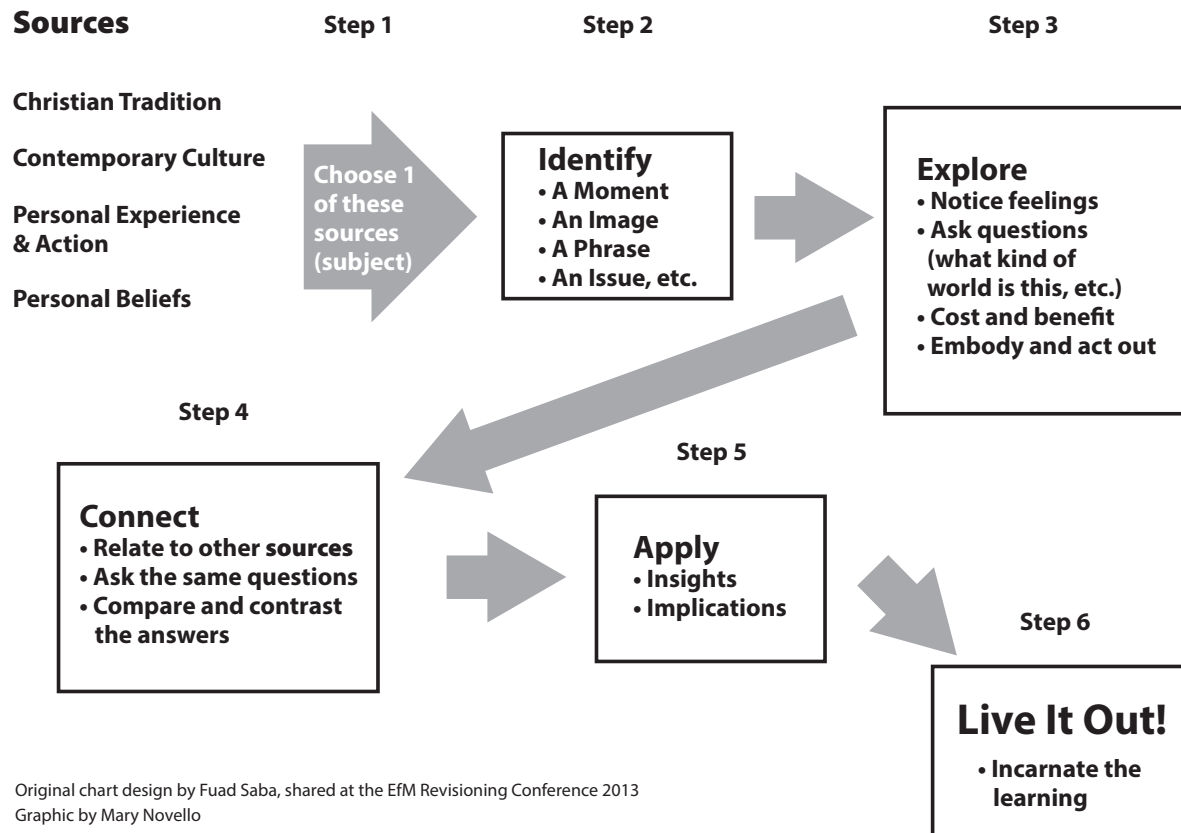
Paver, John E. *Theological Reflection and Education for Ministry: The Search for Integration in Theology*. Ebook. Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2006.

Thompson, Judith, Stephen Pattison, and Ross Thomason. Ebook. *SCM Studyguide to Theological Reflection*. London: SCM Press, 2008.

# The Basic Structure of EfM Theological Reflection in Four Movements

<p><b>IDENTIFY A FOCUS</b></p> <p><i>This is the most crucial step of all. A good focus propels the reflection.</i></p>	<p>Identify the beginning point on which to reflect. Is it something from a Personal Experience, from the Christian Tradition, from the Culture, or from a Personal Position? If the beginning is in a personal experience, identify a specific moment in the experience and the thoughts and feelings at that moment. If from a Bible passage, what is the main idea or image? If from something in Culture, what is the main focus? A Personal Position statement is itself the focus. Create a focus as either an image or a concise statement that captures the main energy of the beginning point and decide the specific stand-point from which the focus image or statement is viewed.</p>
<p><b>EXPLORE THE FOCUS IMAGE/STATEMENT</b></p> <p><i>Asking the theological perspective questions is what turns general reflection into theological reflection.</i></p>	<p>Investigate the focus by posing two or three theological questions around the focus image or statement. Exploration grows out of examining the breadth and depth of the identified focus. What's the story in the image? What kind of world is this? What could be destructive in this world? What could change things? What would make things work out? Those are questions that deal with classic systematic theology's perspective categories of creation, sin, judgment, and redemption. Another way of expressing theological perspectives is the language of wholeness, brokenness, recognition, reorientation, and restoration. What statement can be made about God, human nature, or grace as a result of your exploration of the image? How does the image relate to the theological affirmations of humanity being created in the image and likeness of God?</p>
<p><b>CONNECT OTHER SOURCES TO THE REFLECTION</b></p> <p><i>This is the heart of reflection that helps us connect our lives and our faith.</i></p>	<p>Exploring the focus image or statement theologically generally prompts natural connections to occur—Bible stories may be recalled that relate to the focus, or events in the Culture come to mind, or Personal Beliefs rise up. Theological reflection deliberately attends to those sources. If a theological reflection begins in Personal Experience, consider how our Christian Tradition, our Culture, and our Positions/Beliefs can guide us when life is like the image or statement that provides a focus for the reflection.</p>
<p><b>APPLY LEARNING AND INSIGHT TO MINISTRY</b></p> <p><i>A reflection that does not end with implications for our own lives as ministers in the world is incomplete.</i></p>	<p>Insights lead to implications that are applicable to one's ministry in daily life. Decide how the theological reflection calls us into actions of ministry in our daily life. Implications may take the form of a reframed question, a commitment to a specific action, or a new attitude.</p>

# Theological Reflection Process Chart<sup>87</sup>

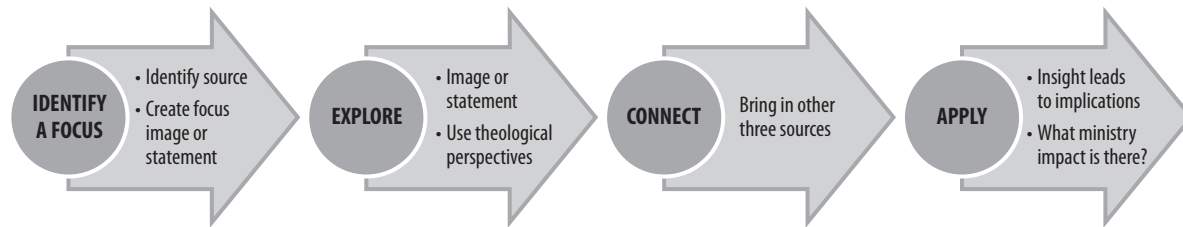


TR Process Chart

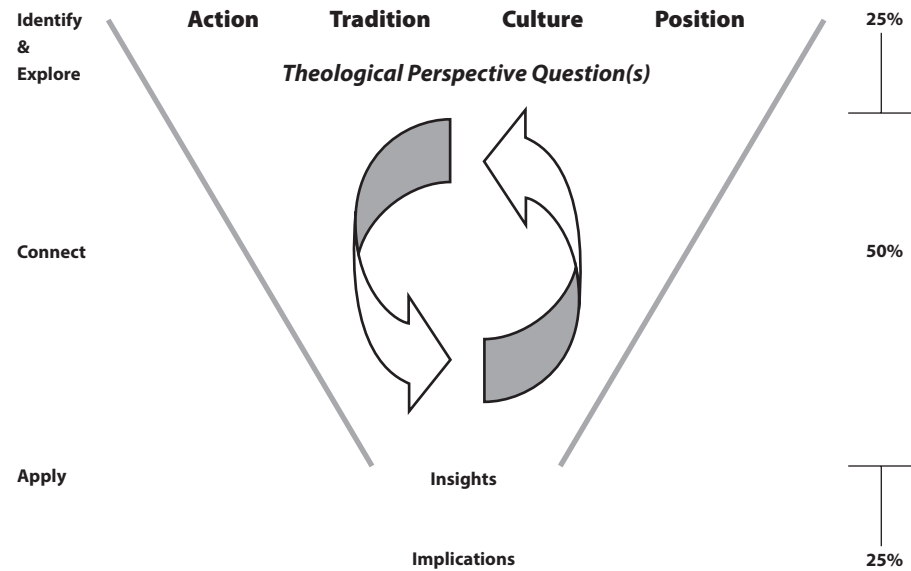
87. Like many of the resources in the EfM program, this one is the product of a collaborative effort. The original process design was developed by EfM mentor Fuad Saba and shared at the Re-visioning EfM conference in Sewanee in July 2013. The graphic presentation was designed by Mary Novello, EfM Coordinator for the Diocese of Western Michigan. Tricia and John deBeer, EfM trainers, further refined the language.



# Four Phases of Movement in Theological Reflection



# Framework for Theological Reflections<sup>88</sup>



	Internal	External
Group	Tradition	Culture
Personal	Position	Action

**Personal Experience/Action**—Behavior and activity define this source; what actually happened that can be communicated using neutral words (RRG-B, p. 47). Actions are behaviors that can be seen by those external to ourselves. A video camera has to be able to view them.

**Personal Belief/Position**—Opinions, beliefs, viewpoints, and convictions held by a person constitute the position pole of the four-source model (RRG-B, p. 47). The important opinions are those that directly influence our behavior.

**Faith Tradition**—Whenever the language, concepts, terms, or images in a conversation come from the Bible or some other document or story that is part of the Christian lore, then one is drawing from the Christian Tradition source (RRG-B, p. 46).

**Culture/Society**—This source of the four-source model refers to a very large body of material. Literature, music, paintings, and other artifacts are part of the Culture Source (RRG-B, p. 46). Other parts are movies, television shows, and books. Focus on the aspects that influence your Positions and Actions.

88. Created by Joshua D. Booher.

## Unpacking the Framework for Theological Reflections<sup>89</sup>

When two words are placed together, for example “theological reflection,” the second word is the primary or focal word. In this case, we are engaging in a reflection. A reflection indicates there are two things. The first is the item (our lives) to be reflected and the second is the item the first item reflects off of. For it to be a “theological” reflection, one of the two items has to originate from our Tradition source.

There are four sources from which you can begin a theological reflection (TR). To help my own understanding, I have them in a two-by-two grid (see chart). The rows are us as individuals (Personal) and us in a group (Group). The columns are things that only we can know (Internal) and things that can be seen from the outside (External). In this grid, things about us that can be seen from the outside are our behaviors or Actions. The things about ourselves that only we can know are our Positions. Things about a group that a person outside a group can see is the Culture of the group. Things about a group that are primarily known only to people inside a group are the Tradition of the group. Though not perfect, this grid helps to show that the influences on our behaviors come from us or a group we are in and/or from inside or outside ourselves. This helps to explain why these four sources help us work our way through a TR. They cover all the influences in our lives.

Though you can start a TR from any of the four sources, for it to be a theological reflection one of the first two sources has to be Tradition. For this example our point of origin will be a personal action.

After identifying the story from your life that you want to reflect on (Action), you need to ask a theological perspective question to explore the story. This question helps to align the mirrors to get a more accurate and meaningful reflection. These questions can take on many forms, from creation/sin/judgment/repentance/redemption to love, grace, salvation, transubstantiation, and transfiguration. Often a good theological perspective question that can be used will arise during the text reflection portion of the seminar.

To be a “theological” reflection, after exploring the Action source from the theological perspective question, the group needs to explore the Tradition source. This allows the Tradition source to “reflect” and inform the Action source. Once a piece from the Tradition source has been identified, ask the EXACT SAME theological perspective question of it.

89. This framework was designed as a training tool to help mentors understand the overall map of the TR process and as a supplement to the four-source model so that when a TR is not proceeding well or there is confusion the mentor has a mental framework to help participants get back into the process and to assess what else needs covered to complete the TR process. EfM participants may also find the tool helpful as they work with individual reflections in the Reading and Reflection Guide and group reflection in their seminar.

Asking the EXACT same theological perspective question is the best way to ensure that you align your two mirrors correctly. For instance, asking, “What is your age?” and, “What year were you born?” get to related information, but do not line up exactly. To get from one to the other you have to execute mental arithmetic. The same would be the case if you ask of the Action source, “What was the world like in this story?” and of the Tradition source, “What was Creation like in this story?” As the mentor you might mean the same thing by these two questions, but the participants are likely answering different questions.

Once the group has explored the Tradition source with the exact same theological perspective question, you are ready to move on.

To have a reflection, you only need two things: the item to be reflected and the item doing the reflecting. So, at this point, we have set that stage. Our life story (Action) is being viewed against the mirror of our Tradition. The mirror was aligned by asking the exact same theological perspective question of both sources. At this point, the actual reflection begins. Everything before this point has been setting up the reflection by exploring the Action source and the Tradition source.

Now, the group will sift through the material that has arisen in the two explorations and see where there are points of similarity (Compare) and differences (Contrast). Begin discussing the similarities and differences.

After the Compare/Contrast discussion, you can move directly to the Insights/Implications. You have done everything required of a theological reflection. You have examined the point of origin (Action), the point of reflection (Tradition), and how they reflect upon each other. However, to have a richer reflection, bring in the other two sources. You do this by seeing how the sources resonate with the discussion through the lens of the theological perspective question. Don’t go sequentially through the sources, though. Allow the sources to speak to each other as resonates arise.

Then, as time and/or energy start to wane, ask the group what insights and implications have arisen for them in this discussion.

## Other Comments on Framework Application

This framework matches the RRG’s four step model of Identify/Explore/Connect/Apply. In the Identify step, you are choosing the point of origin. You Explore the point of origin by way of the theological perspective question. You then Connect to the Tradition source. You also Connect to the other sources as time and energy allow. Finally, you Apply your learnings by way of Insights and Implications.

In addition, TRs have limited time in which to be completed and you want to make sure to give each section enough time. Through my experience, this is done by allowing 25 percent of your time to get through the Tradition theological perspective question discussion. At the 25 percent

mark, you should be starting the compare/contrast of the two Explorations. (This covers Identify/Explore and the beginning of Connect.) At the 75 percent mark, you should stop wherever you are and go to Insights/Implications. (This is Apply.) Going to Insights/Implications at the 75 percent mark allows time to go into some detail in identifying learnings and applications from the discussion. This leaves the middle 50 percent (25 percent to 75 percent) for having a good, rich, flowing discussion. In my experience, this middle 50 percent is the heart of the TR. It is where the strongest energy is and where the learnings and insights occur. So, you tighten up the beginning 25 percent to allow more time for the heart of the TR. This is done by being more directive and not overanalyzing the first few steps. Then, when you reach the Compare/Contrast point, you step back and let the conversation flow more freely.

Questions tend to stop the flow of a conversation as participants have to reorient to what is being asked, think about the question, and restart the conversation. One way to avoid this problem is to make statements. Statements allow the participants to either follow the statement or stay where they were. If they are ready, they will move on by following the statement's content. If they are not ready, they will stay with the content they were previously discussing. For instance, if the group is discussing comparisons and contrasts and you think it is time to add content from the Culture source, you could make a comment relating the Culture source to the discussion. If other participants are ready they will follow your lead. Otherwise, they will continue discussing comparisons and contrasts.

All of the sources are very broad. It is good to find a way to narrow them to a more manageable size. The key is to focus on what aspects of the source influence your behavior. For example, in the Culture source, there are a lot of areas that don't influence my behavior. However, what I learned from my parents, my favorite books, and school does influence my behavior. So, when discussing the Culture, those are the areas I will focus on. Phrased another way, the way I look at sources is through the lens of "What from \*Source\* influences the way I think about \*Theological Perspective Question\*?"

# Theological Reflection in a Group

During the first phase of reflection the subject is identified. This may be something that has happened to the group member, a particular belief the member holds, something from our Christian tradition, or an aspect of contemporary culture. Before we can begin, we need to name the subject. What exactly are we going to talk about? Where does it begin? Where does it end? How are we involved?

## **Identify**

The more sharply defined the focus of the reflection, the more likely it is that the reflection will shape the understanding and the actions of the participants. Using the “theology of the Psalms” as a starting point for reflection is likely to lead to a very general discussion. However, using the first two verses of Psalm 37, for example, provides much finer focus:

**Fret not yourself because of the wicked, be not envious of wrongdoers!  
For they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb.**

Dealing with a particular passage makes it more likely that our partner in conversation will be the tradition itself and not merely our opinions about the tradition. Similarly, when the starting point for reflection is an experience from our life, it is important to describe that experience with specificity and clarity in order to avoid merely rehashing previously held positions. The focus that is chosen for reflection should not only be clearly identified, but it should also matter to the participants. Whether the reflection begins with Action, Tradition, Culture, or Position, the focus should engage the interest and attention of the group members. Unless this happens, the reflection is likely to lack energy.

## **Explore**

The second phase explores the subject that has been identified. What is it like? What language best describes it? What do we discover as we examine it from different vantage points? If the subject has been raised by some life event, what does this event say to us about our world? If we are reflecting on some belief that we hold, to what does this belief apply? What assumptions and values are implicit in the belief? If our starting point is a text from the Christian tradition or from another text, what does the text say to us on its own terms?

As we explore the subject of our reflection, we will often find it useful to use the language of metaphor. Using an image or metaphor deliberately encourages the evocative, intuitive quality of exploration.

### **Connect**

The third phase makes connections between what has been discovered so far and the wider sources of meaning and truth. A reflection becomes theological by making deliberate connections between the Christian tradition and our own experience. Christian theological reflection links the Christian heritage with the personal and cultural dimensions of our lives. In this phase we are interested in the following general categories of questions:

- How does our exploration of this particular subject fit with our beliefs, with the scriptures, and with the creeds of the church?
- Does our exploration test out in everyday life? What would others in our family or at our work say about this?

The questions above are too broad to be of much practical help. More sharply defined questions help us connect and compare one source with another. A particularly helpful question is one that moves us right inside the subject of our exploration so that we can see what things look like from this perspective. We refer to questions like these as perspective questions. An example follows:

*What kind of world* is depicted in the first two verses of Psalm 37? It is a world in which there are wrongdoers, and the wrongdoers sometimes flourish, but not for long. The question “*What kind of world?*” gives us a structure for developing a conversation with other sources of meaning. For example, we can think back to our own experiences with wrongdoers. Have they in fact “faded away like the grass”? What kind of world do we seem to inhabit when we look at what happens to us and at how we actually behave?

Then we can move from questioning the Action source in this way to questioning the Culture source. What is the wisdom about wrongdoers in the magazines we read? What kind of world do our newspapers’ editorial pages assume, and what of our own Position? What do we really believe about the place of wrongdoers in the world we inhabit?

This example illustrates “*What kind of world?*” as a question that allows us to explore the perspective of a particular source and then structure a conversation with elements from other sources by asking the same question of those sources. A question focuses our attention on a particular aspect of a given source.

In the EfM program we frequently use perspective questions designed to investigate the doctrinal themes of Creation, Sin, Judgment, and Redemption. “*What kind of world?*” is a question that opens up our perspective on the doctrine of Creation.

### **Apply**

The final phase of theological reflection deals with the insights gleaned from conversation among the sources and with the implications for action decided by each individual on the basis of these insights. A desired outcome

of theological reflection is a renewed understanding of what it means to be one of God's ministers in the world. To this end group members take their insights and learning from the reflection and apply them to their lives and ministries. Sometimes this involves a clear direction for action. More often the resulting application clarifies their questions, thereby preparing them to explore further their study of the Christian tradition. During this phase of reflection, questions fall into the following general categories:

- How can I apply my learning and questions?
- What am I being called to do differently?
- What do I want to take into our time of prayer?

The more specific each participant can be about the next small step necessary to apply the insights, the more likely it is that the reflection will be of lasting value.

One final note: There is no one "correct" way to do theological reflection. There will be several theological reflection methods for use during the weekly sessions. As you and your group become familiar with the dynamics and purpose of theological reflection, you can refine or develop your own methods.



# Theological Reflection in Motion<sup>90</sup>

Reflection in an EfM group tends to be a “sitting” activity—lots of action in the head and heart, but not much going on for those who like to move around some while they think and learn. The topics discussed may indeed describe action-filled experiences replete with dramatic moments, but we tend to reflect in a sedentary way.

Reflection in Motion (RiM) began as an experiment exploring the possible use of physical movement as a way to “enhance” theological reflection. The experiment succeeded and people began to experience and “see” the way their thoughts—and the thoughts of others—move. The flow of the thinking process became visible as people literally moved among the four sources: Action, Tradition, Culture, and Position. People learned new things about theological reflection: how much thinking people do even when they are quiet; how meaning often comes as a mixture of sources; how the four sources operate in someone’s thinking as one comes to insight and implications; and how movement can contribute to bringing head and heart, body and mind, together.

Reflection in Motion may not be a method to be used every week. Its strength lies in its ability to help people clarify how theological reflection happens. Once people physically see and experience how a reflection moves among and draws from the sources, they can turn to other TR methods with a new appreciation. People have reported learning how some thoughts evolve as a commingling of two or more sources. For example, a deeply held position such as “God is love” can come from **Tradition** (1 John 4:9) as well as from experiencing God’s love directly. In addition, people can “track” their movement from one pole to another, perhaps noticing a familiar pattern. One person might move from the **Action** to the **Culture** poles and back to **Action** before connecting with **Tradition**. Another might follow a different pattern and prefer to move from **Action** to **Tradition** to **Position**. Reflection in Motion is a method that permits people to move (literally) from source to source according to how they think, rather than according to prescribed steps.

People have reported that reflection in motion helps them to:

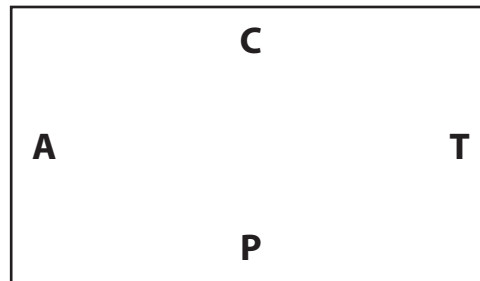
- understand theological reflection because they are kinetic learners and movement aids their learning;
- discover individual styles of reflection (i.e., how a person characteristically moves around the sources);

90. Designed by Richard E. Brewer and Angela K. Hock, Oaces Inc. Tulsa, OK. Adapted from *Common Lessons and Supporting Materials* (2006), 2-6-1–2-6-4.

- realize that everyone in the group is thinking during reflection—even the very quiet people;
- sort out the source of their thoughts by standing between two poles;
- move reflection more deeply inside themselves where they can more clearly identify insights and consider implications for action.

To prepare for a theological reflection in motion:

1. Make four signs for the sources: Tradition (T), Culture (C), Action (A), Position (P).
2. With tape, place each sign on walls, backs of chairs, or wherever you can put them, placing each sign on a separate wall or other support (if possible) to form a square, leaving some room to move from one location to another and making each sign visible to everyone:



3. Set up the room—try to clear space for ease of movement. Leave the center of the reflection space open to allow movement.

Although the example below begins with personal experience, thus in the Action Source, this method frees a group to begin anywhere in the Four-source Model. A group may take a metaphor as its beginning point, explore that world, then scatter to the four sources. The focus of reflection may be identified from a wide-angle lens or from a dilemma. The work can be done with intermittent conversation and silent thought.

### **Identify**

The mentor and presenter stand at the **Action** location while the presenter tells the incident. The rest of the group remains seated and listens carefully. Try to notice any metaphors the presenter uses in telling the incident and where the energy seems highest for the presenter. After hearing the incident, the group helps select a moment that seems to be the “heart of the matter,” i.e., where the incident really seems to be centered.

All can help the presenter name the thoughts and feelings present at the central moment. Someone records those on newsprint or a whiteboard if that’s helpful. Work very hard to name two or three really strong “feelings”; do the same with “thoughts”; this helps everyone to connect more clearly with their own lives.

Everyone takes a little time to come up with an occasion in their own lives when they experienced the described thoughts and feelings. As each person makes a connection to his or her life, they physically move to the **Action** pole. Once everyone is at that pole, take a few minutes for some to briefly tell about their connection; it isn't necessary for everyone to relate the moment aloud. Just be sure that everyone can identify with the named thoughts and feelings.

Everyone can either continue to stand at the **Action** pole, or sit if desired, to brainstorm for metaphors, images, phrases, and the like that seem to best represent what it is like in moments with those thoughts and feelings. If any metaphors were named during the incident, do they suggest others? Is there another image or phrase that everyone can work with better? Try for an image or phrase that is active, rather than passive, for example, "It's like running up a slippery slope" rather than "It's like being caught in an avalanche." Get playful. Help people get in touch with the physical reality of those thoughts and feelings—ask where they feel that moment in their body—that can suggest metaphors.

Watch and listen for a metaphor or phrase or term that seems to provide interest for everyone.

Since reflection moves from and through the metaphor, draw the metaphor or write the phrase on one large sheet of paper and, if possible, place that in the center of the reflection space.

### **Explore**

Seated if desired, explore the world of the metaphor or phrase with one or more of the following theological perspective questions:

- What kind of world does the metaphor represent (or what is life like, or what is creative)?
- What makes things go off track in this world (or tempts us, or is destructive or negative—of what might we need to repent in this world)?
- What questions come up in this world?
- What questions might we ask God—or might God ask us?
- What judgments do we have to make in this world?
- What makes us realize that we have a choice about destruction or redemption?
- What makes us realize that we might need to repent? What is a cause of celebration in this world?
- What can we recognize as redemption?

Write the responses where everyone can see them, or remain present only in the conversation and reflective responses—whichever seems most helpful and does not get in the way of the reflection.

**Connect**

Take a minute or so of quiet time. Ask everyone to notice what connections they are making to any of the other poles or sources of **Culture, Position, or Tradition**.

In silence, everyone moves to the source with which he or she is connecting.

Each briefly speaks about the connection she or he made. The mentor helps conversation and responses to occur by paying attention to who has talked and who has not and by encouraging responses.

Let people move again if they notice other connections. Encourage them to speak the connection as they walk from one source to another. The mentor helps them notice when perhaps they actually need to stop between two poles because both are stimulated. For example, someone may be connecting to both **Culture** and **Position** at the same time. They can stand between the two sources and talk about the dual connections.

**Apply**

Everyone sits back down and considers insights that may be arising. What concerns seem to be surfacing? What positions are we stating? What contradictions and confirmations are present? What part does grace or God or the Holy Spirit or faith play in where we might go from this reflection?

Consider the implications for ministry in daily life. Each person identifies what he or she would pray for or act on now and what help they need, from others in the group, from the greater community, or from some other source.

# Examples of Theological Reflection

*Examples from the four volumes of the Reading And Reflection Guide follow,  
arranged by the source in which the reflection begins.*

# The Action Source

*Theological Reflections beginning with a personal experience or dilemma*

## Theological Reflection Beginning with a Personal Experience (1)

**Identify** a focus.

In writing, describe the conflict you recalled in the Respond section. This places you in the Action/Experience source of your life; you recall something you've experienced or done.

Narrow the narrative by looking for a point in the conflict that had high energy.

Name your thoughts and feelings at that point of energy.

Draw a picture of a metaphor that illustrates what it was like when you had those thoughts and feelings. Think about color, sensation, heat/cold, location in your body of energy or tension. When you have/had those thoughts and feelings, it's as if. . . .

**Explore** the focus with theological perspectives.

Continue the reflection using your picture and considering these questions.

In the picture you created, what kind of interaction do you see?

How is that interaction revealing goodness or brokenness?

What kind of relationship does God have with those in that world?

What kind of relationships exist in that picture?

What crises are suggested in that picture?

What would persons in that kind of picture-world hope for?

**Connect** to other sources.

What personal beliefs (Position source) come to mind as you reflect on the picture and the world it captured?

Who or what in the Christian story (Tradition) or the world around you (Culture) helps you make sense of the world in the picture? In those sources, who are the wisdom figures or groups to help or guide you in a moment like you pictured?

**Apply** learning.

What prayer would you offer to God as a result of your reflection?

Name two areas in which you have the opportunity to minister in your life.

How will this reflection make any difference as you live in those areas?

How has your EfM study given you a way to view the circumstances of your life?

## Theological Reflection Beginning with a Personal Experience (2)

**Identify** a reflection focus.

Recall a time in your life when you believe you experienced the Presence of God.

Make some notes about the experience.

Locate the central moment of the experience, when your awareness of God's Presence was most vivid.

Name two to three attendant thoughts and feelings in that moment.

"It was like\_\_\_\_\_." Draw a picture that represents that moment's thoughts and feelings or make a brief statement of six to nine words.

**Explore** the focus image or statement.

Bring theological perspectives to the reflection.

Study the image or statement in silence. Let the "voice" of the image or statement become present.

What questions about the image/statement surface for you? List those and your responses.

Identify the type of theological questions those are. That is, are the questions about the nature of the world, the nature of God, the relationship of God to the world, the nature of mercy, of grace, of hope, and so forth?

**Connect** to other sources of meaning in your life.

When life is like that image/statement for you, how do you make sense of the experience?

What wisdom do you draw on for understanding? Who or what have you studied in the Christian tradition or the world around you that can "speak" to you or teach you about a moment like that?

What do you deeply believe about the experience you had? What doubts and hopes are present for you? Where do those feelings originate?

**Apply** insight/learning.

Sit quietly with the image, exploration, and connections, perhaps lighting a candle as you reside with the reflection.

What prayer begins praying in you? Try to write that down.

How does the theological reflection support or challenge one commitment in your life?

## Theological Reflection Beginning with a Personal Experience (3)

This variation of theological reflection has sometimes been referred to as the “microscope method” because it describes the refining process that helps focus intently on a beginning point for theological reflection. Typically, the method begins in someone’s experience and systematically focuses the circumstance to one fleeting moment in which to open the self or group to the eternal. In this form of theological reflection, we move into the particular to discover the eternal.

**Identify** a focus from which to reflect:

Recall and recount a time when you were confronted with a barrier of some sort. Describe the circumstance in as much detail as possible.

Notice when there were significant shifts in energy in the event and identify the one moment of greatest energy for you. Let all else fall away and mentally stand just in that discrete instant.

List two or three primary feelings and two or three key thoughts you had *at that tiny moment*. Decline any internal mental invitation to explain, justify, or interpret. Just let yourself accept your key thoughts and feelings of the moment.

Let yourself feel the feelings and notice where in your body they are. What is that like? Do they create a sensation of heat or cold? What color do they have? Settle into those thoughts and feelings and create a picture of what it’s like for you when you experience that combination. For instance, is it like a tea kettle whistling because pressure has built up, or like walking barefoot on rocks, or like hanging from a limb high off the ground?

Write or draw a picture of what it’s like when those feelings and thoughts are present. From this point forward, the reflection is on the image or picture-world that represents your thoughts and feelings, not on the original incident.

Theologically explore the world represented in your picture.

Stay inside the picture-world for this exploration. How does that world reveal something about wholeness or goodness, or about brokenness?

What does someone in that picture-world have to recognize in order to know there is brokenness? What would that person have to change in order to move towards wholeness?

What would it take to restore wholeness?



**Connect** by letting your mind freely move through and around the image.

What does your image-world call to mind for you? Are there events in the world around you that relate to the image and help you make sense of those kinds of moments?

If you've been thinking of some scripture passages or a hymn or prayer, stop and look those up. This is a very important part of theological reflection. How do any of those connections help make sense of this kind of moment?

What do you believe about living in a world such as the image captured? What helped to form that belief? Do you sense any other possible beliefs?

**Apply** to daily life. Theological reflection provides support for living a life of maturity in faith and action.

In what ways might this reflection inform your behavior when you again have an experience that raises these thoughts and feelings? Make notes about how reflecting theologically on this moment helps you integrate belief and behavior and raises any kind of possibilities for you in ministry and maturity.

There may be opportunity during the group's seminar time to explore the theological reflections of various group members. There may be time to do a group reflection around a central theme of the group's choosing. If so, what do you notice about the difference(s) between reflecting alone and reflecting in a group?

## Theological Reflection Beginning with a Personal Experience (4)

### **Identify** a focus:

Recall several times when you were the object of destructive behavior. It may be something like a practical joke, or being the subject of a playful trick. Or it may be something more physically dangerous like being mugged or robbed.

Make a list of the experiences for your eyes only.

Look for threads that run through that list. Do several of the experiences relate to the same person, or do some share a similar aspect? List all the threads you can identify. Pick one as the focus on which you would like to reflect further.

### **Explore** the focus:

Reflection on the focusing thread may produce an image (picture) or metaphor (“It’s like this when I experienced the violence . . .”) or an issue. Write or draw an image or issue suggested by the thread you selected. Whatever form it takes can be explored using theological perspective questions:

Develop questions to explore the world of the thread. For example, what kind of world does the image or issue assume?

What destroys in that world?

How is God revealed (or not) in that world?

Consider the view of humanity assumed or actively present in the world of the image.

Examine what unexpected influences are present in that world.

### **Connect** to other sources of meaning:

Culture: Record literary works, scenes from movies, or song lyrics that come to mind.

What pieces from the Christian tradition feed the conversation? Especially look at Psalms, liturgies and prayers (A resource may be The Book of Common Prayer), hymns, etc.

Ask, “What seems to be the truth about this reality?” Allow yourself to think deeply and write one or more of your own beliefs concerning the ideas and images you surface in the reflection.

**Apply** learning to daily life and ministry:

Sometimes a good reflection leads to better questions. What questions arise for you in light of this reflection?

How might your participation in prayer and worship be impacted?

Close with a collect:

O God who \_\_\_\_\_

I pray \_\_\_\_\_

So that \_\_\_\_\_

In Christ's name. Amen.

## Theological Reflection Beginning with a Personal Experience (5)

This reflection begins in an individual's personal experience and systematically focuses to one moment in which to open an individual or a group to the Eternal.

**Identify** a focus in an experience:

Recall and recount a time when your ethical standards were challenged.

Describe the circumstance in as much detail as possible.

Notice where there were significant shifts in energy in the event and identify the one moment of greatest energy for you. Let all else fall away and mentally stand just in that discrete instant. Stay with any discomfort that you recall.

List two or three primary feelings and two or three key thoughts you had *at that tiny moment*. Decline any internal mental invitation to explain, justify, or interpret. Just let yourself accept your key thoughts and feelings of the moment.

Feel the feelings and notice where they are in your body. What is that like?

Do they create a sensation of heat or cold? What color do they have?

Settle into those thoughts and feelings and create a picture of what it's like for you when you experience that combination. Maybe it was like a vise tightening in your chest, or a fire erupting in your head, or a dark cold tunnel before you, or another image.

Write or draw a picture of what it's like when those feelings and thoughts are present.

Theologically explore the world represented in your picture. Stay inside the picture-world for this exploration.

What is whole or good about that world?

What separation does the image represent?

What does someone in that picture-world have to recognize in order to know there is separation? What would that person have to change in order to move back towards wholeness?

What do conversion and transfiguration look like for those in the image world?

How would God's glory be manifest in such a world?

**Connect** to our other sources:

What seems to be the heart of the matter in the focus metaphor or statement? What is this theological reflection about?

Since this reflection begins in personal experience (Action source), draw in the Culture, Tradition, and Position sources.

What about your own beliefs (Position)? Considering the heart of the metaphor and the issue it represents, state your position. How did you form that position—from something you learned in church (Tradition) or by experience (Action) or in a book you read (Culture)?

Think about (and write if you have time and inclination) how that mix of sources speaks to the metaphor's heart. What wisdom can you gain from the reflection?

**Apply** to daily life. Theological reflection guides us to living a life of maturity in faith and action.

Make notes about how reflecting theologically on this moment helps you integrate belief and behavior and raises any possibilities for you in ministry.

## Theological Reflection Beginning with a Dilemma (Action Source) (1)

First, read through this method and then apply it to a dilemma in your life.

**Identify** a focus: The focus goal is to create a universal statement of the dilemma. This kind of reflection especially requires that the personal experience be something that is over and done with, no decisions remain to be made.

Describe something that happened in your life that posed a dilemma; you wanted two things that could not both happen at the same time. *For example, you want the promotion and transfer you have been offered and you want to remain in the same location where you are.*

Find the central moment of your incident by noting where or when in the event the tension was greatest. Write what you thought and felt at that moment.

To create a dilemma statement, list what you wanted at the moment you felt the tension. You will likely have several “I wanted” statements. Keep this list in the form of “I wanted” rather than “I did not want.” Note: The dilemma is between two goods, but a choice has to be made. *Example: I wanted to advance in the company. I wanted to try my wings. I wanted to see a new location. I wanted to stay where I know what I am doing. I wanted to keep my life and friends.*

From your list, select the pair of statements that best represents the central dilemma. Record the dilemma statement as “I wanted \_\_\_\_\_ and I wanted \_\_\_\_\_.” The challenge is to get an “I wanted” statement rather than “I wanted but I didn’t want. . . .”

Turn the dilemma pair into a universal statement. What is this dilemma actually about? A universal statement of the example dilemma could be “This is a dilemma over the challenge of expanding one’s horizons and hanging onto the familiar.” Or, “This is a dilemma over not knowing whether a step is one that I’m ready for.” There are other possible dilemma statements for the example, so do not get hung up on the “correct” one.

*Universalizing is especially necessary when reflecting in a group in order to avoid advice-giving and problem-solving. If this were a group reflection, each person would identify a moment when they, too, experienced the same universal dilemma. In a group, this is another way in which a tendency to continue to focus on the presenter can be redirected.*

**Explore** your universal dilemma either through the lens of Cost/Promise (Risk/Hope) or Theological Perspectives.

Cost and Promise names costs (risks) and promises (hopes) of the dilemma.

Theological Perspective Questions can be used in the universal dilemma by considering what that dilemma reveals about wholeness, brokenness, recognition, reorientation, or restoration.

**Connect** to other sources in which this dilemma has occurred—Christian Tradition, Culture, and Positions. Remember, these connections come in any order. This is not a rote exercise, but a reflection. Consider such questions as:

**Tradition:** Identify some stories from scripture or church history that relate to the dilemma. In the stories of the people of God, who has been in the same dilemma? Or perhaps some prayers or hymns come to mind that relate to this reflection. Look up what you recall and spend time with the story or account or prayer or hymn. How does the connection help or challenge you in this dilemma?

**Compare Tradition and Dilemma:** Compare and contrast what our Christian Tradition and the initial experience have to say about that dilemma. What choices would the Tradition support? Not support? Why?

**Culture:** Have there been news stories about this kind of dilemma? Have you read a book or seen a movie that dealt with that dilemma? Is there a political dimension to that dilemma?

**Position:** What do you believe about the issues of the dilemma? How was your belief in conflict in the dilemma? What do you hope for regarding the dilemma? What formed your beliefs about this matter?

### **Apply**

**Insights and Questions:** What do you see in a new way? What have you learned about facing this dilemma? What questions remain for you in this kind of dilemma?

**Implications:** Identify learning or insight that occurred for you during this theological reflection.

What do you want or need to do?

- social implications,
- actions you could take,
- what you need to learn,
- support that would help in the midst of such a dilemma,
- where you could find that support.

Close your personal reflection with a prayer that offers your learning and hopes and requests to God.

## Theological Reflection Beginning with a Dilemma (Action Source) (2)

### **Identify**

**Describe** an incident for reflection—an experience in which you felt pulled in at least two directions over something, and for which there are no decisions pending, that is, the incident is over, though there still may be feelings. For example:

I had looked forward to my best friend's wedding for months and had my plane ticket and my new outfit. We had plans to enjoy the sights and catch up and just have fun. And then my surviving parent got sick, but told me I could go ahead with my plans. I felt so torn. There was no one else there.

**Name** the turning point in the incident.

What's the central moment of the incident? Where is the tension greatest? What was happening? What were you thinking and feeling at that moment?

Record the central moment in a short sentence and your thoughts and feelings at that moment.

**State** the issue.

Try to state what's at stake or what the central dilemma is at the moment of greatest tension.

To help get to the dilemma, list declarative statements about what you wanted at that moment or what interests were at stake at that moment. You may have several.

Record tension statements as "I wanted \_\_\_\_\_ and I wanted \_\_\_\_\_." For example:

I wanted to attend my best friend's wedding and I wanted to stay to take care of my ailing parent.

Select a pair of statements that best represent the central tension.

Record the central dilemma/what's at stake. For example:

Personal fun conflicting with caring for another. Dilemma: Plans affected by unforeseen circumstances.



**Identify** another time.

Clarify the dilemma by recalling another time when you experienced a similar tension.

Record your additional experience with the identified tension by completing the sentence: “It was a time when. . . .”

**Explore** the dilemma.

What is it like to live in that tension? Contrast the cost/promise of the dilemma.

Record your responses to the questions using either cost/promise or theological perspectives:

COST OF EACH SIDE OF THE TENSION	PROMISE OF EACH SIDE OF THE TENSION
Ex., Plans: caught off guard, decisions made that are hard to change	Ex., Know what is coming

OR use one or two theological perspective questions adapted from the Cycle of Gospel Living, developed by Eric Law (and used in Interlude One, Week 15).<sup>91</sup> This cycle focuses around power, loss or yielding up of power, and empowerment, and moves through four phases.

- Give up power, choose the cross—This is a point of entry for the powerful.
- Cross, death, powerless—This is a point of entry for the powerless.
- Empowerment, endurance
- Empty tomb, resurrection, powerful

Here are examples of asking questions of the dilemma or image. Use only one or two when exploring your image or dilemma:

Give up power, choose the cross: What are the power dimensions of the dilemma or image? Who has power? What has to be yielded?

Cross, death, powerless: What sacrifice(s) might be called for? What are the temptations of the cross, of powerlessness? To whom or what is power yielded?

Empowerment, endurance: How is power transmitted to the powerless party? What is required in order to enter the cycle that leads to empowerment? What builds endurance?

Empty tomb, resurrection, powerful: What is left behind in the image or dilemma? How does resurrection occur in the image or dilemma? What is the hope of the power received?

91. Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*, 74.

### **Connect**

#### **TRADITION**

Identify some stories from scripture or church history that relate to the dilemma or image. How or where does the Gospel Living cycle occur in our Christian story in scripture? In the lives of women and men of faith? Or perhaps some prayers or hymns come to mind that relate to this reflection.

#### **DIALOGUE**

Compare and contrast what your Christian tradition has to say about that dilemma or image. What choices would the tradition support? Not support? Why?

#### **CULTURE AND POSITION**

Where is that tension or dilemma experienced in our culture? Have there been news stories about it? Have you read a book or seen a movie that dealt with that dilemma? Is there a political dimension?

What do you believe about that dilemma? How was your belief in conflict within the dilemma? What do you hope for regarding the dilemma?

### **Apply**

#### **INSIGHTS AND QUESTIONS**

What do you see in a new way now? What have you learned about facing this dilemma? What questions do you have about the dilemma in your life?

#### **IMPLICATIONS**

What do you want or need to do about this dilemma? Are there social implications? Are there actions you could take? Is there something more to learn? What support would help? Where will you find that support?

## Theological Reflection Beginning with a Wide-Angle Lens (Action Source)

Why this title? Instead of the usual first step to **Identify** a focus from one of the four sources, the wide-angle lens begins with a variety of perspectives, then isolates a thread/theme/idea/image that connects them, that in turn becomes the focus for the reflection. A theological reflection beginning with a wide-angle lens can begin in any of the four sources. The key is that it requires initiation from something that could produce several themes or ideas. There are innumerable options. An individual can begin with movies, assigned readings, incidents from one's life, or several personal positions. In an EfM group, the beginning point can be themes from the spiritual autobiographies, themes from the week's reading, themes from any on-board time of the group, or some other starting point from which a variety of perspectives can be elicited. The initial step always is to list themes and find a thread that runs through several of them.

### **Identify**

#### FIND A COMMON THEME OR THREAD

Begin by finding the threads or themes present in several personal incidents that indicate a gap between your belief and your behavior.

What are the common themes or elements that emerge? Is there a burning question, struggle, or issue? A theme may be expressed as a simple statement, an image, a metaphor, or an issue.

Select one thread that connects various themes. For instance, a review of several incidents (either ones identified by an individual or those identified in a group) could yield themes of frustration, tiredness, hurry, and feeling overwhelmed. Those themes would have shown up in two or more of the incidents. Asking, "What ties some of those themes together?" yields a thread that runs through some incidents. For example, "Having too much to do leads to impatience with others" could be named as a thread that ties two or more incidents.

### **Explore**

#### REFLECT ON SOME THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

What image could paint a picture of the thread identified from your incidents?

Describe or draw that image. Examine the image for what's going on in it. Write about what's going on in that image.

Use theological perspective questions to explore the focus. Which theological perspective (creation, sin, judgment, repentance, redemption, celebration, the doctrine of God, grace, or others you think of) comes first to mind? Consider several. For example, what would repentance look like in that image? Or redemption?

### **Connect**

Bring other sources into the conversation to help find meaning in matters of daily life and ministry.

### **CONSIDER CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND SOCIETY**

Focus on one or two areas of your culture or society so that the reflection will not be too broad. These connections might come from your local community or the larger world; our work environment, our education system, our health care system, our grandmothers, movies, TV, literature, art, songs, artifacts, architecture, government, the press, to name a few. Just pick one area of contemporary society with which to connect.

What does the world in which you live teach you about dealing with the identified focus? Where do you find evidence of people dealing with tiredness and anger in the world around you?

What have you learned from your culture that helps you or challenges you regarding the theme?

How do areas of Culture/Society speak to or about this thread? For instance, what does the world of employment teach us about tiredness and anger? What about our health care system? What about advertising? Again, just use one aspect of our society.

### **CONSIDER THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION**

Identify biblical passages or other elements from Christian Tradition in which this common thread is evoked or brought to mind. Provide time to find and read passages. Select one text that seems to speak most clearly to the thread that was evoked.

Examine the passage with these questions: What do you know about the meaning of the text in its original setting? How have others interpreted this text? What does this text mean to you?

### **COMPARE AND CONTRAST CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND CHRISTIAN TRADITION**

From the perspectives of Culture and Tradition, what kind of a world emerges?

Where do these perspectives join or compete? Where do they clash or contrast?

Again use theological perspectives—creation, sin, judgment, repentance, redemption, celebration, the doctrine of God, grace, or others you think of—to shape your reflection. Likely, there is time to use only one or two of these themes during any one reflection. As an example, if the New Testament passage about Jesus cleansing the temple were used for the Christian Tradition and the work environment for the Contemporary Culture connection, how do those two perspectives compare and contrast? What messages do we hear from either or both?

### CONNECT TO BELIEFS, POSITIONS, AND AFFIRMATIONS

What is your response to the messages from the Christian Tradition and Contemporary Culture?

What do you feel about where this reflection has led? What do you think about it?

Where are you in the reflection?

What positions or affirmations do you hold about this reflection?

### **Apply**

### IDENTIFY INSIGHTS AND PERSONAL IMPLICATIONS

What have you learned about coherence of belief and behavior? What moves or energizes you? What insights come to mind?

What are you personally called to do differently, to affirm, or to change? What prayer do you want to offer?

### DECIDE ON SOCIAL AND CIVIC CONSEQUENCES

What actions will you take to carry out the implications you have discovered?

What will you investigate further in your community in order to make a difference?

Whom can you contact to join you or inform you? What action might you take?

# The Tradition Source

*Theological Reflections beginning with a text or artifact from the Christian tradition*

## Theological Reflection Beginning with the Christian Tradition (Scripture) (1)

This method of theological reflection focuses on a selection from scripture and uses it as the starting point for reflection. The passage may come from the readings for the week, or the group may select a passage that is of special interest.

### **Identify**

#### **SELECT A PIECE OF SCRIPTURE**

A person in the group reads the selected passage of scripture.  
Be silent for a couple of minutes.

#### **FIRST RESPONSES**

What word or phrase stands out for you? Share this in the group.

#### **HEAR THE PASSAGE AGAIN**

Another person reads the selected passage again. Perhaps a different translation may be used.  
The group is silent for a couple of minutes.

### **Explore**

#### **EXAMINE THE PASSAGE**

What do you know about the meaning of the text or its original setting?  
What is happening in the text? What is going on?  
How have others interpreted this text? What kind of a text is this? (sermon, parable, etc.)  
What might it mean today?

#### **EXAMINE THE TRADITION**

What is the world like in this passage?  
What human predicament in the world is revealed in this passage?  
What indicates a change of mind, heart, or behavior?  
What gives rise to celebration in this world?

**Connect****MAKE CONNECTIONS WITH OUR OWN EXPERIENCE (ACTION)**

With whom do you identify in this passage?

Can you recall a time in your life when you experienced an event or situation similar to the one in the passage? What were your thoughts and feelings?

What does that event or situation mean to you in light of this passage?

In what way does the tradition support, inform, and/or challenge your experience?

**LOOK AT CULTURE**

What does the Contemporary Culture say about the world described in the passage? Pick one aspect of Culture to discuss this connection, such as what books deal with the concerns of the scripture passage; what is happening in the world around us now that relates to the matter described in the scripture passage; what attitudes of our world of work connect to the concern of the scripture passage; how is God at work in our world in ways that relate to the scripture passage's concerns? Other ways that Culture can provide some help in reflection is to think of what movies are dealing with the scriptural issues under discussion; what family or social wisdom speak to the issue?

**WHAT IS MY POSITION?**

Where do you stand? What do you believe about the matters or issues raised in this reflection? What is your position on this matter?

**Apply****IDENTIFY INSIGHTS**

What new insights have emerged as a result of this reflection? What can you affirm or state that you have learned?

**IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION**

Is there anything you intend to do differently as you live out your ministry?

What help might you need to carry out your intentions?

What are the consequences for others or for the future?

Example:

*Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the*

*place on which you are standing is holy ground.” He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them.” —Exodus 3:1–9*

A theological reflection starting from scripture begins in the Christian Tradition/Heritage source area.

**Identify** a focus point in the passage, i.e., where the key energy/heart of the passage seems to be, what the passage seems to be about. Perhaps the group can agree on an image or metaphor that pictures what the passage focus or energy is, such as the burning bush.

**Explore** the passage by considering what was going on at the time of this event; what commentaries say about this passage; what you have studied; what is described at the point of the burning bush.

What questions might occur in the face of such an event? What’s the world like for Moses at this point (Creation)? What temptations are there for Moses at this moment (Sin)? What’s surprising for Moses (Judgment)? What choices does Moses have (Judgment)? What makes things alright for him (Redemption)?

What questions would you have in such a moment?

**Connect** to other Sources/Life Areas as responses occur to anyone—not necessary to go in order or as steps. Just let these connections occur in whatever sequence they may come.

*Personal Experience*—when have you experienced something that you might call “a burning bush moment”?

*Culture*—what kinds of groups or events might be “burning bush” events in the world around us?

*Personal Position/Belief*—what do you believe about “burning bush” moments? What do you hope or doubt?

### **Apply**

What new thoughts have occurred to you? What do you want to think about more? How might you engage in your life differently as a result of this conversation?



## Theological Reflection Beginning with the Christian Tradition (Scripture) (2)

### **Identify**

The following passages involve the people of Samaria, a group that fostered strong feelings among the Jews. Carefully read the passages and identify two or three topics common to both.

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” But he turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.

*Luke 9:51–56*

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

*Luke 10:29–37*

*Note: Though the above scripture passages are quoted from the NRSV translation, reading the passages in a variety of translations may increase the sense of meaning.*

Focus the passages by considering where the key energy/heart of the passage is, what the passages seem to be about.

Develop an image in words or a drawing that brings the point of the passages into focus.

**Explore** the image or central idea of the passages, using questions from the theological themes of Creation, Sin, Judgment, Repentance, or Redemption, such as:

- What kind of community does the image-world/theme suggest (Creation)?
- What might get in the way of relationships in that image-world/theme (Sin)?
- What could make those in that world realize there's something wrong; what choices are there (Judgment)?
- What would represent a change of direction (Repentance)?
- What might a new, life-giving creation look like (Redemption)?

**Connect**

Note: Connecting happens best if some freedom is allowed. Listen to each of the “voices” or “sources” below and let your responses emerge in any order. You may not make a connection in one area; that is okay. That may occur at a later time, or not at all. Mainly, allow your inner life to speak, connecting you to these areas of potential meaning and revelation.

**Personal Experience**—When has something happened in your life that is like the world of the image/metaphor? For instance, if the image created for the passages is “extending a party invitation,” when have you given or sent such an invitation?

Compare your experience with the preceding theological exploration. How do your experience and the image relate to one another?

**Contemporary Culture/Society**—Who or what has taught you something that is helpful when life is like the image? In our world, how is there opposition to that image? How is there support for it? Where is God extending party invitations in the world in which you live?

**Christian Tradition**—What other scripture passages or church history events remind you of the image or central point of the passages from Luke?

**Beliefs/Positions**—What key issues do the metaphor and personal experience and contemporary culture raise? State your Beliefs and Positions relative to those issues.

**Apply** meaning and purpose to the reflection by identifying learning and clarifying questions.

How do the beliefs and insights of the exploration support you in ministry?

Notice where you might want to make some changes in action or viewpoint about the matter covered in the reflection.

Write a prayer in response to the discoveries in this reflection.

## Theological Reflection Beginning with the Christian Tradition (3)

**Identify** the focus or a primary point of your EfM study this week.

**Explore** the primary point by identifying the theological perspectives of the world, sin, judgment, repentance, and/or redemption reflected in that focus. Apply any of these or similar theological questions to your consideration.

What view of the world is present in that focus?

What brokenness or sin does that focus address or reveal?

What questions or crises does that focus respond to or contribute to?

How does that concern or focus lead to repentance or reorientation?

How does that concern lead to restoration to a creative life?

What does the focus say about forgiveness?

What concern about God does the focus address?

### Move to the other sources

**Connect** by stating how the focus is present in today's world (*Culture*).

What book or movie has dealt with this focus?

Compare and contrast the connections to the world around you with the above exploration of the focus.

What issues or concerns do you become aware of?

What personal experiences (*Action*) have you had that relate to this focus?

State one or two personal beliefs (*Position*) you have about the focus that surfaced in this reflection.

How did those beliefs form?

When has it been difficult for you to act on those beliefs?

### **Apply**

If you could do just one thing about the concerns that surfaced in this reflection, what would that be?

## Theological Reflection Beginning with a Wide-Angle Lens (Tradition Source)

**Why this title?** The image of a wide-angle lens is used because this reflection begins with a variety of perspectives, then focuses on a thread/theme/idea/image that connects them. An individual starts by finding the threads or themes present—in this case in something he or she reads or watches. The key for use by an individual requires initiation from something that could produce several themes or ideas (in this case, two or more articles on a topic of interest). In an EfM group, the reflection's beginning point can be themes from the spiritual autobiographies, themes from the week's reading, themes from any on-board time of the group, or some other starting point from which a variety of perspectives can be elicited.

The key is first to list the themes in what is under consideration, then find a thread that runs through the themes.

### **Identify**

#### **FIND A COMMON THEME OR THREAD**

Begin by listening carefully to the group as you share your reflections on the readings assigned for the week.

What are the common themes or elements that emerge?

Is there a central question, struggle, or issue that surfaces as those from each year level share?

State the central thread as a simple statement, image, metaphor, or issue.

For instance, a review of several articles could reveal themes of challenge of the *status quo*, support of a particular view, and/or revelation of something new. Asking "What ties some of those themes together" yields a thread that may have run through the articles.

### **Explore**

#### **THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES**

Write about what's going on in the image, issue, or statement you created in the Identify step above.

Sit quietly and let the image or statement and your writing rest in you.

What questions does your image or statement raise?

What questions does that image or statement answer?

Identify the perspectives contained in the questions, that is, wholeness, brokenness, recognition, reorientation, or restoration.

**Connect**

This is the point at which one looks at the various sources in life to help find meaning in matters of daily life and ministry. The object is to find connections between the image, statement, or issue and other aspects of our life that teach us something.

**CONNECT TO CULTURE AND SOCIETY**

Focus on one or two areas of your culture or society so that the reflection will not be too broad. These connections might come from your local community or the larger world: your work environment, the education system, the health care system, your grandmothers, movies, TV, literature, art, songs, artifacts, architecture, government, or the press, to name a few.

Pick just one area of our contemporary society with which to connect. For instance, what does the world of employment teach you about the theme you have identified? Or, what have you learned from the news media in your culture/society that helps you or challenges you regarding the theme?

How does the selected area of culture/society speak to or about this thread?

**CONNECT TO CHRISTIAN TRADITION**

- Identify biblical passages or other elements from Christian tradition (scripture, hymn, prayer, church history document) in which this common thread is evoked or brought to mind. Read the passages.
- Select one passage that seems to address the image, statement, or issue.
- Examine the passage:
  - Note how the passage offers insight into the image, statement, or issue you are considering.
  - Note how the passage challenges the image, statement, or issue.
  - What does the passage mean to you?

**COMPARE AND CONTRAST CULTURE/SOCIETY AND CHRISTIAN TRADITION**

From the perspectives of each, what kind of a world emerges?

Where do these perspectives join or compete? Where do they clash or contrast?

Note what seems to be “at stake” as you compare and contrast your Culture and Tradition connections.

**CONNECT TO PERSONAL EXPERIENCE**

When have you experienced something that relates to what seems to “be at stake” above?

**CONNECT TO BELIEFS, POSITIONS, AND AFFIRMATIONS**

What positions or affirmations do you hold in relation to what is at stake?

Identify how that belief formed for you. Was it from personal experience, from something you learned in your faith tradition, or from the cultural messages you have inherited or encountered?

What “gaps” are there for you between what you believe and how you act in relation to the theme considered in this reflection?

***Apply***

**IDENTIFY INSIGHTS AND PERSONAL IMPLICATIONS**

What have you learned about coherence of belief and behavior?

What are you personally called to do differently, to affirm, or to change?

What skills did this reflection help you learn in thinking theologically about something you read or watched?

**DECIDE ON SOCIAL AND CIVIC CONSEQUENCES**

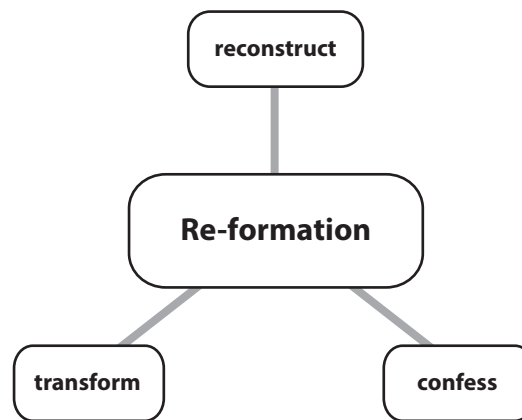
What actions will you take to carry out the implications you have discovered?

Consider how this reflection supports you in living in a multicultural world.

## Theological Reflection Beginning with a Mind Map (Tradition Source)

**Identify** a focus:

Construct a mind map with the centering theme “re-formation,” placed in the center of a sheet of paper. As you make associations from your assigned reading over the past few weeks, write those associations around the theme and draw a line between the theme and each association. The figure below is an example. Your associations may be anything you choose.



Additional levels of associations will radiate out. Straight lines are not required. Using different colors, drawing images, and forming metaphors in addition to the words will enhance the creative process of the mind map.

After making several levels of associations, study the entire map and select one metaphor or image to explore.

**Explore** the world of the metaphor/image:

Identify a specific point from which to explore the chosen image. For example, if the image is “Jumping into an Abyss,” then be sure to explore the image from a specific standpoint such as the person jumping into the abyss. Do not shift to other possible standpoints such as observing someone jump into the abyss or leading someone to the edge of an abyss. It is important not to shift the focus if the reflection is to process smoothly.

Develop two or three theological perspective questions and explore the image through those perspectives. For example, what questions would explore the destructive dimensions of the image (Sin)? What questions would explore the nature of the world of the metaphor-image (Creation)? What questions help to bring in the Judgment dimensions of the metaphor? Or the Repentance and/or Redemption perspectives? *For example, what would cause someone to reconsider jumping into an abyss?*

**Connect** with other areas of life:

Begin connecting with your life by briefly stating when you experienced the world depicted in the image/metaphor. Remember to work from the standpoint previously identified. *For example, when have you metaphorically jumped into an abyss?*

Connect with contemporary culture and society. *For example, what recent stories in the news remind you of jumping into an abyss?*

Bring in your personal beliefs. What do you believe? What do you hold to be true? *For example, for what are you willing to risk metaphorically jumping into an abyss?*

**Apply** to your life going forward:

Notice how what you learn from the reflection applies to your life. *For example, what light does this reflection shed on how you engage opportunities for ministry?*



## Theological Reflection Beginning with a Provocative Word (Tradition Source)<sup>92</sup>

**Identify:** Select a word that has impact.

For the purpose of this reflection and the practice, try the word  
“ATONEMENT.”

What revelations on the meaning of the word do you have? Anything  
it denotes or connotes?

**Explore:** Ask the questions.

Next, ask the six “journalist’s questions” about the feeling the word conveys:

WHO was involved when you were feeling a need to atone for something?  
(Action Source . . . tell the stories from your life)

WHAT image comes to mind about the feelings involved when you experi-  
enced a need to atone?  
(Image . . . explore the metaphor—its reflection of Wholeness, Brokenness,  
Recognition, Reorientation, and/or Restoration)

**Connect:** Go to the other sources we use to help explore meaning.

WHERE does this feeling come from and WHERE is it found in society?  
(Culture Source)

WHEN does this feeling come up in the Bible, lives of saints, hymns, and  
so forth?  
(Tradition Source. . . explore the world of tradition)

WHY is this feeling manifest in our lives?  
(Position Source)

HOW might God redeem any negatives in this?  
(Hope in Christ)

Consider insights and implications:

What have you learned for the next time you feel a need to atone?

**Apply:** Write a collect using the outline:

Dear God . . . (naming of God’s aspects)

You . . . (connect situation of the image to that aspect)

We pray that . . . (petition of our hearts)

So that . . . (result we desire)

Amen.

You might also want to try this using a different word, such as TRANSFOR-  
MATION, CONVERSION, or SALVATION.

92. Adapted from a design by Patricia Bleicher, EfM mentor.

# The Culture Source

*Theological Reflections beginning with a text or artifact from culture and/or society*

## Theological Reflection Beginning with a Social Concern (Culture Source) (1)

### Focus

Find something that challenges you in a news article, an essay, a cartoon, a book, or the like.

Locate the central idea of the item you chose. Write a sentence stating that idea. This will be the focus to explore.

**Explore** the focus theologically.

Scan these perspective questions and bring two or more of them into a conversation with the focusing idea.

What does the focus idea say about the world?

What kind of world does the idea describe?

How does that idea-world describe brokenness?

What vision of wholeness is broken?

What crisis does the central idea recognize or present? What conversion is that idea calling for?

What would have to change?

How would the central idea promote a reorientation towards wholeness?

How would things look if they were made right?

What is the theology of the central idea?

**Connect** the focus with the sources of Christian Tradition, personal beliefs/Position, and personal experience/Action. This movement provides access to “voices” that can guide us in moments like the focus.

When you respond to the focus idea, do you think of an incident in your life or of something you have encountered in your EfM study or of some personal belief that relates to the focus?

List all connections you make to the focus idea.

How do those connections, those voices, guide you in relation to the focus idea?

**Apply** the reflection to your life.

What insights occur as you reflect on what you have found challenging about this culture or society?

Now that you have reflected on that challenge, what is God calling you to do, be, or change?

### Prayer Practice: The Examen

The Loyola Press web site, on the page *Ignatian Spirituality*, offers information about praying the Examen.

The Daily Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and discern his direction for us. The Examen is an ancient practice in the church that can help us see God's hand at work in our whole experience.

The method presented here is adapted from a technique described by Ignatius Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises*. St. Ignatius thought that the Examen was a gift that came directly from God, and that God wanted it to be shared as widely as possible. One of the few rules of prayer that Ignatius made for the Jesuit order was the requirement that Jesuits practice the Examen twice daily—at noon and at the end of the day. It is the habit that Jesuits, and many other Christians, practice to this day.

This is a version of the five-step Daily Examen that St. Ignatius practiced.

1. Become aware of God's presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow.<sup>93</sup>

The Loyola web site provides a number of links to a variety of forms of the Examen, including a printable prayer card.

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93. <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen>

## Theological Reflection Beginning with a Social Concern (Culture Source) (2)

Philosophical anthropology studies the nature of humankind. Questions of identity, both individual and communal, comprise the field of study. Theological anthropology addresses human nature in relation to God. Both philosophical and theological anthropology address related questions: What is the end (*telos*) of human beings? What does human flourishing involve? What is “the common good”—the actions, values, and policies that allow people to flourish? In theological terminology, what is God’s vision for all people? Such questions involve thinking about the meaning of terms such as the Kingdom of God, heaven, and the *eschaton* (end-time).

The following theological reflection outline provides a way to consider philosophical and theological anthropological matters.

**Identify** a focus.

Develop a list of social concerns that are presently being deliberated in your Culture/society. The items on the list might come from politics, news media, documentaries, current cinema, or advertisements.

For example:

- Environmental concerns
- Universal health care
- National security
- Distribution of wealth
- Economic wellbeing

Select one topic from the list you create and reflect theologically on that voice from the Culture source. You will have a chance to make additional connections to the voice of Culture when you add the Connect movement to your reflection.

**Explore** some dimensions of your selected social concern. For example:

- Notice what is revealed about human nature in the identified concern, both individually and corporately. What human values seem to be operating around the social concern? Describe what the identified social concern seems to assert about “the common good”; that is, if the concern you are working with is “economic wellbeing,” how does that concern relate to the common good?
- What characteristics of God are present or absent in that concern? Possibly, a social concern around national security could reflect God’s characteristic of protector. What about God’s self-emptying?

- Identify the deep hopes that are present or implied in the nature of the social concern.

### **Connect**

Describe various ways the identified social concern gets manifested at the present time. For example, if universal health care is the identified concern under reflection, then identify the ways in which that concern has come to the foreground in the culture/society where you live, such as:

- U.S. news report on congressional action
- Canadian experience of universal health care
- English experience of universal health care

Where do you hear God's voice in your social structure, or your culture?

Learn something new. Find a way to hear the voice of Cultures/societies other than your own, such as how other countries handle the same or similar concern. How do varying cultural groups handle such a matter, perhaps even within the same country? Please resist the temptation to "talk off the cuff" about another place or people; rather, try to talk to someone from that culture or look up information that you could consider authoritative and reliable.

**Personal Experience:** Name concrete ways in which the issue has intersected your life. For example:

- Retirement brought change in how medical insurance was obtained
- Got ill and had to receive medical attention over an extended period of time
- Health of a friend's parent deteriorated and he/she required extended health care
- Visit to emergency room of hospital and noticing who was there and why
- Change in a person's life that required addressing the need for medical insurance

When have you had personal experience related to that concern or issue? What emotions have you experienced as that concern has intersected your life: fear, frustration, sorrow mixed with gratitude? Name your thoughts and feelings in relation to the focus you have selected.

**Personal Belief/Position:** What seems to be at stake in the reflection as you have explored and connected to the identified concern? What statements of conviction are you willing to make? What is alive for you in this matter?

- State what you value and hold important that is touched by the identified social concern.
- State your best vision or hope for the world. For creation.

**Tradition:** Listen to the voice of Christian tradition, especially the way Christian tradition speaks to the questions of God, common good (reign of God), or human nature.

What specific stories from the Christian tradition speak to the concern?

Note what scripture stories, perhaps ones you remember from your childhood, give shape to the concern.

As you access the various voices in Personal Experience, Christian Tradition, Culture(s), Personal Beliefs, what rings true for you or seems new to you?

Express, as best you can, any intuitive sense of what “should” be, “ought” to be, could be, or “must” be done relative to the social concern. In other words, what matters to you about this?

Describe actions that you could take that might contribute to the reign of God, the common good, in the matter of the social concern on which you reflected.

***Apply***

Apply the insight and new awareness from the reflection within the context of the social concern you named above.

How do the dimensions of the social concern point to the common good?

In what way does participation in the social concern/issue contribute to a vision of God’s reign?

How does human flourishing revealed through the reflective theological conversation point toward action and behavior and practices?

In other words, what are you going to do (ministry) with what you have considered?

What would support you? Where/how will you reach out for that support?

## Theological Reflection Beginning with the Culture Source

### **Identify**

Explore another social culture in some way—by reading, watching a video or film, talking with someone from that culture, etc.—noticing differences in social custom or mores that challenge you. Create an image or metaphor for your (admittedly limited) understanding of the aspect that you find challenging.

**Explore** the focus from some theological perspectives, such as:

- What beliefs about creation are reflected in the image?
- What is considered sin in the world of your image?
- How does one find forgiveness in that image world?
- What constitutes ultimate fulfillment as that culture understands it?
- What do you regard as the meaning of life for that culture?
- What is the meaning of death?

**Connect** by listening to other voices. (Reminder: You can do the following in any order.)

**Christian Tradition**—What passages in scripture or church history come to mind as you explore the image above? Read the passages or material you recall.

Compare and contrast the world you found in the scripture or church history passage with the world you explored with the theological questions.

**Personal Experience**—What has occurred in your life that provides answers to some of those theological questions?

Compare and contrast your personal experience with the experiences of those in the culture you explored briefly. What differences and similarities are there? What begins to matter to you as you make the comparisons?

**Contemporary Culture/Society**—How does your culture/society view that of the one you explored? What are the challenges and possibilities?

**Personal Beliefs**—What beliefs of yours are challenged by those of the other culture? How could that challenge create road blocks? How could it create opportunity? What would you have to give up in order to change your beliefs? What might someone from the culture you explored have to give up?

**Apply** the reflection by noting your insights and how those insights might make a difference in ministry in your life.

## Theological Reflection Beginning with a Wide-angle Lens (Culture Source)

**Why this title?** The image of a wide-angle lens is used because this reflection begins with a variety of perspectives, then focuses on a thread/theme/idea/image that connects them. An individual starts by finding the threads or themes present—in this case in something he or she reads or watches. The key for use by an individual requires initiation from something that could produce several themes or ideas (in this case, two or more articles on a topic of interest). In an EfM group, the reflection's beginning point can be themes from the spiritual autobiographies, themes from the week's reading, themes from any on-board time of the group, or some other starting point from which a variety of perspectives can be elicited.

The key is first to list the themes in what is under consideration, then find a thread that runs through the themes.

### **Identify**

#### **FIND A COMMON THEME OR THREAD**

Begin with the articles chosen for the Respond section above.

What are the common themes or elements which emerge?

Is there a central question, struggle, or issue contained in the articles?

State the central thread as a simple statement, image, metaphor, or issue.

For instance, a review of several articles could reveal themes of challenge of the *status quo*, support of a particular view, and/or revelation of something new. Asking "What ties some of those themes together" yields a thread that may have run through the articles.

### **Explore**

#### **THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES**

Write about what's going on in the image, issue, or statement you created in the Identify step above.

Sit quietly and let the image or statement and your writing rest in you.

What questions does your image or statement raise?

What questions does that image or statement answer?

Identify the perspectives contained in the questions, that is, wholeness, brokenness, recognition, reorientation, or restoration.



**Connect**

This is the point at which one looks at the various sources in life to help find meaning in matters of daily life and ministry. The object is to find connections between the image, statement, or issue and other aspects of our life that teach us something.

**CONNECT TO CULTURE AND SOCIETY**

Focus on one or two areas of your culture or society so that the reflection will not be too broad. These connections might come from your local community or the larger world: your work environment, the education system, the health care system, your grandmothers, movies, TV, literature, art, songs, artifacts, architecture, government, or the press, to name a few.

Pick just one area of our contemporary society with which to connect. For instance, what does the world of employment teach you about the theme you have identified? Or, what have you learned from the news media in your culture/society that helps you or challenges you regarding the theme? How does the selected area of culture/society speak to or about this thread?

**CONNECT TO CHRISTIAN TRADITION**

- Identify biblical passages or other elements from Christian tradition (scripture, hymn, prayer, church history document) in which this common thread is evoked or brought to mind. Read the passages.
- Select one passage that seems to address the image, statement, or issue.
- Examine the passage:
  - Note how the passage offers insight into the image, statement, or issue you are considering.
  - Note how the passage challenges the image, statement, or issue.
  - What does the passage mean to you?

**COMPARE AND CONTRAST CULTURE/SOCIETY AND CHRISTIAN TRADITION**

From the perspectives of each, what kind of a world emerges?

Where do these perspectives join or compete? Where do they clash or contrast?

Note what seems to be “at stake” as you compare and contrast your Culture and Tradition connections.

**CONNECT TO PERSONAL EXPERIENCE**

When have you experienced something that relates to what seems to “be at stake” above?

**CONNECT TO BELIEFS, POSITIONS, AND AFFIRMATIONS**

What positions or affirmations do you hold in relation to what is at stake?

Identify how that belief formed for you. Was it from personal experience, from something you learned in your faith tradition, or from the cultural messages you have inherited or encountered?

What “gaps” are there for you between what you believe and how you act in relation to the theme considered in this reflection?

***Apply***

**IDENTIFY INSIGHTS AND PERSONAL IMPLICATIONS**

What have you learned about coherence of belief and behavior?

What are you personally called to do differently, to affirm, or to change?

What skills did this reflection help you learn in thinking theologically about something you read or watched?

**DECIDE ON SOCIAL AND CIVIC CONSEQUENCES**

What actions will you take to carry out the implications you have discovered?

## Theological Reflection Beginning with a Provocative Word (Culture Source)<sup>94</sup>

### **Identify**

Select a word that has impact. For the purpose of this reflection and the practice, try the word “DESIRING.”

What revelations on the meaning of the word do you have? Anything it denotes or connotes?

### **Explore**

Next, ask the six “journalist’s questions” about the feeling the word conveys:

WHO was involved when you were feeling \_\_\_\_\_?  
(Action . . . tell the stories from your life)

WHAT image comes to mind about the feeling(s) \_\_\_\_\_?  
(Image . . . explore the metaphor—its reflection of wholeness, brokenness, recognition, reorientation, and/or restoration)

### **Connect**

Go to the other sources we use to help explore meaning.

WHERE does this feeling come from and WHERE is it found in society?  
(Source/Culture)

WHEN does this feeling come up in the Bible, lives of saints, hymns, and so forth?  
(Source/Tradition . . . explore the world of tradition)

WHY is this feeling manifest in our lives?  
(Source/Position)

HOW might God redeem any negatives in this?  
(Hope in Christ)

Consider insights and implications.

WHAT have you learned for the next time you feel \_\_\_\_\_?

### **Apply**

Write a collect using the outline:

Dear God . . .	(naming of God’s aspects)
You . . .	(connect situation of the image to that aspect)
We pray that . . .	(petition of our hearts)
So that . . .	(result we desire)
Amen.	

94. Adapted from a design by Patricia Bleicher, EfM mentor.

# The Position Source

*Theological Reflections beginning with closely held beliefs, values, and opinions*

## Theological Reflection Beginning with a Personal Position (1)

**Identify** a focus.

Begin with a focus on the value of music and poetry in worship and prayer.

**Explore** the focus.

Make a statement or image that reflects a connection between music and poetry and prayer or worship. For instance, someone might express that he only likes a certain type of music in worship because another kind destroys the sense of peace and beauty. Or another person might create an image that depicts people singing or playing instruments and the music notes floating outward towards God and the world.

Explore your statement or image theologically, using a few of the questions provided, or create your own questions for the image:

How does the overall statement or image reflect wholeness or goodness?

What view of the world is contained in your statement or image?

What view of the relationship between God and creation exists in your statement/image?

How would someone experience God in that statement/image?

What might disrupt someone's relationship with God and others in that focus?

What view of restoration to wholeness is contained in the focus?

**Connect** to other sources.

State your personal belief that undergirds your initial image or statement.

How do your personal belief and the exploration above coincide and how do they conflict?

What troubles you about the comparison? What comforts you about the comparison?

Find one or two scripture references to the place of music and poetry in liturgy and worship. Or, select one or two hymns to connect to. How do those hymns relate to your focusing image or statement and to your position? How do they relate to the exploration?

What view of the world around you is contained in your personal belief statement, in the image, in the hymns you chose?

**Apply** what is learned to daily life.

Once a person takes a stance or affirms a position, implications for ministry begin to emerge.

What do you see for your ministry as you live day to day?

Close by composing a prayer adapting the structure of Jewish prayers:

Blessed are you, O Lord God, \_\_\_\_\_  
(description of God),

for you \_\_\_\_\_

and make us \_\_\_\_\_

through \_\_\_\_\_. *Amen.*

## Theological Reflection Beginning with a Personal Position (2)

**Identify** a focus.

Begin with a focus on the value of music and poetry in worship and prayer.

**Explore** the focus.

Make a statement or image that reflects a connection between music and poetry and prayer or worship. For instance, someone might express that he only likes a certain type of music in worship because another kind destroys the sense of peace and beauty. Or another person might create an image that depicts people singing or playing instruments and the music notes floating outward towards God and the world.

Explore your statement or image theologically, using a few of the questions provided, or create your own questions for the image:

How does the overall statement or image reflect wholeness or goodness?

What view of the world is contained in your statement or image?

What view of the relationship between God and creation exists in your statement/image?

How would someone experience God in that statement/image?

What might disrupt someone's relationship with God and others in that focus?

What view of restoration to wholeness is contained in the focus?

**Connect** to other sources.

State your personal belief that undergirds your initial image or statement.

How do your personal belief and the exploration above coincide and how do they conflict?

What troubles you about the comparison? What comforts you about the comparison?

Find one or two scripture references to the place of music and poetry in liturgy and worship. Or, select one or two hymns to connect to. How do those hymns relate to your focusing image or statement and to your position? How do they relate to the exploration?

What view of the world around you is contained in your personal belief statement, in the image, in the hymns you chose?

**Apply** what is learned to daily life.

Once a person takes a stance or affirms a position, implications for ministry begin to emerge.

What do you see for your ministry as you live day to day?

Close by composing a prayer adapting the structure of Jewish prayers:

Blessed are you, O Lord God, \_\_\_\_\_  
(description of God),

for you \_\_\_\_\_

and make us \_\_\_\_\_

through \_\_\_\_\_. *Amen.*

## Theological Reflection Beginning with Multiple Personal Positions<sup>95</sup>

This method of theological reflection can be used when members of the seminar group hold a number of differing positions on a specific subject such as “confidentiality.” This method of reflection requires maturity and tact since someone must be able to offer a belief with which others may disagree. We tend to defend and protect our beliefs. They are “precious” to us, and so it is essential that there be a high degree of trust in the group, a consensus to uphold each person with respect, and a clear understanding that this is not a debate or an attempt to change anyone’s mind.

### **Identify**

Begin by affirming the Respectful Communication Guidelines from the Kaleidoscope Institute, page 319 of this Guide.

Using mutual invitation (page 318 of this Guide), each member states a belief about a significant topic for which there are a variety of opinions. Allow some time for silence.

For example, each participant answers the question, “How do you understand ‘confidentiality’ within the context of EfM?” by stating specifically what he or she means by “confidentiality.” It may be helpful to have a mentor or other group member listen carefully and record each position.

### **Explore**

Each person explores her or his position statement from the Action source, answering the following questions, again by mutual invitation:

- When have you felt tension in acting on the belief you have stated?
- In what situations have you been unsure how to apply your stated belief?

### **Connect**

Brainstorm cultural messages that address the topic (not the individual position statements) presented to the group. The mentor facilitates “conversation” as members compare and contrast their own position statements and actions with messages from culture and society.

The group generates a list of selections from the tradition that speak to the heart of the matter explored so far. The group selects the one piece it

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95. Adapted from *Common Lessons and Supporting Materials* (2006), 2-5-1–2-5-3.



wishes to explore. Read the selection aloud, if possible. Explore the selection of tradition, paying attention to how it affirms or challenges what has emerged in the course of the reflection thus far.

**Apply**

Identify insights and challenges. Share by mutual invitation.

Each member considers how the reflection has “spoken to” the position statement he or she shared in the beginning. Allow time for discerning implications for action and identifying what help is needed to follow through.



# Resources for Community Life

# Group Life: The Seminar

## The Nature of Groups

We all live in groups. Whenever two or three gather together, we have a group. Because we take this so much for granted, we often fail to note that groups have lives. They begin, they grow, they encounter changes and mood swings, they calcify, they end. When we pay attention to the life of the group, we can keep patterns healthy and vibrant. We can make them into creative centers for learning and productivity. Other groups may degenerate into destructive patterns that feed on negativities, breed destructive behaviors, or just simply become ineffective, unproductive, stale, and dissatisfying. These groups usually collapse in conflict or abandonment.

The goal of the EfM seminar is to discover our theology with others on a common path. We know that certain considerations must be met in order for this to happen in a group that maintains a productive and creative life.

The key element of any seminar is **TRUST**. Without it every discussion becomes a defensive encounter and learning is limited by tactics of self-protection. An effective seminar develops because the leadership provides a venue in which leadership can be shared, responsibility for the common wellbeing can be assumed by everyone, and each person can enter the discussion with a sense of value, acceptance, and the ability to make distinctive contributions. Such a pattern does not just happen. It grows in an environment of caring and nurturing. Its growth validates that we learn more effectively by cooperation and enthusiastic participation than by competition and argumentation.

## Essential Elements

We have determined that certain elements need to be present in the life of a seminar to make it effective and satisfying as a **learning environment**. Seating in a seminar should be arranged with no one dominating the group as if chairing a meeting. Members should be able to see each other, and the room should afford a sense of privacy. Different styles may dominate. Put aside barriers, such as a table in the center of the room, that may reduce personal communications. Seminars do not work well with interruptions such as might take place in a large hall open to the public. Restrooms and hospitality can be very helpful, including access to liquids, at the very least water. Nourishment that maintains a sense of comfort and wellbeing are suggested.

EfM offers participants an opportunity to share their “spiritual autobiographies.” **Self-revelation** is a part of every encounter, when we state our

names, shake hands, and offer information about ourselves. Typical information beyond our names includes our address, occupation, and family status. Of course we also reveal a great deal in non-verbal ways by appearance, body posture, and tones of voice. All these features highlight our encounters everyday. To develop a seminar group requires that we reveal a bit more. What we reveal depends upon our own comfort level in a group. Some personal information is obviously not appropriate in a seminar group, but members must make decisions about “how free” they can be. Usually this is an evolving process, like a marriage. As we grow in trust and support for one another, we reveal more and become more open. Secrets tend to restrict our freedom to express ourselves, resulting in a smaller and narrower world view. We cannot grow by ourselves, and we also cannot grow if we fail to participate. Self-revelation is our participation. Feedback from others is how others can contribute to our learning process.

While we begin with Spiritual Autobiographies in EfM, this is only one aspect of our continuing self-revelation and growth. Theological reflection only works well if it speaks to events in our lives. We can find it difficult to engage in theological reflection unless we can reveal enough of our lives to examine with the theological tools we acquire through the process of study.

A mentor has certain leadership functions assigned by the task, but **shared leadership** has more to do with style than with function. Shared leadership means that a group takes sufficient time to arrive at a consensus, that is to say a willingness of all to pursue a certain course. Consensus does not mean that all agree, but it does mean that everyone is willing to pursue a given option. Sharing the leadership requires that group members check with each other. Those who are most vocal need to give place and to encourage those who have less to say, but may indeed offer significant contributions. Shared leadership means looking out for one another, taking time for one another, and recognizing that unless we move together, our seminar will end.

No seminar works well unless there exists a **common enterprise**. This is the subject of our inquiry, in this case the theological enterprise in all its complexity. Our common enterprise includes the history of theology and the sources for our faith, the Bible, the experience of the people of God throughout history and through liturgy, and the interpretation of those experiences that have been handed to us in countless libraries as well as through a shared tradition of experience.

In academia the pattern or discipline used in seminars frequently follows that of the lecture hall. Instead of faculty, seminar members offer papers or “talks” which may be critiqued and discussed. For participants such seminars are often dry and uninteresting, unless either the subject is scintillating or the discussion takes on a polemic level that energizes at least some of the participants. We do not believe, however, that disputation as a technique to manage a seminar is very helpful.

The **general pattern** for conducting an EfM seminar is as follows:

- There is time to catch up with one another. This is kept short unless there is a crisis.
- There is time to worship together. The kind of worship will depend upon the needs of the participants.
- There is time to discuss the lessons, not in detail, but to note highlights, ask questions for clarification, and elicit themes and information that catch or surprise students.
- There is time to engage in reflective work such as a spiritual autobiography or a theological reflection; or time to examine spiritual needs, to plumb for theological meaning, or to examine the meaning of Christian ministry.
- This is a time to harvest the fruits of the seminar. Often we learn without knowing it and we fail to use what we have discovered. We have to name our discoveries in order to truly “own” them. It is important from time to time to ask: What have I learned? What are the implications of what I have learned? What must I do to put what I have learned into practice? What difference will what I have learned make in the way I am now? Tomorrow? In the future? What difference will it make for us, our families, our friends, our church, our communities?
- There is adequate time for breaks and refreshment.

We advise that the group produce a set of statements about the purpose, expectations, and norms by which it will work (e.g., the time to begin and to close each session). It also helps if everyone agrees to a schedule about various tasks associated with the seminar.

Social groups and work groups usually create opportunities to **celebrate** life. This is also true of an EfM seminar group. Remember special events in the life of the group with appropriate festivities. Just how and when this is done will vary from group to group. These celebrations may include a meal and alcohol may be served; however, whenever alcohol is served, the group must be sure to offer non-alcoholic beverages in an equally attractive manner.

Celebration may provide an occasion to bring in significant persons who are not part of the group. Spouses or special friends may be included so that they will have an opportunity to meet the group.

We often fail to say goodbye properly, to grieve for what will be no more, to celebrate what we have enjoyed and to give thanks for what we have received. Celebration may be part of **closure**, but closure is more than simply enjoying festivities. Only when we mourn are we ready to release and move on to the next opportunity. We do ourselves and others no service when we fail to mourn, for that failure means that we remain fixed to the past and our creativity diminishes. Certificates, diplomas, remembrances we exchange in token and in words, all serve as epitaphs and tombstones for the past. It is important that seminar groups find ways to express closure adequately.

# Issues in the Life of a Seminar Group<sup>96</sup>

Whenever two or three gather together, a group exists. No individual can be born and exist alone. We live in family groups, church groups, educational groups, groups of friends, and in groups that are merely an association of individuals who happen to be in the same time and place.

Whether we know each other well or have hardly met, our life together in groups evolves through patterns that can be understood. When we do not understand these patterns, we are open to manipulation, someone moving us to do something against our will and without our knowledge.

EfM's learning style depends upon trust. Participants who strive for honesty and charity can support the kind of vulnerability and openness that allows everyone to interact as peers on a common quest.

Some groups do not work well together and may be called dysfunctional. It is possible to ensure that an EfM group is functional, works effectively, and engenders respect for all members. This does not mean that there will never be conflict. Conflict indicates that there are people who care and are willing to maintain something that is important to them. How we handle conflict is crucial.

There are issues that arise in the life of any group, and some will certainly arise in the context of your EfM group.

## Three Basic Concerns

William Schutz developed the following theory from the premise that every member of a group experiences concerns in three areas of participation and membership within the life of the group: inclusion, control, and affection. At the beginning of a group's life, the concerns of members primarily involve the issue of inclusion. Soon, however, concerns evolve on how each is to participate in controlling the group's life. Finally come the affection concerns. At the end stage of the group's life, the order reverses. Participants who are aware of a group's life cycle may recognize the dynamics surrounding different issues and help the group take responsibility to address these.

The following questions arise at the beginning of a group's life:

### INCLUSION

Who else is here?

What is the personal cost in joining?

How much am I willing to pay?

96. From *Common Lessons and Supporting Materials* (2006).

Can I entrust my real self to others?

Will they hold me up if I am falling?

**CONTROL**

Who is calling the shots here?

How much can I push for what I want?

What do others require of me?

Can I say what I really think?

Can I take it when others say what they really think?

**AFFECTION**

Am I willing to care?

Can I show my caring?

What will happen if I show care for one person before showing it for others?

What if no one cares for me?

What if they do?

What if I don't really ever care for some people in the group?

Will the group be able to bear it?

At the end of its life together the group reverses the questions to ease out of what has become a functioning body:

**AFFECTION**

We pull back from affectional ties that have no real future.

**CONTROL**

We again get embroiled in a game of "Who's boss here anyway?"

**INCLUSION**

We start wondering if we really want to put the time and effort into holding onto some or all members of the group.

The three areas of concern also overlap during the life cycle of a group. And, from time to time, a concern that is more usual at the beginning and ending phases of group life may emerge in the middle of things for one reason or another.



### Three Areas of Need in Group Life

A helpful analysis of group life defines three main areas of need within a group: task needs, individual needs, and group maintenance needs. These different areas of group life require ongoing attention. No group will function very effectively if individual or personal needs go unmet or if the relationships of people in the group become totally dysfunctional. Finally, a group without a task is like children looking for mischief. A group without a task will invent one.

Some tasks usually draw a group together (e.g., Education for Ministry), though it will not by itself necessarily hold the group together.

#### TASK NEEDS

- need for a worthwhile goal
- need for a clear goal
- need for consensus about the goal
- need for a plan to meet the goal
- need to recognize when the goal has been met

Any group gathered for a purpose will push to learn and complete that task.

#### INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Each individual brings his or her own needs to the group, including:

- need for acceptance
- need for contributing
- need for affirmation
- need for power
- need for freedom
- need for recognition

These needs affect the performance of each member and may hinder accomplishing the task.

#### GROUP MAINTENANCE NEEDS

Members must relate to one another so as to preserve the life of the group until it completes the task. These needs include:

- need for improving understanding
- need for facilitating cooperation between the members
- need for members to support each other
- need for fun and enjoyment together

Unseen tension may develop between accomplishing the task and fulfilling individual's needs in the group. Good group maintenance involves recognizing both areas and keeps them in healthy balance.

At first sight only some of a group's task needs are visible and obvious. As the group develops, other areas begin to surface. The task of EfM groups mostly revolves around discussing the texts and reflecting theologically. But it is important to focus occasionally on group maintenance needs for preserving group cohesiveness, and to attend to individual needs so every member will feel integral to the life of the group.

The whole group is responsible for maintaining a balance between these different areas of need. The following design can help your group members recognize the different needs and begin to take responsibility for answering them.

### Evaluating Group Life

Regular evaluation of progress is a healthy exercise for your seminar group. This can be done using written evaluations or open discussions during a seminar session.

Group status reports twice a year provide natural opportunities for a group to evaluate itself.

Regular attention to the group's norms set at the beginning of the year is also wise.

When evaluating, members may consider these questions:

- How do you assess your understanding of and participation in this program?
- What is a stumbling block for you?
- What do you like about the leadership of the group?
- What would you like to change?
- How are we doing as a learning community? As a caring community?
- What needs attention?

# Activities that Nurture Group Life

There are actions that group members can take that promote a productive life in the group. While we do many of these things naturally, without thinking, or simply because we have learned to be polite, it can be helpful to be aware of some of these actions. Thus we can encourage one another or take initiative without feeling that it should be left to a designated leader. Activities that nurture group life belong to everyone, so that the leadership and responsibility (ability to respond) may be shared, and that we may grow and learn together.

Some of these activities are:

**INITIATING:** proposing tasks or goals; defining group problems; suggesting procedures or ideas to solve problems.

**INFORMATION/OPINION SEEKING:** requesting facts; seeking relevant information about group concerns; stating beliefs; giving suggestions or ideas.

**INFORMATION/OPINION GIVING:** offering facts; providing relevant information about group concerns; stating beliefs; giving suggestions or ideas.

**CLARIFYING/ELABORATING:** interpreting or reflecting ideas and suggestions; clearing up confusion; indicating alternatives and issues for the group; giving examples.

**SUMMARIZING:** pulling together related ideas; restating suggestions after group discussion of them; offering decisions or conclusions for the group to accept or reject.

**CONSENSUS TESTING:** sending up “trial balloons” to see if the group is nearing a conclusion; checking degree of agreement in the group.

**AWARENESS:** what is my body telling me? Where is my tension?

**OWNING:** acknowledging to myself the sources of the tension.

**DECIDING:** how much do I want to share and how much can I shelve?

**LEVELING:** letting others know what’s going on in me—stating what I think, feel, or want.

# Tools from Kaleidoscope Institute

The following processes for gracious communication and leadership are from the Kaleidoscope Institute with whom EfM has been in a collaborative relationship since 2011. Learn more about KI at [www.kscopeinstitute.org](http://www.kscopeinstitute.org)

## The Cycle of Gospel Living

The difference in attitude toward the powerful and the powerless was very clear throughout the ministry of Jesus. Jesus never told the poor and powerless to sell all they own and give to the poor. That would obviously be an absurd thing to say. Jesus healed them, loved them, ate with them, touched them, comforted them, blessed them, served them, encouraged them, taught them, and liberated them by his own suffering, death, and resurrection. Finally, Jesus breathed on them to infuse them with the power of the Holy Spirit—the power to teach, heal, and forgive in the name of God. On the other hand, Jesus never told the rich and powerful that they are blessed. Instead, Jesus warned them and challenged them to serve and to humble themselves. He reminded them of what the law and the prophets had said.

The Gospel invites the powerful to take up their cross and follow Jesus. Salvation for the powerful comes from the decision to give up power and take up the cross. The Gospel, however, never asks the powerless to choose the cross because the powerless, by the condition of their powerlessness, are already on the cross. There is no need for them to choose it, just as there is no need for the poor to give up what they have and give to the poor because they are already poor. Because the powerless are already on the cross, salvation comes from endurance and faithfulness in the hope of God's deliverance through the resurrection.

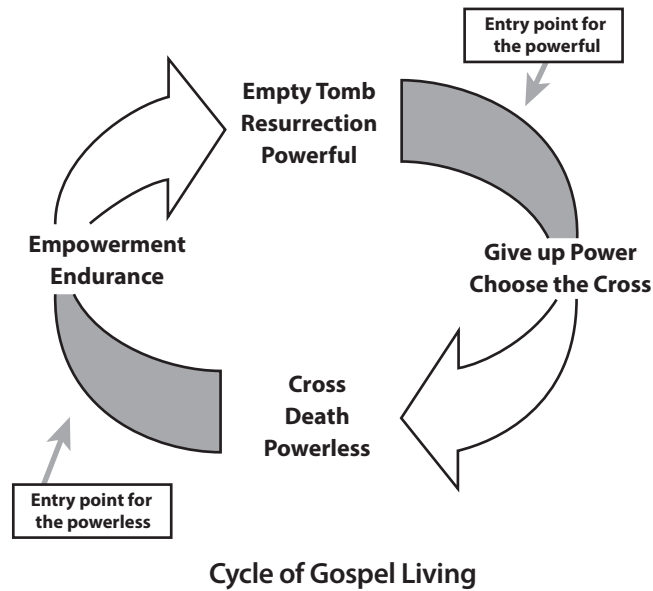
Choosing the cross and the resurrection of Jesus are part of the same Gospel story. But we interact with the different parts of the story differently depending on our place of power in a particular situation. As a Chinese American working in the Episcopal Church, I often find myself in situations where I am set up to be powerless. For example I am sometimes invited to be the token Asian in a meeting. When I am in this kind of situation, I actually spend some time before I enter the meeting to get in touch with the empty tomb, the resurrection side of the Gospel. I tell myself that I am blessed and a child of God no matter what happens. I ask God to breathe the Holy Spirit through me to give me strength to endure and power to speak and challenge the system I am about to enter.

On the other hand, as a trainer and consultant I also find myself in situations where I am given power and authority to influence others.

In my preparation for each training session, I spend time reflecting on what it means to choose the cross. I tell myself that I am a servant to the participants. I tell myself that even though I may be treated as an expert, I must be humble. I tell myself that my job is to work myself out of my job by giving my knowledge, skills, and power away freely, so that at the end of the session the participants will know what I know and my services are no longer needed.

It is crucial to determine in a given situation which side of the cross we are on if we are to experience the wholeness of the Gospel. No one can stay on one side of the cross all the time. That would be neglecting the wholeness of the Gospel. Living the Gospel involves moving through the cycle of death and resurrection, the cross and the empty tomb, again and again. The moment I am resurrected into new life of empowerment, I must begin to think about serving and giving away my power and take up the cross again, or I stand the chance of abusing my power. The moment I take up the cross and become powerless, I must begin to think about faithfulness and endurance and look toward empowerment through the empty tomb. It is in this dynamic of death and resurrection, cross and empty tomb, Lent and Easter, that the Gospel comes to life in each one of us.<sup>97</sup>

Law uses this diagram to illustrate his Cycle of Gospel Living.



97. Eric H. F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993), 41–43.

## Mutual Invitation

In order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak, we will proceed in the following way:

The leader or a designated person shares first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. (Whom you invite does not need to be the person next to you.) After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share.

If you are not ready to share, say “I pass for now” and we will invite you to share later on. If you don’t want to say anything at all, simply say “pass” and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.

We invite you to listen and not to respond to someone’s sharing immediately. There will be time to respond and to ask clarifying questions after everyone has had an opportunity to share.

(adapted from *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb* by Eric H. F. Law<sup>98</sup>)

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*As you practice Mutual Invitation you are enacting the Gospel Cycle of Living. The person speaking is powerful. The persons refraining from speaking have given up power, but will take it up again when invited. A person who passes has the power to offer power to another through invitation. Notice and reflect on this cycle as you become more adept and comfortable with the process.*

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98. Atlanta: Chalice Press, 1993.

## Respectful Communication Guidelines

- R** = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others
- E** = use EMPATHETIC listening
- S** = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles
- P** = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak
- E** = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions
- C** = keep CONFIDENTIALITY
- T** = TRUST ambiguity, because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong

(from *The Bush Was Blazing but Not Consumed* by Eric H. F. Law)

I agree to uphold these guidelines for the time we have together.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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