

# Week Twenty-one

## YEAR ONE

### Read

Ruth  
Jonah  
Esther  
Collins, Chapter 26, “The Hebrew Short Story,” pages 268–77

### 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 Peter  
2 Peter  
Powell, Chapter 25, “1 Peter” and Chapter 26, “2 Peter,” pages 463–91

### Focus

As you read 1 and 2 Peter, notice what Powell had to say about them and what each contributes to developing a spirituality.

## YEAR THREE

### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 15, “Russia: The Third Rome,” pages 503–47

### Focus

Note how MacCulloch describes some of 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.

## YEAR FOUR

**Read**

Allen, Chapter 15, “Revelation and Faith,” pages 155–68

**Focus**

Allen uses the metaphor of a flashlight to point to how theology functions. Theology illuminates our view of important questions and issues. How does the theology that Allen presented shed light on understanding humanity, the world, and God?



## 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 the 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 motivation of human nature presides. Terror becomes the currency through which power and authority distribute goods and services. Street gangs live off this economic system. Some households run on the economy of violence. Nations trade with 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 overtly. Other participation operates through passive complicity that covertly supports the violent dynamic.

How have the people, issues, and events presented in your reading assignment participated in an economy of violence? Describe how the doctrine of God as the Lord can be lived out in such an economy.

In addition, give thought as to how prayer, worship (liturgy), and spirituality address the destructive qualities of any economy, especially the economy of violence.

### Practice

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

- Participation is voluntary—a person can opt out of the discussion without judgment.
- A person speaks 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, adapted from methods developed by the EfM program, begins by collecting 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 the destructive behavior, allowing it to be acceptable. Sarcasm, practical jokes, and ethnic-based jokes usually are not 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. Violence in the form of societal impact may be the chosen realm to consider. Or experience with war. Or any number of possibilities.

### *Identify* a focus

Individual work:

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? Write all the threads you can identify. Pick one as the focus and on which you would like to reflect further.

**Explore** the focus

Reflection around 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 disclosed (or not) in that world?

Consider the view of humanity assumed or actively present in the image world.

Examine what unexpected influences are present in that world.

**Connect** to other sources of meaning

Culture: Record what literary works, scenes from movies, or song lyrics come to mind.

What pieces from the Christian tradition feed the conversation? Especially look at Psalms, liturgies and prayers (cf. 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 beliefs you have around 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 the conversation?

How might your participation in prayer and worship be impacted?

Close with a collect:

O God who \_\_\_\_\_

We pray \_\_\_\_\_

So that \_\_\_\_\_

In Christ’s name. Amen.