

Week Twenty-six

YEAR ONE

Read

1 Chronicles
2 Chronicles
Collins, Chapter 22, "The Books of Chronicles," pages 229–35

Focus

The two books of Chronicles tell the history of the kingdoms from a slightly different perspective from how that history is related in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 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?

YEARTWO

Read

1 Thessalonians
2 Thessalonians
Powell, Chapter 19, "1 Thessalonians" and Chapter 20, "2 Thessalonians," pages 371–95

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?

YEARTHREE

Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 19, "A Worldwide Faith," pages 689–715

Focus

Well-crafted histories aid in understanding the social and intellectual period in which contemporary theology has developed. Name the primary factors that influence the building of theology for today's world.

YEAR FOUR

Read

Sedgwick, Chapter 3, “Incarnate Love” and Chapter 4, “Love and Justice,” pages 53–101

Focus

In Chapter 3 Sedgwick uses sexuality, idolatry, and hospitality as elements to sketch a picture of incarnate love. Chapter 4 brings an important discussion of love and justice to the table. Note which of the themes contribute most to the theology you are building.



ALL YEARS

Respond

No theology worth its salt can neglect prayer and worship. Concepts alone limit what one knows and experiences. As St. Gregory is said to have noted, concepts create idols; only wonder comprehends anything. Wonder grounds prayer and worship and encourages (which literally places courage in one’s heart) us to risk loving others, self, God, and God’s creation.

By necessity, constructing a holistic theology includes prayer and worship. On one hand, prayer and worship should frame theological reflection. And on the other hand, study (one of the spiritual disciplines) opens the heart to God. A piece of scripture provides an archetypical touchstone.

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

Striving with God to know God describes how theology develops. St. Augustine of Hippo’s *Confessions* was a written prayer through which he worked out his theology. St. Anselm also wrote his *Proslogion* as a prayer. Both classics presented their theology as prayer thereby demonstrating the importance of the relationship of theology and prayer. Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthazar succinctly made the point with the quotation “theology on

one's knees" (*die betende theologie* or *la théologie à genoux*).²⁸ Prayer, indicated by genuflection, underscores the significance of doing theology within an attitude of wonder.

Liturgy as work—work of the people of God for all God's people—can provide incidents for reflection. Recall three or four experiences within the context of liturgy that moved you in some way. Worship includes the entire spectrum of emotion. Include 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.²⁹

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.³⁰

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.

Practice

Reflecting Theologically on the Identified Events

Identify a common thread

After you describe your incidents, what common themes or threads do you notice?

Choose one thread (theme) as the focus for reflection.

28. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Theology and Sanctity," in *Word and Redemption: Essays in Theology 2*, English trans. (New York: Herder, 1965), 49–86.

29. Ira Progoff, *The Practice of Process Meditation* (New York: Dialogue House Library, 1980), 147.

30. *Ibid.*, 148.

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?
- Consider what is shown about human nature.
- What is celebrated in this moment?
- How is God disclosed?

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 are the implications for ministry in daily life?