UNIT TWO

Theological Reflection as a Life Skill
NOTES for Unit Two:

• This PDF was prepared from a proof copy of the Reading and Reflection Guide, Volume A. There are some corrections noted that have been made in the book. Since the highlights and strikethroughs sometimes do not print from the PDF, please consult the electronic file copy before notifying us about a needed correction. (And, yes, we do want to hear about any not already noted.)
• The DuBose essay assigned to Year Four in Week Twelve is at the end of this document.
• Online resources are available for digging deeper:
  o [http://oxfordbiblicalstudies.com](http://oxfordbiblicalstudies.com) for everyone (login: efm-sewanee; password: ministry)
  o [http://store.fortresspress.com/store/product/3811/A-Short-Introduction-to-the-Hebrew-Bible](http://store.fortresspress.com/store/product/3811/A-Short-Introduction-to-the-Hebrew-Bible) for Year One (tabs include student and teacher resources)
  o [http://bakerpublishinggroup.com/books/introducing-the-new-testament/264690/esources](http://bakerpublishinggroup.com/books/introducing-the-new-testament/264690/esources) for Year Two (note new address, but the old one should redirect)
• The copy below was inserted in the introductory pages prior to Unit One. It is repeated here in the interest of reminding users of the Guide that the Read and Focus sections are specific to one’s year level, but the Respond and Practice sections are to be done by all year levels.

A Four-fold Discipline for the Practice of Ministry

In each six-week unit, the five weeks following the introductory essay incorporate a pattern for the year’s work that encourages the development of a four-fold discipline for the practice of ministry in the world:

- Read
- Focus
- Respond
- Practice

In each case Read and Focus are specific to an individual’s year of study in the EfM program while the Respond and Practice are intended for all levels. Addressing the Respond and/or Practice work in the seminar meeting may encourage a conversation of great depth since each individual, having previously considered the question from the context of his or her assigned reading in the Christian tradition, will bring a different perspective to the group’s work together.
Week Eight

Theological Reflection as 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 hæleg, 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.

Throughout the four years in EfM, participants practice the discipline of theological reflection. Models and methods developed within the program guide and support theological reflection. Assignments in the coming weeks will present fundamentals of theological reflection. The intent is to provide resources and practice for the refinement of the life skill of 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. EfM over the years has developed a vocabulary in support of implementing the discipline of theological reflection. Two broad areas of development were model and method.
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 likely to occur if we differentiate personal experience and experience of the world and are careful to distinguish among four sources: Action/Personal Experience, Personal Position (Beliefs, Values), Culture/Society, and the Christian Tradition. The Action and Position sources reflect personal experiences and beliefs, while Culture and Tradition identify what we receive from the world.

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 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 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.

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. Doing theology requires a holistic response that involves the intellect, imagination, and emotions. The work of theology 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 that constitutes theological reflection. Whenever 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 and practice in connecting to 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 Position/Belief and Personal Experience/Action), producing a “picture” of what we are trying to do. Methods allow us to apply the model.

Each theological reflection method within EfM follows a four-phase process: identify, explore, connect, and apply.

**Identify:** To provide a starting point, each method 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 non-fiction, a news program or many other examples, there will be a Personal Position contained within the writing or presentation.

This week’s work introduces a method that begins with a text from scripture (Christian Tradition). The focus centers on something that produces 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 would continue 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.

**Explore:** the next phase of theological reflection uses some theological questions to examine the focusing image or metaphor. The purpose, like any concentrated investigation, is to notice the features and characteristics of the identified focus. Thematic questions used 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 from destruction and turns them toward life?);

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

Look at the image from different theological viewpoints, e.g. asking what characterizes the “world of the image” (creation perspective) or what causes alienation in the world (sin perspective) guides the conversation into an exploration of the theology contained within the image.

Use two or three of the theological themes/perspectives to explore the focus.

Connect: The point is that during the connecting phase 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.

To recap to this point: The reflection began in the Christian Faith Tradition source of meaning with the passage from Genesis. Recalling an experience of “Life is very good” drew from Personal Experience to help identify a focus. The image of discovering a box with a joyful surprise inside further identified a 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. The Connect phase deliberately turns to the other two sources, Contemporary Culture and Personal Position (though connections to other sources can occur at any point and in any order).

Examination 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 something from Contemporary Culture comes to mind relating to the identified focus of the reflection, comparing and contrasting the view presented in the Culture source of meaning and that presented in the Christian Faith Tradition source produces further food for reflection.

Finally, the connecting phase of this particular reflection example draws on Personal Beliefs/Positions: What do I hold as true about life? What positions do the views of Culture and Tradition cause me to take? Where do I get those beliefs?

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.
**Apply**: The *applying phase* of theological reflection involves clarifying what the exploring and connecting phases bring into view. New learning often touches on values and behavior. Often the learning involves a change of behavior and occasionally a shift in how a person understands self, human nature, and God. Deep, significant insights need support and encouragement to enter into the change. That is one of the reasons theological reflection is done best in a supportive community.

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.”

When the *applying phase* is brought center stage, the skills, knowledge, and attitude needed to “incarnate” insights into daily life have energy. As you do your reading and focus your study, do so with the continual question of what relevance your study, reflection and learning have to your life and ministry.

Weekly you participate in discussion with other members of your group. Theological reflection is done individually and as a group. The variety of experiences and thoughts of group members and the group dynamics enrich and add complexity to the process.

“Reflection” involves thinking carefully about what one reads, experiences, believes, or knows. Such thinking requires willingness to be open and vulnerable as one reconsiders what each believes, understands, or interprets. Julian Marias, a Spanish philosopher of the twentieth century, said: “Christianity does not give solutions; it gives light by which to seek them.” Careful theological reflection illuminates experience. Theological reflection 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 light by which to “see” situations more clearly.

**A Word about Metaphors**

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 distinctions among images, metaphors, and similes. All of these translate meaning from one thing to another. The literal meaning of the Greek *meta* + *phereo* 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 emerges from the identified reflection focus. In a group, 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.

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

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16. This section is adapted from *Common Lessons and Supporting Materials,* page 2-11-1 ff.
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.

**Respond**

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

**Practice**

Analogical thinking undergirds theology, for we can only speak about God using metaphor, images, story, or pictures. Listed below are some exercises designed to 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: an exploding pressure cooker, 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,” pages 64-73

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

YEAR TWO

Read
The Gospel according to Luke

Focus
Define unfamiliar terms or references.
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,” pages 189–228

Focus
Important names, places, terms to note: Constantine; Chi Rho, Milvian Bridge; Codex Vaticanus; Codex Sinaiticus; Hagia Eirene; Hagia Sophia; Helena, Athanasius, Basil, Arius, Miaphysites, Nestorius; sedes, cathedra, basclica catechesis cremos, monachos, abila, homoousion, homoios, 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**

Allen, Chapter 6, “Nature as Witness and Innocent Suffering,” pages 57–67

**Focus**

Concepts, terms, and names to note: three elements of witness; nature’s witness; inner witness; Testament: Job; Vindicator; William Temple

Allen presents theology, as do all theologians, by using content from other people as well as from his own thinking and experience. Identify sources he used as he presented his position in this chapter.

**Respond**

As you studied you likely made connections with other things that you have read, thought, or experienced. Identify the thoughts, feelings, memories, and connections to other authors that you have read. These constitute the sources you use as you form your understanding of the chapter. What do you notice about the sources you draw upon?

Defining relationships loom 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 confronted Mark’s abrupt proclamation of the news of Jesus Christ and its power over people; Year Three watched the nascent church-state issue unfold; while Year Four read about natural theology and the injustices of innocent suffering.

The issues raised in the reading are real, ongoing, and difficult. What has your experience taught you about one or more of those issues?

What light does learning more about the Christian heritage shed on those issues?

Christians today live within a heritage of people who have placed their lives on the line because of how they experienced God and God’s call on their lives. Having a theology that undergirds a living faith brings us face to face with serious life issues. A hope is that critical study of the Christian tradition will help men and women face issues such as innocent suffering.

How have your reading, study, and reflection on the Christian tradition this week contributed to deepening your understanding of faith issues, especially those raised by human suffering?
Practice

Use your assigned 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 reflect on with the seminar group.
Week Ten

YEAR ONE

Read
Leviticus and Numbers

Focus
Identify: 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

Focus

What interests or concerns you in Powell’s presentation of Luke’s Gospel?
Which of the major themes Powell identified 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,” pages 231–254
Focus

Learn the meaning of the following: *The Life of Balaam and Joasaph*; Miaphysites; Dyophysite “Nestorianism”; Tome of Leo; *Henotikon*; Jacob Baradeus; Syriac Orthodox Church; Sergius; Peter the Iberian; Armenian Church; *Trisagion*; Theopaschism; Ethiopia; abunI; Ezana; tawabedo; *Kebra Nagast*; 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.

YEAR FOUR

Read

Allen, Chapter 7, “Innocent Suffering and Life Beyond Death,” pages 68–73

Focus

Concepts that provoke thoughtful reflection: transformation of suffering; sufferings as punishment for sin; prosperity as mark of righteousness; wrong doing results in suffering; injustices of innocent suffering prompt affirmation of life beyond death; omnipotence—as can do anything; almighty—as having authority over all things; problem of natural evil

Which of the concepts listed above interested you the most?

Respond

Select a theme or concept from your reading, for example liberation, prayer, Christ, or suffering. 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

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*

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17. Note: An eBook English translation of *The Life of Balaam and Joasaph* can be found at http://omacl.org/Barlaam/.
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 is about ministry: what we do and say that provide opportunities to hear and know God more and to act in the world in ways that reflect God. See where the following reflection outline takes you. Review the opening description of reflection movement as a reminder of the terms below.

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 makes the point of the passage evident.

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

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, how is there opposition to that image? How is there 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, pages 84-93”

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

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 the other Gospels’ proclamations.

YEAR THREE

Read

Focus
Rise of Islam:
- Qur’an; three possible “borrowings” of Islam from Christianity; al-ilah (Alllah); identify how Christian divisions contributed to Muslim conquests; Mosques of Umar (Dome of the Rock)

Islam’s impact on Christians in East:
- Pact or Covenant (dhimma) of Umar; hadith that protected monastery of St. Catherine of Alexandria; John of Damascus; ascendency of Bagdad under Abbasid caliphs; Hunayn ibn ‘Ishaq; Timothy I

Church in China:
- Ta Qin monastery; Bishop Alopen; Jesus Messiah Sutra; Discourse on the oneness of the Ruler of the Universe; Emperor Wuzong
Christianity among Mongols:
   Khan of the Keratis’ vision of St. Sergius; Kerait khan; Temujin (Genghis Khan); Kublai Khan and Dyophysite Christianity; Il-Khan Hulagu and Christians of Bagdad; Rabban Sauma; Timur’s destructions

Islam and African Churches:
   North African Church; Coptic patriarchs; Ethiopian monasticism; Qerellos; Zagwe kings; churches of Lalibela; Takla Haymanot; Zar’a Ya’qob; The Miracles of Mary; Prester John myth

YEAR FOUR

Read
   Allen, Chapter 8, “Suffering from Nature and Extreme Human Cruelty,” pages 74–84

Focus
   Key concepts to consider: David Hume’s view of natural world in relation to humanity’s well-being; the Stoic Epictetus’s view of humankind in relation to nature; Iulia de Beausobre and her experience with suffering at the hand of human cruelty; experiencing God’s love in the midst of suffering; two possible responses to the Holocaust

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

   Reflect on how the “laws” you learned in your first ten years shaped your beliefs about God.

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

Practice
   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 reflect on with the seminar group.
Week Twelve

YEAR ONE

Read

Joshua and Judges

Focus

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

YEAR TWO

Read

Powell, Chapter 8, “John,” pages 169–189

Focus

Terms, ideas, and images: 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

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

YEAR THREE

Read


Focus

The Rome of the Popes:

Papa; catholic; Latin Rite; St. Lawrence; Castel Sant’Angelo; Bascilica of St. Peter; Damasus; Jerome; Gerasimos; Vulgate

A Religion Fit for Gentlemen:

Faltonia Betitia Proba; Prudentius; Peristephanon; Ambrose

Augustine: Shaper of the Western Church:

Confessions; Monica; Manichaeism; tolle lege; Donatists; City of God; Pelagius; 410 CE; Augustine’s analogy of Trinity; double processions of Holy Spirit
Early Monasticism in the West:
Martin; Sulpicius Severus; capellae; Cassian; Benedict; Rule of St. Benedict

YEAR FOUR

Read
Allen, Chapter 9, “The Sacrifice in Creation,” pages 87–95 and William Porcher Dubose’s essay “The Trinity” provided in Section II, pages [XXX].

By the time that Dubose had written his essay on the Trinity, he was nearing retirement from a long, productive, and challenging career as a professor and dean of the School of Theology of the University of the South. Before he arrived at the university he had served as a soldier and then as a chaplain in the Confederate Army. Wounded several times and confined as a prisoner of war, Dubose knew the dark side of humanity. Upon his release as a POW, he read his own obituary—he had been reported as killed in action.

Apparent throughout DuBose’s writings, his brilliance resulted in an international reputation of being one of, if not the most, original and creative American theologians. Dogma and experience, which he understood as part of what incarnation means, were in constant dialogue in all his writings.

Focus
Concepts: Power of God; creator’s self-renunciation; connection between God’s creative self-sacrificing and human moral action; de facto person and moral person; doctrine of Trinity in relation to doctrine of creation

Identifications to make with reference to the sacrifice in creation: Dorothy Sayers; Iris Murdoch; W. H. Auden; Dante; Bonaventure

Terms and phrase to note in DuBose’s essay: logos; telos; grace of the Son; gratia gratiata; gratia gratians; love is grace potential; grace is love actu; three constituents of the gospel; ex pare Dei; salvation salvans; ex parte hominis

Respond
Compare how God is involved in the variety of worlds present in the readings with how you find God’s involvement 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 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—your relationship with play, family, work, and how your view your body.
Week Thirteen

YEAR ONE

Read
Collins, Chapter 9, “Joshua”; Chapter 10, “Judges” pages 94-115

Focus
Judges in the Hebrew Bible are more aptly described as warlords than magistrates. Collins wrote that the selection criterion for a judge was might. As you step back into the time of Judges, why would these stories 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,” pages 191-213

Focus
Make note of what surprises you in reading Acts; what you had to look up; and the events, images, or ideas that interest you.

YEAR THREE

Read

Focus
MacCulloch organizes five hundred years of Latin Christianity history around several areas:
• Changing Allegiances: Rome, Byzantium, and Others
• Mission in Northern Europe (500–600)
• Obedient Anglo-Saxons and Other Converts (600–800)
• Charlemagne, Carolingians, and a New Roman Empire (800–1000)

Identify the key persons and events related to each section, especially noticing how MacCulloch’s presentation sheds light on the “human capacity for relationship.”
YEAR FOUR

Read

Allen, Chapter 10, “The Incarnation as Sacrifice,” pages 96–106

Focus

Key concepts to identify and define: God’s self-limitation; incarnation as sacrifice; “dwelling place of God”; Kierkegaard’s allegory in Philosophical Fragments; concept from geometry to point to Jesus’ divinity and humanity; miracles (“signs of wonder”; “deeds of power”; “mighty works”) and natural science

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 God and for human nature?

List images of God that you have or have had—recognizing that there are people who do not like to think of God that way. Scripture uses a variety of images. Perhaps there is one or more that might work to convey your sense of God at this time.

What do those images suggest about how you understand the meaning of being human?

Practice

Start from a biblical text for reflection such as Romans 13; or any passage that someone in Year One or Two has encountered during the study this week; or a passage that someone particularly wants to engage; or a passage from the recent Sunday scripture reading.

Identify

• a scripture passage to practice the movements of theological reflection:
• Identify a focus in the passage—create an image or metaphor if possible;

Explore the focus with theological questions;

Connect other sources (personal experience, contemporary culture, and personal beliefs) to the focus; and

Apply the reflection by noting insights you have and how those insights might make a difference in ministry in your life.
Week Twelve, Reading Assignment for Year Four

The Trinity

The truth takes its own forms and expresses itself in its own ways. Our efforts at defining, proving, or establishing it are all acts after the event. It is what it is, and not what we make it. Christianity prevails in the world in a fact which we have called Trinity, and which is Trinity, however inadequate and unsatisfactory our explanations of the term or our analyses of the thing may be. I would describe Christianity in its largest sense to be the fulfilment of God in the world through the fulfilment of the world in God. This assumes that the world is completed in man, in whom also God is completed in the world. And so, God, the world, and man are at once completed in Jesus Christ who, as He was the logos or thought of all in the divine fore-knowledge of the past, so also is He the telos or end of all in the predestination of the future. That is to say, the perfect psychical, moral, and spiritual manhood of which Jesus Christ is to us the realization and the expression is the end of God in creation, or in evolution. I hold that neither science, philosophy, nor religion can come to any higher or other, either conjecture or conclusion, than that. But now, when we come to the actual terms or elements of God’s self-realization in us and ours in Him, we cannot think or express the process otherwise than in the threefold form of the divine love, the divine grace, and the divine fellowship, in operation or action. Putting it into scriptural phrase, we speak as exactly as popularly in defining the matter of the Gospel to be, The love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the fellowship of the Spirit. As our spiritual life is dependent upon each and all of these three constituents, so we can know God at all only as we know Him in the actual threefold relation to us of Father, Son, and Spirit.

The first element in the essential constitution of the Gospel is the fact in itself that God is love. That God is love means that He is so not only in Himself but in every activity that proceeds from Him. The very phrase the love of the Father expresses the whole principle of the universe. That God

is Father means that it is His nature, or His essential activity, to reproduce Himself, to produce in all other that which He Himself is. That God in Himself is love carries with it the truth that from the beginning all things else mean, and are destined to come to, love in the end. The mystery on the way that somehow light must come out of darkness, that love must needs conquer hate, and that in everything good seems to be only the final and far off goal of ill, may puzzle us but it does not disturb the principle itself. When we come to enter fairly upon the evolution of the future, the higher not merely psychical or social or moral but spiritual life and destiny of man, all the truth gradually dawns upon us in the following discoveries, which are already established facts of spiritual experience: The truth of all spirit is love; the matter of all law is goodness; God is not creator or cause only, nor lord or lawgiver only, but Father of all things, since all things through man are destined to share His spirit, to be partakers of His nature, and to reproduce Himself as Father in themselves as children. In order to be sons of God through actual participation in the divine nature there stands in the way indeed the need of a mighty redemption from sin and an as yet far off completion in holiness; but no matter how unredeemed or incomplete, we know beyond further question that all our salvation lies in redemption and completion, and that we shall be ourselves and the world will come to its meaning only when the self-realization of God as Father shall have accomplished itself in our self-realization as His children. If we knew the fact only that God in Himself is love, it would be to us a gospel indeed of great joy, because it would carry in it the assurance of the highest good, whatever that might be. But it would be but a partial gospel, and in fact only a gospel at all through its certainty of proceeding further.

The phrase Grace of the Son expresses that which perfectly complements and completes all that is meant by the Love of the Father. What is Fatherhood without a correlative Sonship? And what is all love even in God as its subject apart from its actuality and activity as grace in man as its object? The divine propriety of the terms Father and Son as applied to God cannot be too much magnified. The distinction between God as He is in Himself and God as He is in all possible expressions of Himself is one that we cannot think Him at all without making. The most perfect expression of love is contained in the statement, that Love loves love. Its nature is to produce, to reproduce, to multiply itself. Itself is forever the true object of itself, at the same time that it is ever a going forth from itself into that which is not itself. This essential principle of love or self-reproduction is what makes God eternally Father. But the eternal Fatherhood is actualized only in an eternal Sonship. Nothing proceeds from the Father which is not reproduction of the Father, and is not therefore Son. Man sees himself now in nature and destinature son of God. He feels his call and obligation to fulfil God in him as Father by realizing himself in God as son. His spiritual end and impulse is to know as also he is known, to love in return as he is first loved, to apprehend that for which he is apprehended of God in Christ. In proportion as he finds the meaning and truth of his own being in the reproduction of
God, in being son of God, he finds the meaning and truth of the whole creation realized and expressed in his own sonship as heir of all and end of all. And in proportion again as he thus finds all things meaning and ending in sonship, he comes at last to see God Himself as realized in the universal sonship Himself therein realized as Eternal Father. So it is that in Jesus Christ we see everything expressed, because everything realized or fulfilled. He is all truth, because He is the truth of all things God, Creation, Man. And because He is thus truth and expression of all, He is Logos of all. What else could the Logos of all be but Son, or the Son but Logos? What could perfectly express God but that which is the perfect reproduction of Himself, or what is perfect sonship but perfect likeness?

The Grace of the Son is the divine gift of sonship. How could we have known God only in Himself? How could God have been actually our Father without the actuality of our sonship to Him? And could we have known, could we have wanted, could we have willed, could we have accomplished or attained our sonship without the gift or grace of sonship in Jesus Christ? God, we are told, predestinated us unto sonship through Jesus Christ unto Himself. He predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first born among many brethren. In bringing many sons to glory, He gave to us a Captain of our salvation, an Author and Finisher of the faith of sonship and so of the sonship of faith, who was Himself perfected as Son through the sufferings that are necessary to the perfecting of sonship in us. We see in Jesus Christ all that is meant, involved, or implied, in the fact that He is the divine Fatherhood realized and expressed in human sonship.

If that fact, viewed in its totality, signifies not only a human act, nor only a divine act, but a divine-human act, an act of God in man which is equally an act of man in God, then we say that Jesus Christ is not only as well the humanity as the divinity in that act, but He is the divinity as well as the humanity. He is not only the gratia gratiata in it but the gratia gratians—not only the manhood infinitely graced but the Godhead infinitely gracing.

Jesus Christ is therefore to us no mere sample or example of divine sonship. He is no mere one man who more successfully than others has grasped and expressed the ideal of a divine sonship. Neither is He a single individual of our race whom God has elected from among equally possible others, in whom as mere revelation or example to all others to manifest the truth of God in man and man in God. On the contrary, Jesus Christ is Himself the reality of all that is manifested or expressed in Him. He is as God the grace communicating and as man the grace communicated. He is both Generator and generated with reference to the life incarnate in Him both the sonship eternally in God to be begotten and the sonship actually begotten in man. As He was in the beginning with God and was God, so is He universally with man and is universal man.

When we have thus adequately conceived Christ as the universal truth and reality of ourselves, and in ourselves of all creation, and in creation and ourselves of God, then we are prepared for the conclusion that we
know God at all, or are sons to Him as our Father, or are capable in that
relation of partaking of His nature or entering into His Spirit or living His
life, only in and through Jesus Christ; because Jesus Christ is the incarn-
at ion or human expression to us of the whole Logos of God that is to say,
of God Himself as in any way whatever knowable or communicable. We
cannot get at God to know or possess Him otherwise than as He reveals
and imparts Himself; and He reveals Himself through His own Word and
imparts Himself in His own Son. There and there alone is He to be known,
and there He is all our own. The Logos who is the eternal Self-revelation of
God manifests Himself as ideal principle, first and final cause, meaning and
end, of creation; and the end of the whole creation which manifests God is
realized through spiritual humanity in the imparted sonship of the Everlast-
ing Son of the Father.

There is yet one other condition of truly knowing or really possessing
God as wholly our God. As God is unknowable and incommunicable but
through Christ, so is Christ, however perfectly He is in Himself the self-
revelation and self-communication of God, not so to us but through the
coequal action of the Holy Ghost. There is no knowledge of God in Himself
only, there is no knowledge of God in creation only, or in others, or even in
Christ only, without the answering knowledge of God in ourselves also. It
is only like that answers to like. The deep that answers to deep must be the
same deep. Jesus Christ expected in every son of man not only the answer
of the man in him to Himself as eternal and universal Son of man, but the
answer of the God in him to the perfect God head in Himself. Ye cannot see
God in me, He says, because ye have not God in you. No man cometh unto
me except the Father draw Him. I do not wish to urge the mere conven-
tional language of Christianity, true as I believe it and helpful as I may find
it to myself. I would if possible speak in the common language of common
experience. When we speak of knowing God, and having God, it must mean
knowing Him where He is to be known and having Him as He is to be had.
Now, whatever God is in Himself, He is knowable to us only in Jesus Christ,
and He can be our God only as He is conceived in us by the operation of
the Spirit of God and born of the want which He implants and the faith
which He generates.

The doctrine of the Trinity is ordinarily thought of as the very extreme
of speculative reasoning upon the nature of God. But let us remember that
practical faith in the Trinity antedated any speculative thought or doctrine
of the Trinity. And behind that faith the fact itself of the Trinity is all that
makes God knowable by us or us capable of knowing God. Before there was
the word Trinity, the new world of Christianity had come to know God in
Christ, and to know Christ in itself. The entire doctrine developed out of
that actual experience was nothing but a positive affirmation and a deter-
mmed defence of the fulness of the truth of God in Christ and Christ in us.
We can do no better than conclude this entire exposition of the Gospel with
an interpretation of it in the only terms in which it is expressible, viz.: in
terms of the Trinity.
We have to do now with the Trinity, not as matter of doctrine nor as object of faith, but as fact in itself. But at the same time we neither forget nor minimize the essential Christian conviction that the fact of the Trinity through the actual operation of God’s Word and Spirit has been so made matter of spiritual observation and experience as to be legitimate object of faith and material for doctrine. Our object at present, however, is not to define God but to define the Gospel, and our contention is that the Gospel is definable in facts that taken together make up the truth of the Trinity.

The first condition and constituent of the Gospel is the fact that God in Himself is love. How do we know that God is love? I believe that actually or historically we know it in Christ in whom the fact of the divine love is consummated and manifested. But in the light now of Christianity I believe that it is also philosophically demonstrable that goodness or love is the essential principle and the ultimate end of the universe. How God is love, not only in antecedent nature but in the actuality of self-fulfilment in the world, may be readable too in nature, after the light thrown upon it by Christianity, but in fact it is known in its reality only in Christ. Love is no more in God than in us an abstract disposition or affection. All the love we know is in concrete relations and the forms of affection determined by the character of those relations. Human love is marital, parental, filial, etc. out to the wider and widest forms of national, racial, and human affinity and affection. The concrete form in which alone we can know God as love is expressed by our designation of Him as eternal Father. That gives shape and definiteness to not only our conception, but the reality itself of His relation to us and ours to Him, and no less of how that relation is to be fulfilled. The full reality of fatherhood comes about in actuality only in the full realization of sonship, and that therefore must be God’s meaning and end for all that is in the universe of His self-expression. We begin so to anticipate the truth that is to be expressed in such statements as that God has foreordained or predestined us to sonship through Jesus Christ unto Himself, that God has foreordained us to be conformed to the image of His Son, and many others to the same effect. But before we come to these unfoldings of the divine nature and purpose, let us reflect upon the following antecedent truth.

The beginning of all distinction between a pantheistic and a theistic conception of the world lies in recognizing the world as the expression, not of God Himself or, as we say, “of His substance,” but of His Logos, His Thought, Will, Word. The Logos of God, then, is not God (a theos); we distinguish Him. And yet certainly the Logos is God (theos); we identify Him. Moreover, when once we have conceived and accepted God as eternal Father, we are in position to assume that the Logos, not merely as the principle of the divine self-expression but as God Himself self-expressed, must manifest Himself universally as Son or in sonship; since universal and everlasting Sonship is the only self-expression of eternal and essential Fatherhood.

The first constituent, therefore, of the Gospel is the fact in itself of the divine Love in Fatherhood. The second is, the equal fact in itself of the actualization of the divine Fatherhood in creature—or, definitely, in human—
Sonship. The love of the Father fulfills and manifests itself in the grace of the Son. Love is grace potentia; Grace is love actu,—just as Fatherhood itself is Sonship potential, and Sonship is Fatherhood actualized. When we have once seen all humanity perfected as son in Jesus Christ, it is not hard to see in Him the whole creation so perfected in man as its head and as heir of its destiny. And then still less hard is it to see how we could never have known God as Father if He had not so fulfilled and manifested Himself as Son.

The hesitation and reluctance to see all God, and highest God, not only in the humanity but in the deepest human humiliation of Jesus Christ, is part of the disposition to measure exaltation by outward circumstance and condition instead of by inward quality and character. We find it impossible to recognize or acknowledge God in the highest act of His highest attribute. We cannot listen to the thought that it is with God as it is with us, that it only is with us because it is with God, that self-humiliation is self-exaltation. Not only in this way do we refuse to know God Himself as love, but we refuse to understand the universe as love. If we would but surrender our reason as well as our heart and will to God in Christ, we should cease to prate as we do of the mystery and the incomprehensibility of things. We could see how our Lord could say of the cross itself, Father, the hour is come. Glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee. We lose thus the supreme lesson of human experience: Not merely to conjecture that somehow good is the final goal of ill; but to know by actual trial just how the supretest ills are the necessary steps to the highest goods. As St. Paul says, the cross of Christ is foolishness and a stumbling block only to the earthly wise and the self-righteous. To them that are saved, or are ever so little being saved, it is the wisdom of God and the power of God. To know God in Jesus Christ is to know the divine Logos, through whom alone God is knowable. It is to know him, not in His inferior activities of physical creation, nor yet in His higher capacity of lawgiver and law in a world of intelligent reason and free will. Rather is it to know Him in the act and process of that self-communication of love, grace, and fellowship, which is the basis and condition of the only real knowledge.

The third constituent of the Gospel is the fact in itself of the fellowship of the Spirit. Truly, our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. The possibility or potentiality of such a real unity and community with God must exist somehow beforehand in our nature as spirit, or in the natural relation of our finite spirits to the Father of spirits. But the actuality of spiritual relation or intercommunication which we call fellowship is no fact of nature but an act or interaction of spirits. It is not for us to say how, theoretically, spirit can act upon spirit; all that we can do is to understand how, practically and actually, spirit does act upon spirit. The most perfect expression of the actual action of the divine upon the human spirit is contained in the words, The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the sons of God. Let us assume the objectivity or truth in itself of the eternal Fatherhood that is to say, not only Father-relation but Father-spirit, love, will, purpose or predestination, etc. of God in Himself. Let us also assume
the objective reality as matter of fact of all that we have claimed to have
happened in Jesus Christ: viz., that in Him as Logos God revealed Himself
in the universe, and that in Him as Son God fulfilled Himself in human-
ity. In other words, let us assume that all that God is in Himself as Father
has evolved itself through nature and man in the universal and everlasting
Son-ship realized in Jesus Christ; God in Christ as Son is act in Himself as Father. When we have assumed all that body of objec-
tive truth the truth in itself of the Father and the Son what remains still to
make it the Gospel to ourselves? Undoubtedly something remains. All the
reality in the universe can be no Gospel to us so long as it remains objective,
or until it enters into living relation with ourselves. Of course, it can never
so enter unless there is in us the natural potentiality of entering into rela-
tion with it. But equally certainly that potentiality can only be actualized by
ourselves. What is necessary within ourselves to give effect to all that is true
without us is a corresponding response, or a response of correspondence, on
our part. That correspondence is, I repeat, not a fact of natural relationship,
but an act of spiritual communication or self-impartation. When the Spirit
bears witness with our spirit, that we are sons of God, it is not only God
who communicates the gracious fact, but it is God who awakens the humble
and grateful response, and puts it into our heart to say, Abba, Father. If
we cannot thus know God subjectively in ourselves, we cannot know God
objectively in Jesus Christ. And if we cannot know Him in His Word and by
His Spirit, we cannot know Him at all.

As we can know the eternal and universal Sonship incarnate in Jesus
Christ only in the perfection of the human sonship realized in Him in
other words, as we can know the Word or Son of God only in the man
Christ Jesus, so we can know the Spirit of God only in ourselves or in our
own spirit. We cannot know any spirit other than our own otherwise than
through a certain oneness or identity of it with our own. There must be both
an inter-penetration of the two as distinct and the identification of them
as one. Hence the common demand upon men to be of one spirit. What a
subject of reflection then, and of realization or actualization, is there for us
in the fact of our fellowship, our participation, with the Father and the Son
in the unity and identity of a common Spirit. It is in this eternal Spirit that
God Himself is God and is Love. It was in this eternal Spirit that the whole
creation in humanity offered itself without spot to God in the person of
Jesus Christ; and in that consummate act fulfilled His relation to it through
realizing its own relation with Him. It is through this eternal Spirit, which
is God’s and Christ’s and ours, that we pass from ourselves into Christ and
through Christ into God.

We have seen that there could have been no Gospel of God to us except
one of objective Word and subjective Spirit. All life is defined as internal
correspondence with external environment. We saw, I think, long ago that as
it is the function of the divine Word aptare Deum homini, so is it that of the
divine Spirit aptare hominem Deo. On the same line we may say, that as eterno
life is given to us in Jesus Christ to be received, so is it given to us by the
Holy Ghost to receive the life. Our Lord said of the promised Spirit, that its function should be to bring us to Him. There would be nothing to which to come if there were no objective fact and gift of life, there would be no coming to the life if there were no subjective preparing for and drawing to the life. How then finally does the Spirit fit us for Christ and fit us to Christ? It is the act and operation of the Spirit, first, that from the beginning, though yet a very far off, we can already know Christ as our own. That is the power of faith, which lives by God’s Word and takes what that says as though it were. To faith Jesus Christ is the divine, not only revelation but reality of itself from the beginning of the foreknowledge of God in the eternity of the past to the end of the predestination of God in the eternity of the future. To faith Jesus Christ is all the eternal love, the all-sufficient grace, the perfect fellowship or oneness-with-it of God, which is salvation ex parte Dei or salvatio salvans; and no less in Jesus Christ the perfection of our own faith, hope, and love, our own holiness, righteousness, and life, our own death to sin, and our own life to God, which is salvation ex parte hominis or salvatio salvata. The Spirit thus brings us first to a perfect correspondence of faith with the fact of our life of God in Christ. But just because faith means life, that is, knows, desires, wills, and intends it therefore it is it. God already imputes, as He will impart, and faith already appropriates, as it will possess, the life which is so believed in. So believing in it we have it already in faith, and as surely shall have it at last in fact. Attuned to Christ by the anticipatory spell of faith, hope, and love, we shall be by a natural process of spiritual assimilation transformed into His likeness in act, character, and life, until coming to see Him perfectly as He is we shall be wholly what He is.

It has not been my object to add to the solution of the speculative problem of the Trinity. I have only aimed to show practically and spiritually that if at all we are to know and worship God in reality as our God, we must do so as Christianity has always done in Trinity. We must worship God in the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Because God is, and is operative for us, not alone in one but in all these. We cannot but distinguish the Three; it is only in the completeness of their threefold operation that we can perfectly know the One.