

## Week Twenty-five

### YEAR ONE

#### Read

Ezra  
Nehemiah  
Collins, Chapter 21, “Ezra and Nehemiah,” pages 220–28

#### 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?

### YEARTWO

1 Timothy  
2 Timothy  
Titus  
Powell, Chapter 21, “The Pastoral Letters: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus,” pages 397–413

#### Focus

Think about Paul’s struggle against “false teachings” while advocating “sound doctrines.” Compare how the same issues play out in the contemporary church.

### YEARTHREE

#### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 18, “Rome’s Renewal,” pages 655–88

#### Focus

Often, reforming produced examination and renewal among those to whom the protestations were leveled. As you read through the chapter of the catholic counterreformations, consider what was disclosed about God.

## YEAR FOUR

**Read**

Sedgwick, *The Christian Moral Life: Practices of Piety*, Introduction, Chapter 1, “Describing the Christian Life,” and Chapter 2, “An Anglican Perspective,” pages vii–51

**Focus**

Given Sedgwick’s presentation, reflect on how the study of ethics contributes to the formation of 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 our advertising today, or in our school systems. Note what you believe about the study and practice of ethics. What do you view in a new way after reading this week’s assignment? Note what implications that awareness has for what you will do any differently next week.



## 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 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* began 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.

**Practice**

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.