

EDUCATION FOR MINISTRY

Reading and Reflection Guide

Volume C, 2023-2024



Living as Spiritually Mature Christians

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Living as Spiritually Mature Christians

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Acknowledgments

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

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

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

Karen M. Meridith, series editor
Executive Director of Education for Ministry
Sewanee, Tennessee
March 2023

About the Authors

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

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

Angela Hock Brewer considers herself a lifelong Episcopalian. A graduate of the University of Oklahoma, she has served as the Oklahoma Diocesan Chair for Lay Ministry and on the Diocese of Northwest Texas Commission on Ministry for Lay Ministry. Angela is a graduate of Education for Ministry and has served the program for many years as an EfM mentor and trainer.

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

Karen M. Meridith served as the Executive Director of Education for Ministry and Associate Director of the Beecken Center at the School of Theology of the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee from 2010 until 2023. Called to her position with the charge to re-envision and redesign the Education for Ministry curriculum, she was the managing editor for the four-volume EfM Reading and Reflection Guide series, a contributing writer, and responsible for selecting the textbooks used in the curriculum. A graduate of the University of South Carolina and Episcopal Divinity School, she is also a graduate of Education for Ministry and has served as a mentor in the Dioceses of Southern Virginia and Tennessee. Karen is an experienced educator and administrator, and has developed curricula and programming for Christian formation at local, diocesan, and national levels of the Episcopal Church.

Overview of the Year: Reading Assignments for Volume C 2023–2024

Notes

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

WEEK	UNIT	YEAR ONE COLLINS, YEE	YEAR TWO POWELL	YEAR THREE MACCULLOCH	YEAR FOUR FORD, MCINTOSH, SEDGWICK, PEACE
1	Introductory Meeting	Orientation and Organization	Orientation and Organization	Orientation and Organization	Orientation and Organization
2	Unit One Spiritual Autobiography and Listening	Common Reading: Spiritual Maturity	Common Reading: Spiritual Maturity	Common Reading: Spiritual Maturity	Common Reading: Spiritual Maturity
3		Collins: Preface Introduction 1 The Near Eastern Context 2 The Nature of Pentateuchal Narrative	Collins: What are Biblical Values? 1 Frames of Reference Ford: 2 A Right to Life?	Acknowledgements, Introduction 1 Greece and Rome	Ballard essay: On Being Theologically Literate, RRG Pt II, 182–190 Ford: 1 Introduction
4		Yee: Preface, Introduction	Collins: 3 The Bible and Gender 4 Marriage and Family 5 The Bible and the Environment 6 Slavery and Liberation	2 Israel	Ford: 2 Theology and religious studies
5		* Genesis 1–11 Collins: 3 The Primeval History The Priestly Creation Story RRG Pt II 191–208	Collins: 7 Violence and Zeal 8 Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible 9 Social Justice in the Shadow of the Apocalypse The Authority of the Bible	3 A Crucified Messiah	Ford: 3 Thinking of God

OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR: READING ASSIGNMENTS FOR VOLUME C 2023–2024

WEEK	UNIT	YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE	YEAR FOUR
6		* Genesis 12–50 Collins: 4 The Patriarchs	Powell: Preface 1 The NT Background: The Roman World 2 The NT Background: The Jewish World	4 Boundaries Defined	4 Living before God
7		* Exodus 1–15 Collins: 5 The Exodus from Egypt	Powell: 3 The New Testament Writings	5 The Prince: Ally or Enemy?	Ford: 5 Facing evil
8	Unit Two Theological Reflection as a Life Skill	Common Reading: Seeking Meaning	Common Reading: Seeking Meaning	Common Reading: Seeking Meaning	Common Reading: Seeking Meaning
9		* Exodus 16–40 Collins: 6 Revelation at Sinai	Powell: 4 Jesus 5 The Gospels	6 The Imperial Church	Ford: 6 Jesus Christ
10		* Leviticus * Numbers Collins: 7 Priestly Theology: Exodus 25–40, Leviticus and Numbers	*Matthew Powell: 6 Matthew	7 Defying Chalcedon: Asia and Africa	Ford: 7 Salvation
11		* Deuteronomy Collins: 8 Deuteronomy	*Mark Powell: 7 Mark	8 Islam: The Great Realignment	Ford: 8 Through the past to the present
12		Yee: 1 Character, Conflict, and Covenant in Israel's Origin Traditions	*Luke Powell: 8 Luke	9 The Making of Latin Christianity	Ford: 9 Experience, knowledge, wisdom 10 Theology for the third millennium
13		* Joshua * Judges Collins: 9 Joshua 10 Judges	*John Powell: 9 John	10 Latin Christendom: New Frontiers	Coakley essay: God as Trinity, RRG Pt II, 209–220
14	First Interlude Beyond a Binary God	Common Reading: Soughers, pages vii-73	Common Reading: Soughers, pages vii-73	Common Reading: Soughers, pages vii-73	Common Reading: Soughers, pages vii-73
15	First Interlude Beyond a Binary God	Common Reading: Soughers, pages 75-120	Common Reading: Soughers, pages 75-120	Common Reading: Soughers, pages 75-120	Common Reading: Soughers, pages 75-120
16	Unit Three Developing a Sustaining Spirituality	Common Reading: Prayer and Worship	Common Reading: Prayer and Worship	Common Reading: Prayer and Worship	Common Reading: Prayer and Worship
17		* 1 Samuel * 2 Samuel Collins: 11 First Samuel 12 Second Samuel	* The Acts of the Apostles Powell: 10 Acts	11 The West: Universal Emperor or Universal Pope?	McIntosh: 1 Mysteries of Faith 2 The New Encounter with God

WEEK	UNIT	YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE	YEAR FOUR
18		* 1 Kings * 2 Kings Collins: 13 First Kings 1–16 14 First Kings 17–2 Kings 25	Powell: 11 New Testament Letters 12 Paul Hyperlinks 11.3–11.5	12 A Church for All People?	McIntosh: 3 The Splendor of God 4 The Voice of God
19		Yee: 2 Intersections of Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality, and Nation	* Romans Powell:13 Romans	13 Faith in a New Rome	McIntosh 5 The Humanity of God
20		* Amos * Hosea Collins: 15 Amos and Hosea	* 1 Corinthians * 2 Corinthians 14 1 Corinthians 15 2 Corinthians	14 Orthodoxy: More Than an Empire	McIntosh: 6 The Glory of Humanity
21		* Micah * Isaiah 1–39 Micah, RRG Pt II 221–224 Collins: 16 Isaiah	* Galatians 16 Galatians	15 Russia: The Third Rome	McIntosh: 7 The Drama of the Cosmos
22	Unit Four Integrating Belief, Behavior, and Doctrine	Common Reading: Toward Wholeness in Knowing God	Common Reading: Toward Wholeness in Knowing God	Common Reading: Toward Wholeness in Knowing God	Common Reading: Toward Wholeness in Knowing God
23		* Jeremiah * Lamentations * Ezekiel Collins: 17 The Babylonian Era 18 Ezekiel	* Ephesians 17 Ephesians	16 Perspectives on the True Church	Sedgwick: Preface, Introduction, 1 Describing the Christian Life
24		* Isaiah 40–66 * Jonah, et. al Collins: 19 Additions to the Book of Isaiah 20 Postexilic Prophecy	* Philippians * Colossians 18 Philippians 19 Colossians	17 A House Divided	Sedgwick: 2 An Anglican Perspective
25		Yee: 3 The Challenge of Violence and Gender Under Colonization	* 1 Thessalonians * 2 Thessalonians 20 1 Thessalonians 21 2 Thessalonians	18 Rome’s Renewal	Sedgwick: 3 Incarnate Love
26		* Ezra * Nehemiah * 1 Chronicles * 2 Chronicles Collins: 21 Ezra and Nehemiah 22 The Book of Chronicles	* 1 Timothy * 2 Timothy * Titus * Philemon 22 The Pastoral Letters 23 Philemon	19 A Worldwide Faith	Sedgwick: 4 Love and Justice
27		* Psalms * Song of Songs 23 Psalms and Song of Songs	* Hebrews 24 Hebrews	20 Protestant Awakenings	Sedgwick: 5 The Practices of Faith 6 The Call of God Appendix

OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR: READING ASSIGNMENTS FOR VOLUME C 2023–2024

WEEK	UNIT	YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE	YEAR FOUR
28	Second Interlude The Cross and the Lynching Tree	Common Reading: Cone, pages ix-64	Common Reading: Cone, pages ix-64	Common Reading: Cone, pages ix-64	Common Reading: Cone, pages ix-64
29	Second Interlude The Cross and the Lynching Tree	Common Reading: Cone, pages 65-166	Common Reading: Cone, pages 65-166	Common Reading: Cone, pages 65-166	Common Reading: Cone, pages 65-166
30	Unit Five Vocation	Common Reading: A Mature Theology of Vocation	Common Reading: A Mature Theology of Vocation	Common Reading: A Mature Theology of Vocation	Common Reading: A Mature Theology of Vocation
31		*Proverbs * Job * Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth) 24 Proverbs 25 Job and Qoheleth	* James 25 James	21 Enlightenment: Ally or Enemy?	Peace, Rose, Mobley: Foreword Introduction 1 Encountering The Neighbor
32		*Ruth * Esther 26 The Hebrew Short Story	* 1 Peter * 2 Peter 26 1 Peter 27 2 Peter	22 Europe Re-enchanted or Disenchanted?	Peace, Rose, Mobley: 2 Viewing Home Anew 3 Redrawing Our Maps
33		*Daniel * 1 Maccabees * 2 Maccabees 27 Daniel, 1–2 Maccabees	* 1 John * 2 John * 3 John 28 Johannine Letters	23 To Make the World Protestant	Peace, Rose, Mobley: 4 Unpacking Our Belongings 5 Stepping Across the Line
34		*Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus) * Wisdom of Solomon 28 The Deuterocanonical Wisdom Books	* Jude 29 Jude	24 Not Peace but a Sword	Peace, Rose, Mobley: 6 Finding Fellow Travelers
35		Yee: 4 Affirming and Contradicting Gender Stereotypes Collins: 29 From Tradition to Canon	* The Revelation to John 30 Revelation	25 Culture Wars	Peace, Rose, Mobley: 7 Repairing Our Shared World
36	Final Meeting	Closing the Year	Closing the Year	Closing the Year	Closing the Year

About Online Resources

There are numerous internet resources for Bible study. One that EfM recommends is Bible Odyssey (<https://www.bibleodyssey.org/>). The site is free and requires no special login.

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

Collins:

https://ms.fortresspress.com/downloads/9781451472943_Studyguide_updated2015.pdf

Powell:

<http://bakerpublishinggroup.com/books/introducing-the-new-testament-2nd-edition/11940/students/esources>

MacCulloch:

<https://theology.sewanee.edu/files/resources/macculloch-study-guide-babb.pdf>

EfM website:

<https://theology.sewanee.edu/education-for-ministry/>

Note: efm.sewanee.edu will be redirected to the new address automatically.

Inclusiveness Policy

Education for Ministry

Education for Ministry is grounded in the Baptismal Covenant of the Episcopal Church. Communication in EfM seminars and training events will be consistent with respecting the dignity of every human being. EfM mentors and trainers are called to create an atmosphere in which participants may learn, network, and converse with colleagues in an environment of mutual respect.

An EfM seminar or training event does not seek to limit the areas of inquiry of its members or to curtail robust theological reflection. The aim is to contribute to the education of all participants through critical, experiential, and open inquiry and to contribute to the building of new cultures that genuinely respect and appreciate difference and diversity—whether differences are of class, gender, sexual orientation, race, nationality, age, disability status, language, or religious belief, or are epistemological, theological, or methodological in nature.

Everyone who participates in an EfM seminar or training event is entitled to an experience that is free from harassment, bullying, and intimidation, including any form of unwelcome sexual advances or contact, and any discrimination based on class, gender, sexual orientation, race, nationality, age, disability status, language, or religious belief. By attending, all participants accept the obligation to uphold the rights of all attendees and treat everyone with respect.

In EfM spaces we will respect the dignity of every human being by empowering and centering marginalized voices; by going beyond just recognizing differences to recognizing the power dynamics that result from difference; by working to disrupt those power differentials. To that end, one goal of an EfM seminar or training event is to avoid treating majority white, cisgender, heterosexual, middle class groups as more “universal” (either explicitly or implicitly) than any other group or somehow representing a neutral default. We also will consider contextual and structural issues when working with information and narratives from marginalized communities to show understanding of the structural issues faced by communities, rather than simply focusing on individual level factors.¹

March 2021

1. Adapted from the classroom policy of Dr. Sherry Hamby, Professor of Psychology at The University of the South.

PART I

The Guide



Week One: Orientation and Organization

ALL YEARS

Opening Worship

Beginning (and perhaps ending as well) with worship is the normal pattern for EfM seminars, and often group members will take turns leading the worship each week. Your mentor may have prepared or invited someone to prepare worship to lead in this session.

Another option is to use this form from the Anglican Church of Canada where EfM has had an affiliate program since the 1980s.

A Form of Prayer for Groups or Families²

1 The Preparation

Light a candle or candles on the table or in the worship area. The one who lights them says one of the following:

Leader God is our light and our salvation, and in his name we light these candles. May they remind us of the beauty of his truth and the radiance of his love. May our hearts be open to the light of Christ now and at all times.

All *Lord, in your mercy, let there be light.*

Or

Leader O God, you command a light to shine out of darkness. Shine in our hearts that we may be as lights in the world reflecting the glory of Jesus in our lives. All God is light and in him is no darkness.

All *Lord, in your mercy, let there be light.*

The Collect of the Day may then be said.

3 Praise

Here may follow a psalm, hymn, song, or instrumental music.

4 Readings

One or more passages of scripture may be read.

2. Reprinted from pages 687–693 of the *Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada*. ©1985 by the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada. Used with permission.

5 Response

Any of the following may follow the readings: silence, discussion of the scripture passage or theme of the day, reading of a related work of literature, telling of a related story, study of special material from the parish, diocese, or national Church, discussion of family concerns in the light of scripture or the theme of the day.

6 Intercession

Prayer may be offered for the Church . . . and all in authority, the world, the special needs of the group, those in need, and the departed. The following litany may be used, or a seasonal litany or other prayers; or individuals may offer their own prayers, silently or aloud.

Leader Let us pray together to the Lord, saying, “Lord, hear our prayer.”
All *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Leader Loving God, we thank you for your many gifts to us, for the love which brings us together, for the earth which provides for our needs, for the new life you have given us in Jesus Christ, (for . . .).
All *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Leader We pray to you for our Christian family (especially for . . .), [for all people of faith], and for grace to grow in your love.
All *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Leader We pray to you for our world, for all its cares and needs, and for all who lead us and care for us, (especially . . .).
All *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Leader We pray to you for those in need, for the sick and the lonely, for the hurt and the frightened, and for those who live without hope (especially . . .).
All *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Leader We pray for those we love who have died, that you will surround them with your care and love (especially . . .).
All *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Leader We pray for one another, asking you to bless us, our friends, and our relatives. Bless the places where we work, and bless our homes and our life together.
All *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Members of the [group] may wish to share in personal prayer. Then may be said,

Leader Let us remember before God our selfish ways, the things we have done wrong, the sorrows we have caused, the love we have not shown.

Silence for reflection is kept.

*All Most merciful Father,
forgive us our sins against you
and against each other.
Strengthen us to overcome our weaknesses,
that we may live in love
as you would have us live,
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.*

7 The Lord's Prayer

Leader As our Saviour taught us, let us pray,

*All Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.*

8 Conclusion

Leader Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." *Amen.*

Read

Welcome

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

In this first seminar meeting of the EfM year, the mentor(s) will distribute materials and lead the group in organizing the year and getting to know one

another. Between this meeting and the next, participants will prepare the assignments and exercises described in Week Two. Assignments are provided in a Read-Focus-Respond-Practice format that continues through the thirty-six meetings for the year. Notice that this first meeting also follows the Read-Focus-Respond-Practice format.

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

Take some time in this session to introduce yourselves to one another. The mentor will provide an “ice-breaker” or some other format for these initial introductions. Your group’s spiritual autobiographies will contribute to the relationships built in the course of the year together. The group will be setting community norms during this meeting. A suggested format is given below in the Practice section.

Core Practices in Education for Ministry

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

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

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

Living in Community

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

In EfM we begin the year by sharing a focused portion of our spiritual autobiographies. As we listen to one another we may find points of

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

Regular Prayer and Worship

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

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

Theological Reflection

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

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

Using EfM's process for theological reflection often feels awkward at first, yet few expect to be able to play a musical instrument proficiently or master an athletic pursuit without practice. The same is true for spiritual disciplines.

With sufficient practice in TR comes the ability to slip seamlessly into bringing the lens of faith to bear on any aspect of life, essential to aligning our behavior with what we say we believe. When faced with making an ethical choice, regular reflective practice can enable one to answer the question: “How do I know this is a faithful way?”

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

Study of the Christian Tradition

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

In addition, the Reading and Reflection Guides offer contextual themes that shape ministerial formation over four years, viewing the study of the Christian tradition through lenses of personal and global contexts for our ministry in daily life as we grow in spiritual maturity and live into the journey with God. The regular study of the Christian tradition in EfM forms a foundation for theological reflection in the service of faithful living.

Vocational Discernment

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

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

Responding to God’s call is shaped by the regular practice of attention to personal and community contexts. What are the needs of the community

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

Expectations

The Participants

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

There are some basic expectations of each participant:

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

The Mentor

The role of the mentor is crucial to the life of the group. The term “mentor” originates in Greek mythology. Mentor was a friend of Odysseus who remained in charge of his household while he was away. “Wisdom” in the form of Athena took shape in Mentor to be the guide and teacher of Telemachus. A teacher who guides is a description of an EfM mentor.

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

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

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

The Seminar Group

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

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

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

- There is time for social and spiritual needs to be addressed. This is a way to build trust, friendship, and community. It is an opportunity to support each other and maintain the freedom we all need to express our thoughts and feelings.
- There is time to discuss the materials which participants read in the texts. It is not a time for classroom presentations, rather an occasion to raise questions, wrestle with the materials, obtain clarifications, and generally share impressions about what has been read.
- There is an opportunity to engage in reflective activity. This may come in the form of a spiritual autobiography, one of many forms of theological reflections, studying and following a spiritual discipline, or exploring the meaning of the ministries we have.

The Program

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

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

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

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

What EfM Is NOT

- *EfM is not only Bible study.*
EfM participants study what the Bible says, but they also learn how to understand the Bible within its historical context and literary setting. Biblical studies form the primary work of the first two years. EfM is more than a Bible study in which one reads the Bible, seeks to understand it, and then applies it to daily life. EfM takes seriously God’s revelation through all of Christian tradition, from the earliest biblical messages, through the development of liturgy and theology, and even in the context of the challenges we face in our own times.
- *EfM is not a program in personal therapy or problem solving.*
While EfM groups develop a close community in order to delve deeply into matters of faith and theology, the group does not exist as a problem-solving agency or as a setting for analyzing or addressing personal and social problems. In an EfM group, members may wish to share various aspects of their lives, but EfM is not a place to probe or press individuals to talk about those things they would prefer to leave unexamined.
- *EfM is not a closed community.*
The content of EfM materials and the processes we use for reflection are not secrets. A group may invite a guest such as someone who brings some special information or someone who would like to participate for a session in order to decide if he or she might like to join. On the other hand, we do respect one another’s privacy. This means that we expect the group to maintain confidentiality about personal matters. The rule

of thumb is: secrets—no; privacy—yes. Participants may share with others what they have learned and how that was learned, but they are expected to retain in confidence specific personal aspects of their colleagues’ lives which may have been shared during the course of the program.

- *EfM is not an academic program leading to a degree or an ordination program.*
Local arrangements may permit EfM to become part of the work leading to a degree or to ordination, but the School of Theology of the University of the South makes no recommendations about ordination nor does it grant course credit for completing the Education for Ministry program.

The EfM Curriculum

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

Volume A: “Living Faithfully in Your World”

Volume B: “Living Faithfully in a Multicultural World”

Volume C: “Living as Spiritually Mature Christians”

Volume D: “Living into the Journey with God”

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

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

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

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

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

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

Terms in the EfM Curriculum

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Seminar Schedule

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

Focus

The Reading and Reflection Guide is provided to you by the program. You will need to purchase the two interlude texts for the year and assigned reading texts according to your level in the curriculum.

- **The Reading and Reflection Guide, Volume C, 2023-2024—"Living as Spiritually Mature Christians."**

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

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

- *Beyond a Binary God* by Tara K. Soughers
- *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* by James H. Cone

- **Texts for the assigned readings in the Christian tradition** provide a foundation in the study of the Bible and church history, and in the practice of viewing life experience and choices through a theological lens.

Years One and Two will need a Bible for reading assignments, and all participants will benefit from bringing a Bible to the seminar for use during theological reflection. The most recent Oxford Annotated edition of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is recommended, but any translation may be used as long as it includes the Apocrypha. A Bible with study notes is helpful. Paraphrased Bibles are not recommended for study.

- **Year One:** Two texts

A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible, 3rd ed. by John J. Collins.

The Hebrew Bible: Feminist and Intersectional Perspectives, edited by Gale Yee.

- **Year Two:** Two texts

Introducing the New Testament, 2nd ed. by Mark Allan Powell.

What Are Biblical Values?: What the Bible Says on Key Ethical Issues by John J. Collins.

- **Year Three:** *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* by Diarmaid MacCulloch.
- **Year Four:** Four texts
 - Theology: A Very Short Introduction* by David Ford.
 - Mysteries of Faith* by Mark McIntosh.
 - The Christian Moral Life: Practices of Piety* by Timothy F. Sedgwick.
 - My Neighbor's Faith: Stories of Interreligious Encounter, Growth, and Transformation* edited by Jennifer Howe Peace, Or N. Rose, and Gregory Mobley.

Respond

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

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

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

- The **Read** section lists the reading assigned for the week. Most of the time each year level will have its own separate reading assigned. Other times, at the beginning of a unit and during the Interludes, the reading assigned will be for all years together.
- The **Focus** section is specific to each year level's reading assignment and may include terms to define, topics or names to note, or a question regarding that week's study in light of the themes of the year and the particular unit.
- The **Respond** section poses an idea that all participants can relate to from the perspective of their own individual study for the week. Respond may provide a vehicle for seminar discussion, encouraging the connecting of personal responses to those of others in the group in relation to the theme of the year or unit.

- The **Practice** section provides participants a suggested practical application in connecting learning to daily life, including practicing skills for ministry such as listening or theological reflection between group meetings. Mentors may choose to use an individual theological reflection model from the week's Practice as a starting point for group theological reflection, giving participants opportunity to experience how group reflection and personal reflection on the same topic may both differ and complement each other. Personal theological reflection can help us to go deeper in our theological understanding as it draws on the four sources from our individual perspectives. Theological reflection in a group also offers depth through insights from varied perspectives as participants share from their own life experiences and differing cultural and social contexts. Each way of reflecting is important in shaping a whole life attuned to listening for and responding to God's call to us.

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

Practice

If you have not already made introductions, you may want to do so now. What would you like to share briefly to help other group members begin to get to know you? A suggested format for introductions and beginning the work of reflecting on becoming a spiritually mature Christian is below.

Our Stories: A Way to Deepen Personal Connections

The spiritual autobiography encouraged for this seminar year helps participants to notice what has shaped and continues to shape each person as we seek spiritual maturity. Beginning in the preparation for Week Two, each will have the opportunity to explore those life dimensions and decide what to share openly with the group at the agreed upon time.

Read the following excerpt from Unit One, Week Two (page 22):

Ambiguity abounds when describing spiritual maturity. A fully realized spiritual maturity—for Christians, attaining the “full stature of Christ”—is always just beyond our reach and thus continually eludes us. Spirituality's biblical etymology, rooted in words like “wind” and “breath,” increases its ambiguity exponentially. Spiritual maturity cannot be easily defined; however, it can be intimated and experienced. Phenomena associated with spiritual maturity

are best communicated through analogy, symbol, metaphor, and images—the “stuff” of poetry and the fine arts.

The format for the spiritual autobiography this year draws on the image of an artist’s palette. Over time an artist may add or change colors, adjusting the color range to suit a particular project or express a particular mood. Eventually many mature artists develop a personal palette of hues recognizable as distinctive in their work. In much the same way, the people, places, and life events of our personal history become a palette that colors the experience of our relationship with God.

Take a deep breath and center yourself in this place and time. Choose one color from your palette. Don’t overthink this, just go with a color that immediately comes to mind. Spend a few moments allowing this color to bring to mind a story about a person, place, or life event that connects in some way to your experience of God. This need not be an earth-shaking event. A simple story that says something about yourself and/or a piece of your life is fine. You will have the opportunity to share more extensively when you present your spiritual autobiography sometime in the next few weeks.

Using Mutual Invitation briefly share the color you identified and the story it brings to mind as part of your introduction to the group.

The Kaleidoscope Institute’s Mutual Invitation is recommended as a helpful process to use to make sure each person in the group is invited to share during these initial introductions as well as during check-in and times for group discussion through the year. A description of Mutual Invitation is on page 311 in Part II. The process is designed to facilitate conversation across cultural differences and may feel awkward at first but will become easier as you practice. The extension of a gracious invitation can do much to encourage each person in the group to share with greater ease.

Begin to set community norms by reading aloud the Kaleidoscope Institute’s Respectful Communication Guidelines on page 312 in Part II. Your mentor will facilitate the group in considering how these will form the foundation for your norms, as well as what you might need to add in order to help the group do its work as a learning community this year. You may want to review the norms you compose over several weeks before agreeing on a final set. Your group also may find it helpful to read the Respectful Communication Guidelines aloud at the beginning of each meeting, at least for the first several weeks of the year. Some groups do this every week to mark a safe space for sharing. You are encouraged to review your community norms periodically through the year to see if additions or changes need to be made. Everyone in the group should be willing to agree to abide by the norms you set together.

Finally, in the upcoming week prepare for your next meeting using the work assigned for Week Two. This will be the pattern for the year: Complete the assigned work in the week prior to the seminar meeting. Looking ahead will help you allow adequate time to complete the reflective work as well as

sometimes long reading assignments, a practice that will enhance your learning and your experience in EfM this year.

A Closing Prayer

All: Almighty God, you declare your glory and show forth your handiwork in the heavens and in the earth: Deliver us in our various occupations from the service of self alone, that we may do the work you give us to do in truth and beauty and for the common good. We ask this in the name of your Son as we daily strive to grow into the “full stature of Christ,” who lives and reigns with you and the Holy spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.³

3. Adapted from “For Vocation in Daily Work” on page 261 of *The Book of Common Prayer*.

UNIT ONE

Spiritual Autobiography and Listening



Week Two

ALL YEARS

Read

Spiritual Maturity: Living Authentically as an Adult Christian

Those who carry out the work of ministry in the world need support, guidance, knowledge, and vision. The Letter to the Ephesians offers one vision for Christianity, bringing the people of God “to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13b) To serve the world intentionally in Christ’s name means that each Christian needs to find a personal way into God’s incarnating actions that bring growth and maturity.

Human maturity has an elusive quality to it. By definition, *maturity* means full development. But there are so many aspects to human development—physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual—that its attainment across the spectrum is clearly beyond our reach. Indeed, with the possible exception of the physical, even a single dimension of maturity will ultimately elude us. We can always aspire to greater maturity; we can always entertain the possibility of more personal integration, more wisdom, more love of God. Maturity is a goal that has no defined end point.⁴

Through this year in EfM we will be considering what it means to be a spiritually mature Christian. As Neil Parent notes above, the term “maturity” is ambiguous in that it has several simultaneous meanings, each dependent on the context in which it is used. Adding the adjective “Christian” amplifies the ambiguity because there are variant expressions of Christianity.

To live as an adult Christian in today’s world requires, in part, striving for wholeness, acting wisely, assuming responsibility, and living authentically. Throughout the year the topics of adulthood, wisdom, integration, authenticity, and wholeness act as lenses to bring into focus a vision for living in the world as spiritually mature followers of Jesus Christ, especially for how that identity blossoms when nurtured and challenged by biblical, historical, theological, and ethical learning.

4. Neil A. Parent, ed., *Educating for Christian Maturity*, Department of Education, United States Catholic Conference (Washington, D.C., 1990), 1–3.

Ellen Wondra, professor of theology and ethics at Bexley-Seabury Seminary Federation in Chicago and editor of *The Anglican Theological Review*, gives a snapshot of the purpose of theological education:

There are at least 289 theological colleges, seminaries, training programs, and other institutions of theological education in the Anglican Communion worldwide. Two hundred and eighty-nine, according to the Anglican Communion office. All of them have a fundamental purpose in common, regardless of their widely varying curricula, pedagogies, constituencies, and resources: they are all dedicated to **“equip[ping] the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ”** (Eph. 4:12–13, emphasis added).⁵

The Education for Ministry Program is among those 289 theological learning enterprises and shares the purpose Wondra describes.

Spiritual maturity, like physical and emotional maturity, has a trajectory. “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face.” (1 Corinthians 13:11–12) But unlike physical maturity, which has a set and attainable final form, moving from spiritually childish to spiritually adult ways proceeds toward a goal that is striven for, but never fully attained. “For now we see in a mirror, dimly” applies to an understanding of Christian maturity. Christian adulthood, therefore, is an ideal for which one strives, knowing that goal—given the limitations and complexity of human life—is essentially never fully apprehended nor completely realized.

Dimensions of Maturity

The physical life has distinguishable development. As a person grows, physical growth progresses along predictable lines. An infant moves through measurable phases that indicate healthy progressions of maturity. The growth continues within significant measures that assure “normal” growth. However, exactly when full development occurs is somewhat elusive. A person tends to grow in height after other physical characteristics have reached the full physical potential. An eighteen-year-old male may reach sexual maturity before he has reached his full height. A female’s body reaches maturity sooner than a male body, indicating sexual differences impact physical maturity. Once the physical growth is completed the body continues to develop differently. Cultural and social standards shape what such physical aging means. Do the physical characteristics of a ninety-year-old person demonstrate maturity or an atrophying of maturity? How the question is answered depends in large part upon the ways in which a culture views youth, elders, and the cycle of life.

5. Ellen K. Wondra, “Editor’s Notes,” *Anglican Theological Review* 90:4 (2008), 689.

Feelings such as love, fear, joy, anger, delight, and frustration (along with many other feelings) comprise one's emotional life. How a person lives within the realm of emotions discloses the degree of emotional maturity. An emotionally mature person understands and manages her/his emotions in ways that result in behavior and attitudes that contribute positively to a situation.

What does it mean to be intellectually mature? If mature means fully grown, questions immediately surface. Is a person's intelligence a fixed aptitude throughout life? Or is it developed in stages? Is intelligence an ability that has meaning only in given circumstances? Further, are there multiple intelligences, such as described by Howard Gardner?⁶ If so, does each kind of intelligence develop or are they innate givens? Intellectual maturity points to an individual's competence in reasoning, creating, deciding, and applying in ways that convey an in-depth understanding of areas of interest. Within the arena of Christian ministry a person demonstrates intellectual maturity as one reflects carefully and critically within life situations in ways that increase and enhance the ability to discern God's self-revelation and action.

Social maturity refers to how a person relates to other people. Cultural norms establish a proper way to relate to other people whether they are family, friends, neighbors, acquaintances, or strangers, and individuals are socialized to function responsibly within the standards and norms of that particular society. A socially mature person recognizes that different cultures, communities, organizations, and families have differing practices that govern acceptable behavior. Social maturity refers to the ability to participate with integrity while in different social settings.

Ambiguity abounds when describing spiritual maturity. A fully realized spiritual maturity—for Christians, attaining the “full stature of Christ”—is always just beyond our reach and thus continually eludes us. Spirituality's biblical etymology, rooted in words like “wind” and “breath,” increases its ambiguity exponentially. Spiritual maturity cannot be easily defined; however, it can be intimated and experienced. Phenomena associated with spiritual maturity are best communicated through analogy, symbol, metaphor, and images—the “stuff” of poetry and the fine arts.

The markers of physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual maturity occur throughout life. The dimensions of maturity are interrelated yet they develop independently. Physical maturity does not guarantee emotional maturity. A person may demonstrate intellectual development beyond his or her age, yet remain socially immature. The expression “this child has an old soul” suggests that progress toward spiritual maturity may show within any developmental stage. In addition, maturity has a fluid quality that can appear to come and go. Clichés such as “second childhood” or “mid-life crisis” intimate a dynamic quality of maturity that progresses and regresses.

6. For information on the theory of multiple intelligences see Howard Gardner, *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 2000).

Christian Maturity

The measure of Christian maturity weaves together all of the above dimensions of maturity in relation to an understanding of Jesus as the model of the fully mature human.

Every age and culture must apply the model of Jesus to its own times and circumstances. The question of what constitutes Christian maturity must be answered afresh by each generation. What first-century Christians in Antioch thought about being Christ-like would be vastly different from those in pre-Reformation Europe or from those of us in the United States at the close of the twentieth century. Christians in every era and location seek to model Christ out of their own experiences of the world, with their different needs and responsibilities, with their vastly different self-concepts.⁷

Through this year together in EfM we will be using a conceptual framework that guides the application of “the model of Jesus” to our own times and circumstances. Each of the five units of the *Guide* contributes to the building of an authentic, adult Christian faith.

Mature followers of Christ strive to live authentically within all levels of life. Practical theologian Johannes Van der Ven names three levels sociologists have used for analyzing human behavior: the micro level refers to the individual’s specific and peculiar circumstances; the meso level is the communal and institutional dimensions of living; the macro level includes global pluralities.⁸ These three levels help create a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning of coming to “the full stature of Christ.”

At the **micro level**, the personal or individual level, particularities shape the meaning and values that make each person distinctive. The specific time and place of birth, DNA makeup, and other individual distinguishing characteristics work together and contribute to the uniqueness of each person while particular persons, actions, events, and physical experiences shape an individual’s identity. Each individual encounters persons who model what it means to be an adult. Wisdom figures, whether known through direct relationships or encountered within the literature of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, also are formative. Further, cultural activities and events communicate values in each decade of a person’s life, introducing figures, experiences, and ideas that convey notions of maturity. Often, developing an understanding of what it means to be an adult comes through negative as well as positive experiences.

Human beings are individuals, yet much more. Each person has a corporate identity fashioned by the givens of the individual life mediated through institutions and social patterns. When a person is viewed at the **meso level**, the communal dimension of human nature comes to center

7. Parent, *Educating for Christian Maturity*, 3.

8. Johannes Van der Ven, *Education for Reflective Ministry* (Louvain/Grand Rapids: Peeters/Eerdmans 1998), 11–13.

stage. Institutions—family, religion, school, government, business, among others—help produce the self that is “we.” It is important to attend to the institutional realities of a particular society, for they reveal the influential factors that form a person’s assertions about reality. Directives that come in the form of “should, must, and ought” shape the moral environment of a person’s life. Viewing life from the standpoint of the meso level highlights the contours of a community’s ethical geography.

At the **macro level** is a person’s global, planetary context situated in the greater physical universe. Satellite technology that can picture the entire planet astonishes us with a sudden view of the macro level of life. Social media graphically illustrates that humans live within a global, interrelated reality while instant communication through mobile technology helps bring the macro level into nearly constant awareness. Earthquakes along the Pacific Rim affect daily life across the globe. Wars and the refugees they produce contribute to devastating conflicts in the intercultural fabric of the human family. Environmental concerns are heightened as a person sees our blue planet against the black background of interstellar space and realizes that viewing the earth from outer space is in actuality a long view in which all the particularities of day to day life exist. In less than a minute, a person with the Google Earth app on a smart phone can experience all the levels of human experience that Van der Ven describes.

The concept of micro, meso, and macro dimensions of life can be a useful tool for forming a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of Christian maturity. With greater clarity about how values, assumptions, and desires shape the world at the individual, institutional, and global levels comes greater ability to envision what being intentional about growing into “the full stature of Christ” looks like in daily life.

Listening as a Way into Christian Maturity

Tucked away within the United States Department of State website is a resource written to help adolescent international students handle stress. In the chapter on communication the authors introduce “active listening”:

The most common problem in communication is not listening! A Chinese symbol for “To Listen” is shown below. It is wise beyond the art. The left side of the symbol represents an ear. The right side represents the individual—you. The eyes and undivided attention are next and finally there is the heart.

“TO LISTEN”

Ear

Ear

Eyes

Undivided
Attention

Heart

This symbol tells us that to listen we must use both ears, watch and maintain eye contact, give undivided attention, and finally be empathetic.⁹

Deep listening requires the convergence of ears, eyes, and heart in undivided attention. Anyone who has been given undivided attention knows the power of that level of listening. A person who desires to be heard, especially about a heartfelt matter, experiences such listening as a profound service. To listen with undivided attention opens the door for ministry.

Listening as a skill can be learned and practiced, but listening also is an attitude—a way of being in the world.

The ability to listen depends not in the first place on any particular skill or technique, but on a fundamental respect for one's partner in conversation. Listening is thus a moral act. Listening is an act of attending to the other that discloses the strangeness of otherness, disrupting our comfortable self-images and threatening to undo our everyday experience of ourselves (and others) as familiar and basically unified personalities. Not listening becomes a way of securing ourselves from encounter with the mystery of otherness. Listening exposes us to our own desires not to want to share of ourselves. Listeners are required not only to welcome the strangeness of the other but to risk self-disclosure in the act of listening, for the listener must at some point recognize and then expose to the other his or her own strangeness—and not only to the other but to one's own self.¹⁰

As emotional and spiritual maturity deepen, a person increases in the capacity and willingness to be present with another in silence. The ability to listen attentively extends beyond the other person; it increases the propensity to listen to oneself as well. The combination of listening attentively to self and others in turn increases the disposition to listen for God. Other virtues, such as patience and humility, grow as well.

Seeking Christian maturity demands our moving toward wholeness, exploring how to act wisely, becoming more willing to accept responsibility and to live authentically and gracefully. Listening deeply and attentively is foundational for living authentically with others and cultivating relationships that guide one through the complexities of human behavior.

A person cannot listen to everything at once and therefore listening is selective. Listening also requires focus that attends to specifics. We listen to and listen for different things when we give our attention to someone or something, and so the listening experience operates on multiple levels. While attending to another the listener may notice comments and emotional nuances that are applicable to her or his own individual life.

9. Henry J. Nicols and Susan M. Baum, *Tool Kit for Teens: A Guide for Helping Adolescents Manage Stress for American-Sponsored Overseas Schools*, Overseas Schools Advisory Council (Washington, D. C.: Department of State, 2003).

10. Lloyd Steffen, "The Listening Point," *Christian Century*, November 21–28, 1990, 1087.

Listening requires interpretation and each situation shades what is heard. Communication happens contextually, at Van der Ven’s micro, meso, and macro levels. Listening involves attending to the individual characteristics and style of another’s self-expression. The tenor of the voice, facial expression, and gestures comprise a specific medium of communication on the micro level of experience. A person speaks with an accent from a distinct culture or environment, using vocabulary and idioms from a larger cultural context shared by ethnic groups at the meso level of experience. At the same time, on the macro level, the big picture context of nation or hemisphere always plays in the background. National and global realities influence how one interprets and understands issues in the two other levels, individual (micro) and institutional (meso).

Ministry matures as the attitude and skill of listening integrate the three contextual levels into the interactive process of communication. Wholeness, authenticity, and wisdom have room to grow as people become attuned to the macro, meso, and micro levels present in every conversation. As a person knows more about the Christian heritage, cultural realities, and personal beliefs and experience, the potential for ministry matures.

Lloyd Steffen, chaplain at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania, who has spent years in helping young adults grow into maturity, believes that the wise listener listens from a theological perspective.

We are in need of a theology of listening, for a willingness to listen ultimately expresses an attitude of love. Christians believe that Jesus listened to God and to those he encountered in his daily life. We do neither. If we listened to one another we should be inviting one another into new forms of relationship based on openness and respect and a willingness to share ourselves. If we listened for God, we should spend our time not praying for ourselves but listening to our prayers to see what we are saying not to God but to ourselves. The heart is a great mystery. Christians believe that God knows the human heart (and we do not), for that heart is where God’s omniscience lies. God does not need to be informed about our wants and needs. It is we who need to know what we want, what we fear, what we love.

Ultimately, listening for God is like listening to one’s own self, and that is no easy task. Listening for God requires the kind of listening to the self that makes up any moment of confession and self-examination. Listening for God requires that we learn to be critical of ourselves, since so much of what we want interferes with what our religious traditions tell us God wants, which is simply that we love one another and trust that the spirit of God shall be with us. For the listening point is what Jesus wanted for us—that place where “they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn for me to heal them” (Matt. 13:15).¹¹

Anglican theologian David Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity at the

11. Ibid., 1088.

University of Cambridge, advocates expanding “doing theology” beyond the dominant voices that issue affirmations of “right belief” and directives of “right action”:

One caricature of theology is as a neat, unquestioning package of dogma in which there are affirmations that say “Believe this!” and commands that say “Do this!” That is theology in what grammarians call the indicative and imperative moods. These are in fact the dominant moods of a great deal of theology, and they are as vital to theology as they are to life. A man and woman getting married are right to exchange basic affirmations: “I do,” “I will.” A fire-fighter at a blaze is right to order: “Clear the building!” But affirmations and commands by themselves do not make for good theology any more than they do for good living. Before the marriage comes the mutual questioning, the exploration of whether it is the right move, and above all the discernment of whether the desires of each are sufficiently in harmony. After marriage there are (one hopes) years of living out the promises, with a great deal of further questioning, experimental trial and error, and the further shaping and education of desires. The fire-fighter’s order is not arbitrary, but comes from years of training, practice drills, and experience, learning to ask the relevant questions and to take decisions after assessing situations in line with the overarching goal of saving lives.

Likewise in Christian theology: there are endless questions to be asked as minds and hearts are stretched in trying to do justice to the wonder of God and God’s relationship to all creation—past, present, and future. There is an overarching desire for God and the purposes of God. Between the questioning and the desiring, and weaving into them in fascinating, ever-new ways, are the experiments with possibilities, the affirmations of truths and commitments, and the imperatives that guide judgments and decisions.¹²

Questions, especially those that dare enter the deep of human consciousness, explore “the wonder of God” to uncover and cultivate humanity’s yearnings. Desiring and inquiring, seeking to do justice to wonder and holiness, open avenues into experimenting with “fascinating, ever-new ways” to know God. Exploring possibilities encourages emerging practices that uncover and affirm truths and commitments. Imperatives, grounded in secured affirmations, enliven faith that embraces the maturing mind, heart, and soul of individual and communal life. Humankind’s triad of perspectives (individual, institutional, and globally inclusive) magnifies theological insight and awareness so that Christians can more fully encompass maturity and wisdom.

Ford’s approach to theology offers a possible framework for developing a balanced theology of spiritual maturity as an adult Christian.

- **Desires**—interests that an individual holds

What do you long or yearn for?

12. David F. Ford, *The Future of Christian Theology* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 68.

- **Questions**—inquiries that are raised and that motivate and guide increased learning
What do you wonder about or doubt?
- **Explorations**—experiments available for “hands on” practical experience
What possibilities do you want to explore or test?
- **Affirmations**—positions held as true and that are valued
What are you coming to believe or affirm?
- **Imperatives**—commands that call for action
What should, ought, or must you do?

Throughout the coming weeks, one or more of these lines of thought will guide the formation of knowledge and action in seeking a way to “the full stature of Christ.”

Focus

Terms and names to note: physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual dimensions of maturity; micro, meso, and macro levels

Respond

What connections did you make to the ideas presented in this week’s Read and Focus sections?

Note questions raised and affirmations discovered.

Consider and write about how you listen for God’s presence, and what gets in the way of your doing that.

In the seminar meeting, responding to and reflecting on reading assignments must be done on a limited basis so that all participants have time to contribute. For this reason giving a “book report” is discouraged. A more helpful way to summarize learning from your study across the weeks each year is to use this ABCD schema:¹³

A	B	C	D
What amazed you or gave you an “aha!” moment in this week’s study?	What bothered you in this week’s study?	What confused you?	What delighted you?

Practice

Constructing a Spiritual Autobiography

Note: The Education for Ministry program is based in the Christian tradition and generally the participants are part of that tradition, though representing a variety

13. Offered by an Oklahoma mentor, Lauri Wilson, during mentor training in 2013 and refined by other mentors in a conversation in *Reflections*, an online forum for mentors hosted by the EfM administration.

of denominations. However, sometimes other faith traditions may be represented in a seminar group, or group members may have been part of other traditions in the course of their spiritual journeys. This spiritual autobiography format makes room for the possibility of including other expressions of faith.

Before beginning the assignment, please read “Spiritual Autobiographies—Some Guidelines” on pages 224–225 in Part II of this Reading and Reflection Guide. It is expected that every participant in EfM will share a portion of her or his spiritual autobiography each year. Your mentor will work with the group to construct a schedule for presenting spiritual autobiographies, usually spread across several weeks of seminar meetings.

- Imagine the metaphor of an artist’s palette to represent your experience of maturing in faith.
- Name the “colors” that have gone into your personal maturing process: the people, events, resources, locations, and so forth that have been part of personal growth in knowing God.
- Colors can represent various moods and levels of energy. Try assigning an actual color to each of the people and circumstances that you identify.
- Identify when each color was added. Note how that person or circumstance or resource played a part in a personal journey of faith maturity.
- “Mix” your palette/life by writing about the desires you have felt in relationship to God, the things you have tried, the questions you have raised, the affirmations and commitments of faith you have made, and the imperatives for action and decisions that you hold.
- An artist creates with a result in mind, a finished product at the end—a picture, a weaving, a sculpture. However, in the work of maturing in a relationship with God, the creative process itself may be more important than achieving an end. What do you think?
- What picture or sculpture or other work of art would represent your journey of maturing faith?

Alternate Format for Sharing Spiritual Autobiographies

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

Use Mutual Invitation (see page 311 in Part II of the *Guide*) and allow a brief silence before inviting the next person to share. Each participant answers the framing question or prompt in about three minutes. There is no cross talk. After everyone has had a turn, the mentor leads the whole group in a closing prayer of thanksgiving for the gifts shared.

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

Any color(s) can be assigned to any question. Your association of color and experience is what is important. In each case you may wish to share the color you assigned to the story and reason(s) for doing so.

- Week One: Share a story about a desire you have or have had for your relationship with God.
- Week Two: Share a story about how a person or event contributed to your maturing in faith.
- Week Three: Share a story about questions that have had an impact on your maturing in faith.
- Week Four: Share a story about an imperative you have experienced as you work toward maturing in your relationship with God.
- Optional Week Five: Bring in a picture of a work of art that represents your journey of maturing faith. Set all the pictures up around the room for a silent “gallery walk.” Notice and give thanks for the rich variety of individual journeys in your group.

Week Three

A Reminder about Online Resources

As you begin the readings in the Christian tradition, remember that there are numerous internet resources for Bible study. One that EfM recommends is Bible Odyssey (<https://www.bibleodyssey.org/>). The site is free and requires no special login.

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

Collins:

https://ms.fortresspress.com/downloads/9781451472943_Studyguide_updated2015.pdf

Powell:

<http://bakerpublishinggroup.com/books/introducing-thenew-testament-2nd-edition/11940/students/esources>

MacCulloch:

<https://theology.sewanee.edu/files/resources/macculloch-study-guide-babb.pdf>

EfM website:

<https://theology.sewanee.edu/education-for-ministry/>

Note: efm.sewanee.edu

will be redirected to the new address automatically.

About Electronic Books

All of the books used in EfM are available for purchase in e-book formats. EfM provides free e-book files for the Reading and Reflection Guide each year. Instructions for accessing and downloading these texts will be provided in EfM News (the electronic newsletter) as the program year begins in September.

About Reading Theological Works and Interlude Texts

Reading theological books may be a new experience for some participants. Most of us are accustomed to reading in our daily lives specifically for information and in small pieces, and more and more many of us read only from sources—especially in social media—that are curated for a narrow viewpoint.

A theological text is meant to be part of a conversation. There is no need to accept the author's every assertion as gospel, nor to throw the book at the wall simply because it challenges your viewpoint.

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

If a book challenges you—or you wish to challenge its author—reflect on what is so challenging to you. Reflect on what feelings that challenge evokes. How would you answer the author if the assertion(s) you find disturbing or respond to negatively were said in your presence? (If it helps, keep in mind that the author is also a Child of God!) Practice self-awareness. Focusing the discussion on stylistics, grammar, or things you consider editorial shortcomings may be a way of deflecting a conversation away from assertions or ideas that you find challenge some of your long-held positions. Write in your book (gasp!), make notes, come back over and over to see if you are able to find another way into what the author is sharing.

If you find yourself nodding in agreement with or finding new insights from what the author is saying, what can you share with the group that illuminates how the book resonates with your positions and/or life experience? What will you do with any new insights? And reflect, reflect, reflect. How can you put these words, the ones that challenge as well as the ones that resonate or inform, into conversation with your life and your theology? What are the implications for your ministry in daily life?

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

As postcolonial scholar Kwok Pui Lan frequently reminds her students: A hermeneutic of suspicion should be balanced with a hermeneutic of compassion.

An ancient author, or even one from more recent centuries, is writing to a particular audience, one that may not share your worldview or use your vocabulary. Nonetheless, an author from the long tradition of Christian witness can speak to us across the centuries with insights for faithful living today.

Above all, in the interest of ongoing formation as theologians, we ask you to avoid simply dismissing a book you find difficult. This applies to the general reading texts in the curriculum as well as the interlude texts. If we read only works we already agree with, where is the possibility for growth?

About the Reading Assignments

In various weeks throughout the year there may be long reading assignments in the Reading and Reflection Guide as well as in your textbooks. The practice of looking ahead can help you plan time to comfortably complete each assignment. While those in Years Two and Four have plenty to read, we acknowledge that Years One and Three have the heavier lift due to the requirements for covering two-thirds of the Christian Bible in the case of Year One and the whole of church history (so far) in the case of Year Three. Year One. While we hope you will be able to read all of each assignment to get the full sweep of the biblical canon, we acknowledge that reading a substantial portion of the Hebrew scriptures makes for a heavy reading schedule. Please think about what you need to do in order to provide enough time for your preparation. For example, if you have a long commute each day or if you are someone who enjoys audiobooks, you might consider listening to an audio version of the biblical passages assigned.

Some weeks it may be very difficult to get all the work done. If you find yourself pressed for time, consider these options:

- Be aware that it is not necessary to read every assignment deeply. Skimming is acceptable, especially helpful in the long rehearsals of laws or repetitious accounts of tribal history. Read for the sweep of the story without laboring over details.
- Focus on the passages listed in parentheses at the end of each reading assignment. If this is all you have time for, these passages will give you a basic experience of this particular part of the biblical narrative.

As much as we want participants to have an encounter with the Bible in Years One and Two that will be foundational for theological reflection, we also want you to remember that this does not have to be your only or last encounter with that text. Ongoing critical study, reading and hearing the words in liturgy, and spending time in devotional attention to scripture all will contribute to your understanding over years to come.

Year Three. These will also have a heavy reading schedule as MacCulloch covers how the Four Gospels were carried to the four corners of the earth in each time period. Again, read for the sweep of the story and try not to worry about details. Since you get to keep the book, you will have opportunities later to go back and dig into specific chapters where you might have deeper interest. You might consider purchasing *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* in audiobook format, (available through Audible.com) if you want to be able to listen while commuting or walking or washing the dishes. Also, a six-part video miniseries from the BBC entitled *A History of Christianity* features MacCulloch speaking on key themes from the book (although it does not track exactly with the chapters and so is not a substitute for the reading).

Your local or diocesan library may have the set on DVD. Many participants in Year Three have found watching the BBC series helpful to their general understanding of church history.

Remember the ABCD schema for presenting your thoughts on the reading assignment:

A	B	C	D
What amazed you or gave you an “aha!” moment in this week’s study?	What bothered you in this week’s study?	What confused you?	What delighted you?

YEAR ONE

Read

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

Some EfM participants have observed at the end of their first year that they wished they had read Collins’ Chapter 29 at the beginning of the year. It is very brief. If you wish to read it now, do so. Note how this chapter provides a context for reading the ancient writings of the Hebrew Bible today.

Focus

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

“Critical” does not mean debunking scripture, and it does not mean proving its truth. Religious people should and will find truth in their scriptures, but they may also be interested to learn something about where their scripture came from, who wrote it, and how editors collected it for them to read.

Through this year you will be reading nearly the whole of the Hebrew Bible as well as two texts that will offer important interpretive perspectives to your understanding of the Hebrew Bible. John Collins’ *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (Third Edition)* is a widely used, acclaimed textbook that provides an overview of current biblical scholarship through a historical-critical lens. If you have been accustomed primarily to devotional Bible study, Collins’ approach may feel strange to you, but foundational to the EfM curriculum is that learning about the origins of the Bible as a text provides a needed context for deeper engagement with its contents in reflection and future study. Gale Yee’s *The Hebrew Bible: Feminist and Intersectional Perspectives* is intended to supplement standard introductions to the Hebrew Bible by offering commentary from contemporary female biblical scholars. In addition to a brief historical look at feminist and intersectional biblical scholarship in general, the book offers essays, corresponding to each of the standard divisions used in Collins’ survey, that explore feminist and intersectional concerns raised by the biblical narrative. You may find yourself challenged by the essays in this collection. If you are new to reading scholarly work, the Kwok essay noted above may help you find your place in the conversation.

Note: Next week, the Introduction to the Yee text is long, setting the background for a better understanding of the development of feminist biblical scholarship and defining important terms. Plan ahead to allow time for this important foundational information.

YEAR TWO

Read

Collins, “What Are Biblical Values?”; 1 “Frames of Reference”; 2 “A Right to Life?”

Focus

Terms and names to note: values; textual foundationalism; biblical foundationalism; biblical authority; ethical interpretation; historical meaning; biblical law; descriptive vs. prescriptive; inner-biblical priorities and modern sensibilities; the frameworks of creation, covenant, and eschatology; models of creation; creationism; allegorizing; crypto-science; covenantal nomism; apocalyptic worldview; anthropocentric; theocentric

What in these chapters is new information for you?

YEAR THREE

Read

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

Focus

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

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

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

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

and Far East; and the Eastern Orthodoxies of Byzantium empires.

What is gained or lost in such an approach?

Name desires, experiments, questions, affirmations and/or imperatives that MacCulloch's discussion raised for you (refer to Week Two, pages 27–28, to refresh your understanding of the terms “desires, experiments,” and so forth).

YEAR FOUR

Read

Ballard, “On Being Theologically Literate” on pages 182–190 in Part II of this Reading and Reflection Guide; and Ford, Chapter 1, “Introduction: theology and the religions in transformation”

Focus

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

Over the next several weeks, you will be reading two different texts and an essay on the work of doing theology. David Ford's *Theology: A Very Short Introduction*, begun this week, examines the basic questions that arise when thinking about God and centers an understanding of God in worship. Sarah Coakley's essay, “God as Trinity: An Approach Through Prayer,” proposes that we can best experience the wholeness of the triune God in personal and corporate prayer. Mark McIntosh's *Mysteries of Faith* explores Christian doctrines using a central image of relationship. These works are very different from one another, yet each in its way offers a practical approach, a way of examining and constructing our own theologies centered in practice. As you read, notice how each author handles core theological concepts, such as the nature of God, the divine/human nature of Jesus Christ, the Trinity, the question of evil, the relationship of creation to creator, and other theological questions that may occur in the course of doing your own work in theology. It may help to keep a journal in which you can consider these questions over the weeks spent on these texts.

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



ALL YEARS**Respond****Group Life**

Any type of group proceeds through identifiable phases of maturing, whether the group is constituted for a short or long term. A group's life begins, deliberately or otherwise, with the work of getting to know one another, of finding a place among people who may or may not already know one another—Inclusion. Then there is a period of determining what authority each person has in the group, how each can contribute to the life of the group, how differences are responded to—Control. As those phases are successfully accomplished, people begin to have a sense of support and care for another, to feel good about one another and how things are going—Affection.

Inclusion

Control

Affection

As the life of a group draws to completion, such as nearing the end of a seminar year, the phases work in reverse, with questions such as how will we stay in touch (Affection), what needs to happen to continue the group in the future (Control), and who will be back, graduate, or be added (Inclusion).

Read “Issues in the Life of a Seminar Group” and “Activities that Nurture Group Life” in Part II of this Guide, pages 303–307, for a fuller explanation.

Consider how the Inclusion phase is being addressed in your seminar group.

Identify how your participation in EfM could support your own maturing in the knowledge and love of God.

Practice

Continue to work on a spiritual autobiography that identifies the “colors” of your life as you have matured in faith.

Week Four

Remember the ABCD schema for presenting your thoughts on the reading assignment:

A	B	C	D
What amazed you or gave you an “aha!” moment in this week’s study?	What bothered you in this week’s study?	What confused you?	What delighted you?

YEAR ONE

Read

Yee, Preface and Introduction: Definitions, Explorations, and Intersections

Focus

Terms and names to note: feminism; ideological criticisms; first wave feminists; second wave feminists; sexism; sex/gender system; postmodernism; queer theory; intersectionality; “matrix of domination”; “heterogeneity, hybridity, multiplicity”; postcolonial feminism; *The Woman’s Bible*; “depatriarchalizing the Bible”; traditional vs. feminist interpretations of Eve; “texts of terror”; *The Women’s Bible Commentary*; deconstructive criticism; gender criticism; womanist criticism; Kimberlé Crenshaw; Mary Wollstonecraft; Betty Friedan; Mary Daly; Judith Butler; Combahee River Collective; Audre Lorde; Elizabeth Cady Stanton; Sojourner Truth; Phyllis Trible; Musa Dube

Note the students’ questions on page viii. Are any of these questions that you also wonder about? Which questions surprise or challenge you? What questions of your own would you add?

Yee writes:

The historical and literary criticisms reveal that the Hebrew Bible is mainly the work of elite men. Although they were only a tiny minority of the population of ancient Israel, their upper-class male sociohistorical and religious imprints are dominant and normative throughout the text. Furthermore, biblical scholars and religious interpreters of the bible, such as clergy, have primarily been male. Thus the composition of the biblical text as well as its interpretation throughout the ages tends to focus on male interests and ideologies.¹⁴

What has been your own understanding of feminism? What messages about feminism have you encountered in the culture/society around you?

14. Gale A. Yee, ed., *The Hebrew Bible: Feminist and Intersectional Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), 17–18.

What might a consideration of feminist questions and interpretations contribute to a maturing spiritual life?

After this introduction, each of the essays in this book correspond to a particular division in the Collins text. Think back over what you have recently read in Collins as you consider the perspective each essay offers.

YEAR TWO

Read

Collins, 3 “The Bible and Gender”; 4 “Marriage and Family”; 5 “The Bible and the Environment”; and 6 “Slavery and Liberation”

Focus

Terms and names to note: Levitical Holiness Code; natural vs. unnatural; bride-price; dowry; Damascus Document (Dead Sea Scrolls); androcentric vs. misogynistic; celibacy; sabbatical laws; panentheism; Liberation Theology; Diaspora; slavery laws; household codes; Paul’s slavery metaphor; Carol Meyers; Phyllis Trible; Elizabeth Shüssler Fiorenza; Lynn White, Jr; Moses Stuart; Frederick Douglas

What in these chapters is challenging to you?

YEAR THREE

Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 2, “Israel”

Focus

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

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

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

the life and experience of an individual and a group; this is salvation history—history that tells the story of God’s work of redemption.

Reflect on how that concept of salvation history resonates in your life.

YEAR FOUR

Read

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

Focus

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

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



ALL YEARS

Respond

List the favorite stories you have heard or read in your life. Include movies and plays as well as books.

What is similar across the list?

What values seem to be consistent in those stories?

What stories have you rejected?

Practice

Listening

Listen to the stories around you during the week, stories you might hear from your family, friends, your coworkers, and people in stores you frequent. What concerns are expressed? What hopes do you hear?

How do you discern truth in what you hear?

Week Five

Remember the ABCD schema for presenting your thoughts on the reading assignment:

A	B	C	D
What amazed you or gave you an “aha!” moment in this week’s study?	What bothered you in this week’s study?	What confused you?	What delighted you?

YEAR ONE

Read

Genesis 1–11 (Genesis 1–3, 6–9)
Collins, Chapter 3, “The Primeval History”
“The Priestly Creation Story” essay provided in Part II of this Guide, pages 191–208.

Note: EfM suggests reading the assignments in the Bible before reading the commentary, then your own experience of reading the text can be brought into conversation with what the scholar has to offer in interpreting the text.

Focus

Terms and names to note: primeval; two creation stories; ‘adam; Atrahasis myth; Epic of Gilgamesh; Sons of God (Genesis 6); Enuma Elish; covenant; Baals; cult; Sabbath; ex nihilo; Zoroastrianism; Manichaeism; dualism; Plato; Neo-Platonic; via negativa

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

All people, to some degree or another, seek answers to fundamental questions. What is truth and can I know it? What endures? What is real? Is there purpose to my life? Where did we come from and where are we going? Stories in all their forms, one way or another, offer answers to basic concerns. Begin noticing how such questions play out in stories of your own family and local context.

“The Priestly Creation Story,” an excerpt from an earlier version of the Education for Ministry curriculum reprinted in Part II of this Guide, is a theological reading. Consisting of only ten verses in Genesis, this passage

poetically presents a full doctrine of creation. It also offers a doctrine of God. The story shows God as wholly Other yet present to creation. God transcends all that is, thereby providing a corrective to all forms of dualism. Many theological difficulties get untangled by the implications in the story.

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

What family stories or personal experiences have contributed to your social, intellectual, or faith maturation?

YEARTWO

Read

Collins, 7 “Violence and Zeal”; 8 “Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible”; 9 “Social Justice in the Shadow of the Apocalypse”; and “The Authority of the Bible”

Focus

Terms and names to note: Christian Zionists; Boers; postcolonial; zeal; monolatry; apocalypticism and terrorism; Armageddon; dualism; distributive justice; resident alien; “preferential option” for the poor; almsgiving; The Prayer of Jabez; prosperity gospel; agape; eros; the Rapture; postmillennialists; premillennialism; the Tribulation; jubilee year; kingdom of God; messianism; ethic of detachment; Didache; Second Coming; Kant; Edward Said; Meir Soloveichik; Gog; Gandhi; Hammurabi; Stanley Hauerwas

Collins calls the Bible a “running argument.” What is your response to this? What might this contribute to a conversation about biblical values?

YEARTHREE

Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 3, “A Crucified Messiah”

Focus

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

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

Describe your attitude towards change. Explore what might be responsible for that attitude.

Looking back over your own spiritual history, when has change or disruption been an influence on your faith and/or spiritual practice?

YEAR FOUR

Read

Ford, Chapter 3, "Thinking of God"

Focus

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

In your experience, how is God known?

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

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



ALL YEARS

Respond

Sometimes, the ministry that one engages is a ministry to self. Attending to one's personal growth in relationship to God is part of that ministry.

What does this week's study help you to understand about the ministry needed for yourself in order to facilitate your growth in your relationship with God?

Describe your image of a relationship with God.

Practice

Review your autobiography. How does that story reflect your image of a relationship with God?

Where do you see that image of relationship with God exhibited in others?

Week Six

YEAR ONE

Remember the ABCD schema for presenting your thoughts on the reading assignment:

A	B	C	D
What amazed you or gave you an “aha!” moment in this week’s study?	What bothered you in this week’s study?	What confused you?	What delighted you?

Read

Genesis 12–50 (Genesis 15, 17)
Collins, Chapter 4, “The Patriarchs”

Focus

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

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

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

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

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

Looking back over the whole of Genesis, name any examples of spiritual growth you see.

YEAR TWO

Read

Powell, Preface, Chapter 1, “The New Testament Background: The Roman World,” and Chapter 2, “The New Testament Background: The Jewish World”

Note: EfM suggests reading the assignments in the Bible before reading the commentary, then your own experience of reading the text can be brought into conversation with what the scholar has to offer in interpreting the text.

Focus

Terms and names to note: schools of philosophy; mystery religions; animism; Gnosticism; Nag Hammadi; honor and shame; Pax Romana; Sadducees; Pharisees; Essenes; Zealots; Herodians; Samaritans; Gentiles; Hellenism; Septuagint; “Chrestus”; Herod the Great; Herod Antipas; Pontius Pilate; Herod Agrippa I; Josephus

Powell notes three worlds that comprise the world of the New Testament. What are they? Identify some of the many cultures of the New Testament world.

YEAR THREE

Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 4, “Boundaries Defined”

Focus

Terms and names to note: *Hermas (The Shepherd)*; Letter to Philemon; *Didache*; gnosis, Gnosticism, Nag Hammadi; Docetism; key points of difference between gnostic and Jewish attitudes; Marcion; Diatessaron; *presbyteroi*; *diakonos*; *episkopoi*; the importance of Antioch and Jerusalem in the early church; Clement; Ignatius; Victor; Stephen of Rome

References to primary sources are sprinkled throughout the chapter. If you want to explore and have time, try to find two or three primary sources to read, even if only a portion of the work. Henry Bettenson’s *Documents of the Christian Church* includes many primary sources from the early Christian tradition.¹⁵ Used and new copies of this book in several editions are available to purchase and through some libraries. Online, the Christian Classics

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

Ethereal Library at www.ccel.org includes numerous documents of the early church in its collection. For example, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, Commonly Called the Didache*.¹⁶

Describe the value and the price of boundaries in terms of growth and maturation.

YEAR FOUR

Read

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

Focus

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

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

In what ways are your ethics shaped by influences such as your family and the culture in which you grew up?



ALL YEARS

Respond

Numerous world and personal events color all that this work of ministry education and formation is about. Uncertainty has a face. Fear, hope, anger, and suspicion grow in the face of uncertainty.

How does what you are learning in EfM study and reflection address moments of mounting anxiety?

Practice

The following is an exercise in very informal theological reflection.

Create a picture that captures a personal anxiety.

Write one or two paragraphs about that image.

What prompts anxiety for someone in that image? What would someone in that image fear?

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

From your study, what ideas or people have you discovered that would help someone in that image make sense of things when they are anxious?

What past experience comes to mind that helps you deal with anxiety?

What do you believe or hope for about anxiety and Christian maturity?

Who can you think of in your culture that could offer wisdom for someone in the face of anxiety?

Notice discoveries you have made.

Sit quietly with any prayer that may surface in response to what you wrote.

Week Seven

Remember the ABCD schema for presenting your thoughts on the reading assignment:

A	B	C	D
What amazed you or gave you an “aha!” moment in this week’s study?	What bothered you in this week’s study?	What confused you?	What delighted you?

YEAR ONE

Read

Exodus 1–15 (Exodus 3, 4, 6, 15)
Collins, Chapter 5, “The Exodus from Egypt”

Focus

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

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

How is the relationship between God and creation/humankind/Israel maturing?

YEARTWO

Read

Powell, Chapter 3, “The New Testament Writings”

Focus

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

Name three methods of exegesis.

In “Exegesis and Hermeneutics” Powell states, “All the exegetical methods and academic disciplines described above are used by people who oper-

ate with different hermeneutical assumptions and interests. The methods themselves are simply tools that are employed for very different purposes by people with different attitudes and goals.”¹⁷

Reflect on how considering the interpreter’s assumptions, interests, and purpose can contribute to your reading of biblical commentary.

YEAR THREE

Read

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

Focus

Terms and names to note: *parousia*; *Apostolic Tradition*; Celsus; *in catacumbas*; Origen; Plotinus; Mani; Manichee/Manichaeism; Diocletian; Syriac Church; Osrhoene; Dura Europos; Armenia; Ephrem; *Odes of Solomon*; Trdat (Tiridates)

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

What evidence of martyrs, if any, can you think of in your time and place?

What do their actions reveal for reflection on maturing in your relationship with God?

YEAR FOUR

Read

Ford, Chapter 5, “Facing evil”

Focus

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

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



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

ALL YEARS

Respond

Summarize your learning from the unit's study. What stands out for you as a key discovery in these first weeks of EfM?

What have you learned about listening?

Using a few words for each category, describe the micro (individual), meso (institutional), and macro (global/cosmic) levels of your life. Refer to Vander Ven's categories on pages 23–24 in Week Two if you need to refresh your memory.

What do you value, assume, and seek for yourself and others?

Practice

Identify areas of ministry in which you are involved; for example, home, neighborhood, employment, volunteer work. Name any common factors of ministry that trace through these areas.

Write about your understanding of Christian maturity. Highlight images you use.

Highlight what you draw upon from personal experience, from the world around you, and from your study.

Highlight any statements of your personal beliefs, hopes, or doubts.

Conclude by considering what insight you may have gained and what commitments you might make.

Identify an aspect of your growth as a person of faith that you especially want to focus on to help you provide ministry in different areas of your life.

PART II

Resources



Supplemental Readings in the Christian Tradition

Week Three, Reading Assignment for Year Four

On Being Theologically Literate⁷⁴

I. On Being Literate

At its simplest, to be literate is to be able to read and write. But there is a stronger sense to the word. To be literate is to be well read in, or at least familiar with the literature of a particular subject. It is this sense that interests us: that is, with being literate in the field of Christian theology; of having a grasp of the tradition through its written deposit.

This could suggest merely an attempt to provide an annotated select bibliography, or a Cook's tour of key theological debates. Such an enterprise would, indeed, have its value. However, the intention is to explore a more fundamental implication. It is important to ask, what is the purpose of being literate? How fundamental is it to Christian believing? But to be literate has also meant to be a member of the literati, an aficionado, a member of an elite. Are we merely trying to boost the standing of the specialists in theology, professional or amateur, who play an esoteric game, far apart from ordinary discipleship? Or is it relevant to a core Christian concern that affects us all?

The basis of my argument is that Christianity sees itself as historical in a unique sense and that therefore tradition is an essential part of living in and with that historical reality. Of course Christianity shares the basic human experience of finding identity in historical continuity embedded in story and culture. There are also, as with many other religions, foundational events which are normative for its existence. But Christianity, taking further its Jewish heritage, has classically affirmed that revelation and salvation were uniquely embodied (incarnate) in these particular events. Thus the historical is not merely the stage for religious discovery or the medium for a religious idea but essential to the substance of Christian faith. The human experience, therefore, of being historical is of the heart of Christian existence and that tradition, in all its ambiguity, is necessary to Christian self-identity, part of being caught up in the drama of salvation. Therefore, to have a sense of the past is a key element in Christian awareness; and being literate is very much bound up with that. There are bound to be wide variations among Chris-

74. Paul H. Ballard, "On Being Theologically Literate," *Modern Believing* 38 (3), July 1997, 34–42. When this article was written Ballard was head of the department of Religious and Theological Studies at the University of Wales, Cardiff, where he taught practical theology.

tians as to how this is experienced and expressed. There are different callings and concerns: for some it is at the centre of their ministry as theologians but for most literacy is a backcloth to their particular Christian obedience; some will have grown up on the stories of the past heroes and heroines, but others will have only just begun to explore their new found faith. There is no 'national curriculum' that everyone must meet, but all can begin to recognize and draw on the spiritual, intellectual and artistic resources to which all in fact are indebted.

2. The Issue Today

The idea of theological literacy only becomes an issue when it appears to be under threat. Otherwise it is taken for granted. I am continually alerted to this year by year as I have to recognize that it is less and less possible to assume a basic cultural background as the starting point for teaching. The present generation seems to have lost the western (British) classical tradition which included some debt to Greece and Rome as well as to Shakespeare, the Prayer Book and the Bible. There may be a new tradition emerging but a hiatus, a complete break, will cut future generations off from their heritage.

Our society has, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, been going through a significant cultural sea change. Thomas Kuhn has taught us to use the phrase 'paradigm shift' to describe the transition from one world view, with its fundamental cultural patterns and assumptions, to another that will express itself in new habits, customs and intellectual norms. It has been widely argued that we are going through such a Copernican revolution, watching the end of the Enlightenment of the Modern era and the emergence of Postmodernism, some kind of New Age.⁷⁵

It is never possible, however, from the midst of events to see precisely where history is leading. We cannot be sure whether what we are experiencing is a total 'paradigm shift', like the emergence of the modern world out of the middle ages, or merely a further out-working of the process of modernization. At the same time it is important to ask how total any historical change can be. There are always elements of continuity as well as discontinuity. Perhaps we are only going through a period where the latter, discontinuity, is temporarily dominant and the continuities will again reassert themselves.

Nevertheless the last decades have been a period of far-reaching social change which are significant for this and subsequent generations. In a number of ways basic attitudes have changed. This is, of course, significant for Christianity, for the Church, too, is inevitably caught up in the process. And this poses a problem for, to paraphrase the words of Reinhold Niebuhr,

75. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970). See also theological explorations of this idea in Hans Kung and David Tracy (eds) *Paradigm Change in Theology, a Symposium for the Future* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989) and David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Mary Knoll: Orbis, 1991).

it is necessary to distinguish between what cannot be changed and has to be accepted, indeed affirmed, and what has to be resisted and possibly changed, and that always carries risk and courage.⁷⁶

3. Significant Trends in Contemporary Culture

What then are some of the characteristic features of the present that are significant for our theme? These may or may not be mutually compatible, which is not surprising in the maelstrom of history.

3.1. *We live in an increasingly pragmatic society*

Francis Bacon recognized that knowledge is power. In our generation the experiential growth of scientific understanding of the mechanisms of the universe suggest that we can unlock the key to existence. However, there has been a change in the relationship between science and technology. Science is increasingly harnessed to technology. Knowledge is valued in relation to its uses. This can be seen in the emphasis at all levels of education on learning for economic and social purposes. The question thus becomes ‘What can we do?’ and moral truth is dependent on being able to do what we want. Kant’s ‘I ought therefore I can’ can be so easily inverted into ‘I can therefore I ought’. All problems that might arise are susceptible to solution by further applications of technology whether by producing new techniques and more sophisticated tools or by social management. The computer is the model of life. Appeals to past wisdom or alternative lines of argument are regarded as outdated and retrograde.

3.2. *Paradoxically, there is a new emphasis on holism*

The analytical methodology of classical enlightenment thinking has led, it is argued, to mechanistic fragmentation. It is necessary to recover the inter-relatedness of all things. This ranges, on the one hand, from the physicist’s interest in cosmology to the biologist working on the ecological structures of habitat, including our own. On the other hand it has also stimulated a quest for more religious and mystical ways of looking at existence, a feature that frequently rejects Christianity because that has been too closely bound with the destructive tendencies of Western science. Instead there is attraction to the unities of the Indian religions or the nature mysticism of traditional tribal religion. There is, thus, an increasing desire to search for inclusive ways of thinking about our world that will give a framework for the resolution of the confrontational attitudes that seem endemic to the modern world.

3.3. *There is a new romanticism*

The rationalism of modernism has, from time to time, been challenged by forms of romanticism. Romanticism emphasizes the intuitive and emotion-

76. This reflects the well-known prayer used by Alcoholics Anonymous.

al. There is a sense of the immediacy of knowledge whose truth is grasped through inward conviction. The creative freedom of the human spirit has to be given free rein. The artist is the priest of humanity, the channel for expressing the power of the human spirit. Tradition and the past are often seen as inhibiting, quenching the flames of human potential.

Since the late 1960s there has been a resurgence of romanticism. There has been a flowering of religion, mainly of a mystical kind, frequently rejecting the apparent formalisms of Christianity for the esoteric possibilities of the East and elsewhere. This has been heralded as a new era, the Age of Aquarius or the New Age or the Age of the Spirit. Within Christianity itself there has been a renewed emphasis on these elements in the tradition that look to immediacy and religious experience. Most clearly this has been found in the Charismatic movement, which has its exaggerated and sometimes dangerous side; but it can be found in more Catholic forms and in the interest in the search for spirituality in non-Western traditions such as Orthodoxy or Celtic Christianity.

3.4. We live in an increasingly pluralistic and relativistic society

The pluralism is most clearly seen in the ethnic and cultural mix found in our inner cities. But pluralism is much more pervasive. The cohesions of our common history are more and more tenuous as religions and ideological traditions disintegrate. There is an increasing fragmentation which begins, in places, to threaten social cohesion. People are being forced to find security and identity through belonging to different, often embattled, associations.

This fragmentation has been boosted by the advocacy of personal rights and the consumer society. Diversity and choice are seen as the supreme social good. In the competitive market of the enterprise culture, everything is up for grabs. Marketing has taken over, even in the area of values and faith, seeking to catch the attention of the passing customer who may be more attracted to the wares next door.

3.5. There is a belief in the future at the expense of the past

Part of the mindset of the modern person is the explanatory value of history. Something can be understood when seen in its historical context. But there is a conflict here. The emphasis can be on the importance of origins or of destiny. Today our eyes are on the future. This has been true of technology which promises a brighter tomorrow and of policies that, especially in Marxism but also in Capitalism, hold up the possibilities of a renewed society. It has also become a marked feature of contemporary theology, especially political and liberation theology: the promise of the Kingdom of God already present in the resurrection of Jesus and the life of the Spirit. But such a drive can downgrade the past, relegate it to an irrelevant curiosity. History or tradition has today to justify itself as having a positive contribution to make to human welfare.

Alvin Toffler and others warned about ‘future shock’.⁷⁷ It may appear that some of their expectations were exaggerated. Many of the old traditional perspectives persist, and the future is never entirely predictable. Yet a lot of what they foresaw has come about. And we are just on the threshold of the electronic revolution. The new world would seem to be markedly different from the old.

As has been indicated from time to time, this cultural shift has affected religion along with the rest of society. Religion is not dead but is a many-headed hydra which grows two heads where one is cut off. As Madeleine Bunting in the *Guardian* expressed it, ‘it’s DIY; forget tradition, just find a few friends and make it up as you go along’.⁷⁸ This is confirmed by Rosalie Osmond in her study of contemporary religion, i.e. Christianity. She detects a sharp separation between tradition and faith. The former is embodied in the burdens of old dead intellectualism, ritual, buildings and social trappings. The new faith is immediate, personal, experiential, God in the unusual and exciting. It is all rather simple and naive.⁷⁹

4. The Importance of Literacy

For Christianity there is an obvious and crucial dilemma. The Gospel has indeed to be proclaimed in ways that connect with and are accessible to the new cultural context. Indeed the present time has seen a great flowering of new forms of worship and presentation—even if some go well over the top! But it cannot be at the expense of forgetting the tradition, for that threatens to reduce faith to mere sentimentality.

The importance of being literate is precisely because it addresses this fundamental relation between the present and the past. By definition a literature is the cumulative deposit of the tradition. And Christianity, as an incarnational religion, is essentially rooted in history. There is a focal point in past time—the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—to which the Christian community is anchored. There is also a commitment to being part of a community that has forged its self-awareness and identity in the course of a pilgrimage of faith—a cumulative storehouse of wisdom that cannot be cast aside. The present can only be understood in the light of the past and, normatively, knows itself to be Christian by its loyalty to its origins. That is, history is part of the existence of faith.

But this is not to advocate mere traditionalism. Tradition can be a dead weight, an unadventurous reproduction of a received pattern of faith. To talk about all this in terms of literacy, however, also insists on the hermeneutic imperative; the need to be critically aware of the past in a discerning and open way so that there is a creative and liberating dialogue with tradition.

77. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (London: Bantam, 1984).

78. *The Guardian*, 24th December 1995.

79. Rosalie Osmond, *Changing Perspectives* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1993).

Past and present are knit together in a living obedience to the faith that has fed and nurtured the saints.

4.1. Being literate makes one aware of one's roots

Alex Haley's book and television series *Roots* highlighted for so many what it meant to search for origins and to understand the tradition.⁸⁰ This is a basic human motivation. In a cosmopolitan and often hostile world it helps to provide an identity. So for the Christian, it is important to secure identity with the household of faith, not only in the Bible but subsequently, as part of world history and the history of nations.

4.2. Being literate also gives a sense of belonging

To begin to know the story is to discover that one is a member of the household of God, enfolded in the communion of saints, both down history and across the globe. It is indeed a motley crew, with skeletons in the cupboard and episodes of which properly to be ashamed. But it also includes great heroes and heroines of the faith, martyrs, confessors, doctors, evangelists and countless ordinary people who, like ourselves, just get on with being obedient. From them can be drawn inspiration and wisdom, challenge and vision.

4.3. Being literate widens our horizons

Even in an age of mobility and television, we remain parochial in Christian experience. But there is a whole world out there of spirituality, service and witness that can fill out and challenge our limited perspective. Like the householder in the Gospel it is possible to bring out treasures old and new. We will, thus, begin to understand our own tradition, appreciate its positive strengths, set it in a wider context and review it in the light of the wider tradition. It was precisely out of such exposure in such bodies as the Student Christian Movement that the ecumenical quest arose. Sometimes it may be necessary to take a stand but each affirmation can also be the loss of another truth by denial. We need each other. One of the saddest trends of recent years has been the diminution of the ecumenical imperative, a theme that needs to be re-woven into the counterpoint of Christian living.

4.4. Being literate brings new resources in our search for Christian understanding

Other cultures, past or present, often see things very differently from the way we do. Their experience is not ours; their ways of thinking can be strange to us. But this sets up a dialogue between us, for their seeming oddity may hide wisdom that illuminates and challenges our assumptions in surprising ways. Especially at a time when so much of our inherited wisdom seems to be running into the sand, it is valuable to explore alternatives that may open up new possibilities. For example, the Orthodox tradition of the East is meeting the quest for a greater mystical emphasis; Evangelicals are

80. Alex Haley, *Roots*.

rediscovering their spiritual and radical roots, not least by looking at the early and medieval Church; or Christians in Korea are exploring traditional spiritualities to understand better the communion of saints.

4.5. Being literate helps us recognize that our problems are not unique

Others have been there before and may help us in our situation. Of course circumstances are never the same but there is no need to reinvent the wheel. A good example is the issue of cultural pluralism. For us, after so long a period of Western hegemony, it comes as a shock but this was precisely the situation of the early Church. They had to ask what to make of the traditional paganism, the mystery religions and minority faiths. They also had to discover how to enter into dialogue with the dominant philosophical traditions of their day as we do with the rationalist and postmodern culture of our own. It is also the situation of Christian minority groups in the ancient cultures of the far east—India, China, Japan. The surprising thing is that these are seldom cited in our debates, yet they have experience of struggling to find their identity in a culture that is both theirs and yet not theirs.

4.6. Being literate means that we can faithfully reappraise the past

The hermeneutic dialogue also allows us to question the past on the basis of our own situation. The striking example of this is the concern for the status of women in the Church which has traditionally, within the social conventions, been male dominated. But once the question is asked, then it is possible to look afresh at the tradition and to discover that there is a hidden strand waiting to be discovered of women's spirituality; a strand which itself interacts with the contemporary dialogue.

5. How to be Literate

To be literate, therefore, enables us to relate to the tradition with a freedom and creativity that both strengthens faith and, through a critical solidarity, opens up a creative dialogue, exploring new avenues of believing and obedience. But how do we become literate?

5.1. A word of caution

Modernization has eroded the possibility of living in a tradition based society. From time immemorial a tradition was handed down through the normal social structures of family, communal customs, rites of passage, peer group activity, education, religion, folk arts. Ideas, vocabulary, etiquette, expected roles and customs were picked up accidentally and absorbed subliminally. Now it has to be a conscious effort. Faith has to be kept alive, traditions deliberately sustained. The Church is in the business of creating and sustaining a counter culture. But absorbing a tradition takes time. There is no quick fix. To become literate is a time consuming, deliberate, demanding effort. It is not possible to rely on it happening naturally anymore.

5.2. To become literate means, therefore, entering into a journey

Christian initiation is admission into the community of faith, including its tradition. This, as part of the journey of faith, is a life-long process. At its heart is a participation in the drama of salvation, focused in the scripture and the communion. But it is also to seek to be steeped in the traditions of the Church. Hymns and prayers and other means put before us the resources of the past. Preaching and teaching draw on the wisdom of others. The Prayer Book, missal and hymn book are treasure stores from which we can each, variously, learn. Beyond this there are the other activities of prayer and study, of reading and shared witness and service that give shape to Christian discipleship both locally and in the wider Church. It is important, therefore, to pay attention to the routine of daily life in the Church for it is this that will create the images of Christian commitment and mould the lives of those that participate.

5.3. There are indeed classics

For Christians this is, first and foremost, the Bible. But we live in a generation for whom the Bible is a closed book, no longer the basic literature of education and culture. The plethora of new translations may not have been helpful. Even for practising Christians the selected readings heard weekly hardly begin to offer any real insights. We have to find our modern equivalent of systematic daily reading through the scriptures. Moreover it has to be done in the light of two hundred years of critical historical scholarship. The Bible has to become both a living scripture and an historical resource in the religious quest of humanity.

There are also other Christian classics that have traditionally been used for devotional reading, a source of inspiration and wisdom: Augustine's *Confessions*, Julian's *Shewings*, Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Bonhoeffer's *Cost of Discipleship*, Henri Nouwen's *The Wounded Healer*, and many others.⁸¹ There are convenient anthologies that open up wide selections very quickly, and many modern writers not only draw on them but offer introductions and commentary. Indeed this age is producing its own literature, some of which will themselves become classic.

Theological literacy is not primarily a matter of erudition—though the Church needs its theological high flyers. It is first and foremost about having an open and inquisitive spirit that is glad to become engaged with the Christian story because that is the family to which we belong. Besides there is a great sense of reward and it is often real fun. James Stewart, in his classic on preaching admonishes his readers.

81. Augustine, *Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Julian of Norwich, *Shewings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978); Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956); John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1989); D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM Press, 1959); Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Doubleday, 1972).

There is another resource which will come powerfully to your aid . . . your fellowship with the great minds of the centuries. . . . Keep alert to what theology is saying. Refresh your soul with the living waters of the spiritual classics—all these and many more are your rightful heritage: and who could dwell there and not be ‘strengthened in the inner man’ . . . Such intercourse will impart new qualities of breadth, insight, dignity and precision to all your work. Therefore, in the words of the Apostolic injunction, ‘give heed to reading’.⁸²

Stewart may have had the preacher in mind, but the preacher is enabling the congregations to enter into its heritage. This is a promise for the whole people of God.

5.4. There is a growing and continuing need to stimulate Christian reading and learning

It is encouraging to recall how many are engaged in various forms of theological education from evening classes and public lectures to degrees and research. It is also interesting that the present demand seems to be precisely to obtain familiarity with the foundational elements—Bible study, doctrine and spirituality. It seems that there is an instinctive awareness of a need to rediscover the tradition and to dig new foundations in a strange and changing world. And there is an increasing volume of good literature and other aids on the market; though there is also a ready supply of doubtful rubbish. Perhaps the greatest need is at the level of the local congregation where more could be done to introduce a sense of critical yet challenging exploration.

All this, however, cannot be left as a form of antiquarianism, of curiosity about their past. Our society is very good at creating theme parks and calling it heritage. Rather it is an engagement with the Gospel in the realities of the world. To be Christianly literate, like all theological activity, is an act of prayerful obedience, an offering of ourselves to God that we may be guided and used by his Spirit in the place where we have been set. Maybe something of what has been attempted here is summed up in the versicle and response from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, itself a quote from scripture:

**O Lord, save thy people and bless thy heritage.
O Lord, Govern them and lift them up forever.**

82. James S. Stewart, *Heralds of God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1946), 197.

Week Five, Reading Assignment for Year One

The Priestly Creation Story⁸³

The Priestly creation story in Genesis 1–2:4a is one of the shortest and yet most tightly packed theological statements in the Bible. In its present form it dates from the time of the Restoration in the fifth century BCE. It had developed, however, over a much longer period and had been polished smooth by the time P gave it its final working. We must study it line by line in order to unpack the many levels of meaning in it.

Let us go over the main points.

First read **Genesis 1–2:4a**.

Then read again the biblical reference for each point in conjunction with the discussion.

1. God alone is the creator of all, with no divine helpers. The world is not simply shaped by God. (1:1)
2. God creates by speaking; God simply says, “Let there be . . . ,” and what is spoken comes to be. (1:3, 6, 9, etc.)
3. God creates light; it is not the gift of the sun, which shines only with the light God has given it. (1:3)
4. God keeps the waters of chaos in their place by calling for a firm dome to keep out the waters that are above and by gathering the waters below into the seas so that the dry land appears. (1:6–10)
5. The heavenly bodies—sun, moon, planets, and stars—which were thought to be gods by many cultures in the ancient Near East, are only creatures of God. (1:14–18)
6. The earth shares in the task of creation, though only at God’s command: the earth brings forth vegetation. The waters also bring forth sea creatures and the earth, animal life, but not in the same way as the earth brings forth vegetation. God creates the higher forms of life. (1:11, 20–21, 24–25)
7. God creates humankind in God’s own image and gives it dominion over all the creation. (1:26)
8. God creates humankind male and female, and this fact is connected closely with humankind’s creation in the divine image. (1:27)

⁸³. *Education for Ministry—Year One: Old Testament*, 4th edition, ed. Patricia Bays (Sewanee, Tennessee: The University of the South, 2006), 29–46.

9. God blesses humankind with sexuality and the gift of children. (1:28)
10. The final work of creation is God's rest on the seventh day. (2:2)

The First Words

Even from this brief outline we can see some of the things that were on the mind of the author. First, one important aspect of this story cannot be seen in most English translations. Grammatically, the Hebrew begins in the middle of a sentence. What could this mean? Is it a mistake? Was the first corner of a manuscript lost? No, there is a theological meaning. Beginning a sentence in the middle is a way of saying, "We do not know what God was doing before our world came into being. Our knowledge cannot pry before the beginning of our world; God's beginning is unknowable to us."

God and Creation

Next, it is important to say, above all else, that God is completely different from everything else. Other religions may have said that there were all sorts of divine beings: animal monsters, heavenly bodies, the seas, storms—anything that seemed powerful or mysterious. For the P writer, nothing in the world is divine. Rather, the whole universe is God's creation. Some religions may have thought of at least part of the universe as being made out of the substance of the divine, flowing forth out of the god. For P, nothing of God flows into the universe; God is God, and all else that exists is not God and is not divine.

Third, there is no need to look to lesser gods for the fertility of the earth. Vegetable crops and animals are included in God's design for the world, and the earth brings forth her increase at God's command. The worship of Baals (fertility gods), with all the gross practices that went with it, is not necessary; indeed to worship them would be to deny the power of the one Creator.

Fourth, the whole creation leads up to the creation of humanity. Life has not been created in order to provide playthings for the gods nor to act as slave-servants to the gods. Humanity, man and woman, is created to be God's representative in governing creation. It is a position of great dignity and worth.

Israel, the Chosen People

Each of these points was important in the life of Israel. She had been chosen to be God's people; God had made a covenant with her and had promised that, through Israel, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The covenant was the basis for all of Israel's religious faith. After the Israelites had settled in Canaan, they were tempted and led away from God to the worship of the Baals and the *astral deities*—the sun, moon, planets, and stars—which the other nations worshiped. The prophets constantly tried to

overcome the worship of these false gods so that Israel would be faithful to the covenant. When the northern kingdom was destroyed and the leaders of Judah (the southern kingdom) were carried into exile, the warnings of the prophets were shown to have been correct. Thus we can see the P writer—in the circumstance of exile—expressing in this story the true dignity of humankind and the complete sovereignty of God as these facts had been learned in Israel’s life and taught by the prophets. All of what Israel stood for was expressed by the covenant. This was how Israel knew God; God was the God who had made the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and who had sealed it at Sinai through Moses. This God, and this God alone, had created the nation of Israel, and this God alone had created the heavens and the earth and all things.

The creation story expresses the faith of Israel learned by her experience as the people of God’s covenant. Just as God had made Israel God’s people at Sinai, so also God had made all of humanity in God’s own image at creation. Both the covenant story and the creation story say the same thing: God has given humanity dignity and worth and dominion; therefore, the creation story reaches its climax in the creation of humankind.

The Sabbath

The P author does not end the story with the creation of humanity. The final day of creation is not the sixth, on which human beings are created, but the seventh, on which God rests. This rest does not mean only a mere recuperation from the exhaustion of creation. Rather it is a cessation of regular work in order to enjoy the fruits of that labor. God rests in order to enjoy creation. The P author, with special interest in the *cult*—the practices of worship—leads us to the practice of the Sabbath. This is not, however, a contradiction of what we have just said about the creation of humanity as the climax. The covenant, the basis of Israel’s faith in the dignity of all people, is what the Sabbath is all about. The Sabbath is the celebration of the covenant. Therefore, the story leads to two ends, both of which refer to the same central point of Israel’s faith: (1) God’s gift of life and authority—a people under God—and (2) the Sabbath, which is the celebration of this people under God through the covenant.

You are not expected at this point in your studies to be able to feel all that is involved in the covenant. The point you should be able to grasp at this stage is that the P creation story sums up the experience of Israel and is not a simple childish story. You will come back to this story again and again, and the more you become familiar with the rest of the Old Testament, the more you will feel the power of it. Now look back again to the beginning of the story, and we will go over it more closely.

The Priestly Creation Story

This verse, which looks so simple in the English translation, is very strange in the Hebrew because it begins mid-sentence. The text can be translated, carrying it on through verse three, in several ways. (1) “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness. . . .” (2) “When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void, and darkness. . . .” (3) “In the beginning of God’s creating of the heavens and the earth—(when) the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the wind of God was moving over the face of the waters—God said, ‘Let there be. . . .’” None of these translations really fits the text as we have it, but each one is possible. Somewhat closer might be to start with an ellipsis “. . . .” and then use the wording of option 3 above.

What difference would it make which translation we pick? Some people have argued that if we use the first one, there is nothing before God creates. God creates the heavens and the earth, and they are formless and empty until God then shapes and fills them. While it is fine theology to believe God created from nothing—*ex nihilo* is the Latin phrase that is used—Genesis 1 does not make such a claim. If we take the second or third translation, there is already a formless empty abyss and God begins to create; God shapes and fills a chaos that already existed.

Dualism

Later theology, especially Christian theology, has insisted that God created out of nothing not simply as a way of choosing one of these translations over the other. Theologians have been trying to oppose a point of view which was very common in the world of the first few centuries of the Christian era and is still very much with us. This point of view is called *dualism*. It says that there are two aspects of the world: the material and the nonmaterial, sometimes called the “spiritual.” The material is usually regarded as less good, sometimes evil. Theologians have not wanted to say that there was something, anything, already existing when God began creation, because this already existing something, chaos, could be used by the dualists to refer to matter, the material stuff, which God shaped. They could then say that this matter is the source of evil. So the theologians said that God created *ex nihilo*, out of nothing; anything and everything that is, matter included, is created by God and is good. You can begin to see here that many beliefs, many truths, are not stated explicitly by every biblical passage on a similar theme.

Dualism had a great effect on the thinking of the early church. It came from eastern roots. In Persia the religion of Zoroastrianism taught that there were two gods, one evil and one good. The good god was the god of light; the evil god, the god of darkness. (The name of the god of light, Mazda, is known to many people although they may not know where it originated.)

A man named Mani, who was greatly influenced by Zoroastrianism, developed a religion, dualistic in nature, that prescribed ways of combating the power of the material world and escaping into the world of spirit and light. His religion, usually called *Manichaeism*, flourished in the third and fourth centuries, especially in North Africa, and influenced many Christians. St. Augustine, one of the greatest theologians of the church, was a Manichee before he converted to Christianity.

Plato

The teachings of the great pre-Christian philosopher Plato have also led to dualistic conclusions. Plato taught that, although individual things in this world come and go—they are born and they die, they come into being and they decay—there lie behind the individual things the *ideas* of them. There are many individual trees, each different to some degree from the others and each destined to die and decay, but each is a partial representation of the idea Tree. The idea contains all that it is possible for a tree to be; it is complete and single, not needing many separate examples of itself to express its completeness; it lasts forever, eternally existing while the individual representations of it come and go. Why Plato said this, what problems he was trying to understand, we shall look at later. The fact that he said it, however, allowed people of a later time—during the third through the fifth centuries CE—to develop a religion that was dualistic in a much more subtle and sophisticated way than was Manichaeism. The *Neo-Platonists* taught that the ultimate *One* lies beyond all things, and it is impossible to speak of that One at all. The *via negativa* is all that is possible. From the One all the rest of the universe emanates as light emanates, flows, or shines from a light bulb or a candle. The farther away from the source, the less like the One a thing becomes, until finally, at the farthest remove, there is matter. A human being, according to Neo-Platonism, is really spirit, akin to the One, but the spirit is trapped in a material body. Below humanity there is no spirit; all is merely material. Only by mystical exercises can humankind rise above the material body and reach union with the One. This point of view has influenced much of Christian piety. Augustine was also a Neo-Platonist before becoming a Christian.

Whatever the correct translation of this verse may be, theologians were right in thinking that the Old Testament opposed dualism. The Hebrews did *not* make a distinction between matter and “spirit.” As we shall see in the JE (Yahwist-Elohistic) creation story, the first human being is made from the dust of the earth and has life breathed into him so that he becomes “a living being.” The entire creature, without division into body and spirit, is a living being. When the Christian church said that Jesus is the word of God made flesh, it also spoke against any kind of dualism.

This is why many theologians prefer the reading of verse one that says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” But there is no way to decide on the basis of the text itself. The P writer has other ways of dealing with the problem of dualism.

Genesis 1:2

Whichever way you translate the first verse, when the earth appears it is without form and void—that is, it is chaotic, empty of all form, design, or meaning—and darkness is upon the face of “the deep.” “The deep” is a translation of the Hebrew word *tehom*. Behind this word there lies a whole mythic tradition. In the ancient world of the Mesopotamian basin there existed a story of the creation of the world by means of a great battle between a warrior god and a dragon, a sea-monster, who represented watery *chaos*. To many peoples who lived in desert lands far from the sea, the sea was fearsome. Its great storms were powerful and destroyed ships and houses built close to the shores. Stories of sea monsters were told by returning sailors. So “the deep,” the waters of the sea with its monsters, was a symbol of chaos to the ancient people.

The Babylonian creation myth is a long story about the birth of various gods and about the eventual conflict between the god Marduk and the goddess Tiamat. In the course of the conflict, Tiamat is slain, and it is from her body that the firmament, the great dome of heaven, is made. It is worth noting here that the name Tiamat is closely related linguistically to *tehom*. By slaying Tiamat, the chaos monster, the monster of the deep, Marduk makes it possible for order to reign.

Much has been made of the common background out of which the Babylonian and the Hebrew creation stories come. The differences between the stories are more important—and more instructive—than their similarities. The Babylonian myth is an involved story of the birth of the gods and of the struggles among them for supremacy. Human beings are created almost as an afterthought, to serve as slaves for the gods, tending the earth so that the gods might have leisure. In the P story, the reference to “the deep” is virtually the sole remnant of this older myth. There is no birth of God; God is there before the story begins. Only by taking a broad meaning of myth as we have done can the P story be called a myth at all. P has stripped the narrative of all features of a “story about the gods” and has reduced it to a statement of doctrine, using the older myth as a framework only. By using an older framework with which people were familiar, the writer is also able to “start where they are” and show them greater truth.

The capriciousness of the gods and the denigration of humanity in the Babylonian myth stand in complete contrast to the picture of the sovereign and loving God of the Hebrew story. Nothing is told of God except God’s acts toward the world he is creating. No questions of God’s origins are raised; no relationship to any other god is assumed (until we get to the plural pronouns in verse 26); and the dignity of humankind toward which the whole story moves is a contradiction of the Babylonian estimate of human worth.

Still, the symbol of chaos, *tehom*, the deep, like Tiamat—the monster of the deep—is important. Chaos, or the threat of chaos, is always present in life. We know that we are insecure in the world we live in. We feel the threat

of destruction. The world itself is not secure. The ancients felt this, too, in the dark, a storm at sea, a tornado, wild forces of any kind. As the P story of creation unfolds, by bringing order to chaos, God takes possession of it and subdues it. In Hebrew thought, it is God alone who keeps chaos under control. In the story of Jonah, a man who refuses to obey the word of God finds himself thrown back into chaos where he is swallowed up by the very monster of the deep herself. Jonah returns to dry land when he promises to obey God.

There is an additional level of meaning in the use of *tehom*/Tiamat. Since the Priestly account comes to us through the experience of exile, using the term may be a subtle way for the Israelites to remember that ultimately the Lord and not the Babylonian gods is the source of all creation. (We see another example of this with the creation of the sun and moon.)

The wind or storm of God was moving over the chaos. The word that the English Bible translates “spirit” is *ruach* (pronounced ROO-ahk). This word can mean “spirit,” but also means “wind, breath, or storm.” In this verse, the picture is that of the great divine wind blowing storm-like over the sea, or “hovering” over the deep like a great bird about to light on its nest, especially one incubating its eggs. The “spirit” of God here should not be thought of as acting to create; it is simply there, a storm, almost part of the chaos itself in wildness, yet showing forth the presence of God about to create, to bring order into the chaos. The image of the “hovering” of the spirit is one of almost-life, of the care and tending immediately before birth.

Genesis 1:3

Light is created. It is not some god-like stuff that flows from God into the darkness. Some religions have thought of light itself as a god. With the fear of darkness that most people have, it is understandable that light should be thought of as divine, as saving in some way and giving safety. In Genesis light is from God. God alone is the source of the safety that light brings. Notice also that light is created before the sun, stars, and moon. Light does not come from them, according to this story, but directly from God.

The form of words in verse 3 is important: “God said . . .” God creates by his word. In the P account God creates by speech alone. This shows God separated from his creation and speaking to it. It portrays God with such immense power that it takes only a word for there to be a creative response. Later philosophers and theologians speak of both the transcendence of God and immanence of God. Transcendence refers to the separateness of God from God’s creation; immanence refers to God’s nearness. The creation-by-speech here in Genesis 1 shows God’s transcendence. In Genesis 2 the immanence of God is evident in the manner of creation, for God shapes the clay.

Thought about God swings between these two poles. On the one hand, if God is not transcendent, God tends to become confused with the rest of the world. Pantheism is a form of religion that overemphasizes the

immanence of God at the expense of transcendence. The term means literally “all is God.” Stoicism is an ancient religion, prominent in the world of the first few centuries of the Christian era, which is pantheistic. Much modern thought tends also toward pantheism, confusing nature with God. Unless God is not the world, God loses the dimension of divinity.

On the other hand, if God is not immanent, near to us, then God is irrelevant. A merely transcendent god who was not accessible to his people could not even be known, let alone worshiped. In the eighteenth century, when people were supremely confident in the power of human reason to know and understand all things, a view of the world developed that did not allow God to have any significant relationships with the world. The universe was thought to be like a huge machine, operating according to the laws inherent in it. A theological school of thought called deism pictured God as a clockmaker. God designed the universe and made it as a clockmaker makes a clock, in such a way that it could continue to run on its own. Then God withdrew from it, allowing it to run in accordance with its inherent laws, never intervening again. This is a doctrine of God that overemphasizes the divine transcendence. If it be true, there is no point in praying to God or expecting any relationship with God other than adoration for the work that the almighty has done in time long past.

By saying that God creates both by the word and by handling the stuff of creation, the biblical writers express both the transcendence and the immanence of God. God is the one who stands over against us, completely different from us, and speaks the divine word to us; God is also the one who is immersed deeply in the world with the stuff of it clinging to God’s hands. God is not the world, but God is deeply involved in it.

There is one further point that P wants to make: the world is “good.” It is like a refrain in a song. Here, God declares the light to be good. This does not simply mean that it is pleasant or beautiful. God also creates the great sea monsters and creeping things and calls them good. When God calls them all good, the meaning is that they fit in with the great overall purpose of creation. They have their place in the grand design. The goodness of creation is based on God’s purpose, not on our sense of beauty.

Genesis 1:4–5

Notice that although God creates the light, darkness is not created. God separates the light from the darkness, but darkness continues. Primitive people, like many of us moderns, feared the darkness, especially when there was no moon or when it was cloudy so that there were no stars. Evil spirits—and evil people—can work their wills in the darkness.

Notice also that, even though God does not create darkness, God calls the light “day” and the darkness “night.” In naming the darkness God takes possession of it. Throughout our study of the Old Testament we become aware of the power that ancient people ascribed to the act of naming. If you were able to name something, you had power over it. Even today we see

something of this. A parent gives a newborn child her or his name; the child has nothing to say about it. When children grow up, they can legally change their names, but while they are children, it is the parents who decide what they shall be called. It may be that the custom that teenage children have of taking a nickname by which their friends know them is an unconscious attempt to break loose from the bonds of parental control. A remnant of this control-by-naming can also be seen in the care with which some people try to ensure that coworkers never discover that childhood nickname. To know someone's embarrassing nickname would be tantamount to having a certain degree of control over the person.

In the Old Testament we see events in which God changes a person's name: Abram is changed to Abraham, Jacob to Israel. The meaning of the name is not as important as the fact that God has changed it and has thereby claimed the person. When God names the darkness "night," God claims it, takes possession of it, and thereby restrains it by his power. We said earlier, in discussing the first verse, that P had ways of combating dualism: This is one of them. The possibility of chaos taking control of God's creation is overcome because God takes possession of darkness and is Lord of the night as well as of the day.

The final sentence in verse 5 shows the Hebrew system for counting the days: A day goes from evening to evening, not from morning to morning as ours does. In Jewish custom this is still so; the Sabbath, for example, does not begin on Saturday morning, but on Friday evening at sundown. In the Christian church holy days are first celebrated on the evening before. Christmas eve and Hallowe'en (which is "All Hallows' Eve," the eve of All Saints' Day) are well-known examples, but the rule applies in all cases. Worship services held on such "eves" characteristically contain prayers and scripture readings concerned with the theme of the holy day itself.

Genesis 1:6–8

The word translated "firmament" means a hammered metal bowl; the firmament is like a great upside-down metal bowl that separates the waters. In this imagery we have the ancient view of a three-tiered universe, which was held, with modifications, until the sixteenth century CE when Copernicus put forth his theory of the motion of the planets around the sun. In the Genesis picture, the earth is a disk with waters beneath it and the firmament above it holding back the waters. So the three tiers are the waters under the earth, the earth, and the waters above the firmament. We see this cosmology (picture of the earth) again in the second of the Ten Commandments, when we read, "You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. . . ." The reason for this commandment is that all the things in this three-tiered universe are creatures, not God.

Notice that heaven is not the sacred dwelling-place of God; it is simply the firmament. God dwells above heaven. The important point about this

is not that it tells us where God is, but that it says God is not to be localized in any point within creation.

The creation of the firmament to keep the waters in their proper place reflects the ancient fear of water in large quantities; a deluge of water symbolizes chaos. Once again, the P writer deals with chaos and dualism. Chaos is held in check by the firmament, which God has made. Humankind is dependent only on the good God for safety. In the P account of the story of Noah and the flood, God opens the windows of heaven and the springs of the deep and releases the waters of chaos to destroy a large part of creation. As we see when we study that story, God makes a covenant with Noah promising never to do that again—God’s creation shall stand and the watery chaos be held back forever.

Genesis 1:9–10

Again we see the fear of water, and God sets the proper limits of the seas so that the dry land appears. This is a different form of the creative act of God of withholding the power of chaos.

By having God name the dry land “Earth” and the waters that were gathered together “seas,” the P writer is using the names of powerful gods in ancient religions. Because God both creates and names these, we are to see that they are merely creatures, not gods. The P writer thus combats the influence of polytheism (belief in many gods). Once again comes the refrain: “And God saw that it was good.”

Notice that the refrain did not occur at the end of the second day when the firmament was constructed. This formula of approbation does not reappear until the seas and the dry land are created. This is because the creation of the firmament is only part of the complex work of creating the world of cosmos within which the rest of creation will take place. The formula of approbation designates the completion of an act. On the second day a creative act is left incomplete, and on the third day two acts occur. The fact that two days are spanned shows that P is using older traditional material, fitting it, sometimes awkwardly, into a seven-day scheme. The liturgical interest of P, the concern that the whole story leads up to the Sabbath, compels the use of a seven-day scheme and the fitting of material into that scheme as neatly as possible.

Genesis 1:11–13

In the ancient world, wherever the growing of crops took the place of hunting or herding as the chief means of life and livelihood, people became concerned about the fertility of the earth. Without the proper mixture of good soil, water, and sunlight, the crops would not grow. Almost all agricultural societies have religions that try to bring about the fertility of the earth. In the ancient Near East these religions often tried to do this by practicing sacred prostitution. By having sexual relations with a temple prostitute, one

guaranteed that the land would be fertile. In these verses the P writer combats this kind of religion.

Plant life is created by God. But notice how this happens. Previously, God has created by his word. Here God speaks to the earth, commanding it to “put forth” vegetation. P does not try to deny the obvious fertility of the earth. The wonder of the seasonal rebirth of green things from the earth is too clear to be denied. But P has the earth act at God’s command. The earth’s fertility is God’s gift.

The reference to “plants yielding seed and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit in it” is to grasses and herbs that yield seed directly, and those plants and trees that have their seed inside a fruit or nut. That is, all kinds of plants have within them the means of reproduction. The earth is fertile and plants have the power to reproduce, due to the command of the word of God. The self-contained powers of nature to bring forth life are not nature’s own; nature is a creature. And it is good.

Agricultural fertility cults frequently have in their mythology a dying and rising god. When scholars of the history of religion noticed this, and especially when they saw the forms it took in the Near East, many of them suggested that this accounted for the Christian belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus. This, they thought, was simply a variant on the dying and rising god of the agricultural fertility cults. In fact there is much of the symbolism of the rebirth of nature in the proper celebrations of Easter. The lily, the rabbits, Easter eggs, all speak of the rebirth of natural life. (But for those of us who live in the northern hemisphere, it is too easy to drift into a belief that Jesus’ resurrection was somehow part of the natural order, rather than a gracious act of a loving God.)

The ancient Hebrews were surrounded by these kinds of religions, particularly in the myths surrounding Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility, and Anath, his sister. The myth tells of the death of Baal. The god of death, Mot, holds Baal in the prison of death. Anath goes to Mot, slays him and cuts up his body, casting it about over the land, and Baal comes back to life. The prophets of Israel constantly fought against Baal worship. Israel had been created as a nation by God and must remain faithful to him. Still, the need for successful agriculture was obvious. In the P creation story the author maintains that the God of the deliverance from Egypt is also the one who gives fertility to the earth. Faithfulness to the covenant will suffice to ensure the fertility of the land.

The figure of Jesus comes out of this kind of background. There can be no possibility of adequately describing his death and resurrection in the terms of the fertility cults. His death was a once-for-all event and his resurrection has its meaning only in connection with the promises God made to Israel in the covenant. It speaks not of life coming naturally out of death, but of God being faithful to God’s promises.

Genesis 1:14–19

On the fourth day the heavenly bodies are created. Worship of the astral deities—the sun, moon, stars, and planets—was widespread in the ancient world. Indeed, almost anywhere you go around the world you will find evidence of such worship. The stars and planets are one feature of nature that is there for all to see. Hunting tribes may not be concerned with growing crops; different animals that have been worshiped may not be known in places far from where they live; oceans may be unknown to inland dwellers, and deserts with their sandstorms may be unfamiliar to people who live along the coasts. But the lights of the heavens can be seen anywhere in the world.

One of the things about the stars that impresses people who pay close attention is that they move with such regularity. We are sometimes amazed that our astronomers can predict with accuracy where a particular planet will be at a specific time, but the ancient astronomers could do this, too. Ancient people were impressed with the fact that, although much in life was uncertain, the movement of the stars was always the same.

Because of the regularity of the heavenly bodies, many believed that the stars controlled everything else and determined what was to happen on earth. Even today astrology, the study of the stars to see what they tell of life, is popular. Some people really believe what their horoscopes say. Others may view astrology as mere superstition, but in ancient times it was a serious matter. All of life was thought to be governed by the astral deities. Men and women, in this view, simply live out lives that have already been determined at the time of their birth. They have no freedom and nothing much matters, since all is determined in advance.

For Israel, however, this could not be so. God had called the people Israel and made a covenant with them. God would be their God and bless them, and they were to keep God's commandments. Israel could be faithful to God or unfaithful. Israel was free—to obey or disobey. Therefore, Israel was responsible for what she did. To believe in the astral deities and their control over life was a denial both of the lordship of God and of human responsibility.

The P editor says that God created the lights in the firmament—they are not gods. Although P used the names of the gods Earth and Sea, “Sun” and “Moon” are not used. By using the clumsy expressions “greater light” and “lesser light,” P makes it plain that these, too, are creatures of God. We may have here another example of the exiled Israelites being able to find a “safe” way to jeer at their captors. “You worship ‘big light’ and ‘little light,’” they are saying, “while we worship the creator of all that is.”

The heavenly bodies are creatures of God, and they have quite simple jobs to do. They do not control the lives of people: they are the means by which to tell time! They divide the day from the night and they mark off the seasons and the years. They also give light on the earth, but it is not their own light, but the light that God created first of all creatures. This, too, is good; another act of creation is completed. With this, the cosmos (the universe itself) is finished.

Genesis 1:20–23

On the fifth day living beings are created, beginning with those that are least like humans and moving, on the sixth day, to humankind, which is created in the image and likeness of God. Living creatures are treated in a special way in this story. The plants, which were brought forth from the earth, are not thought to be forms of life. They have their seed and reproduce, but they are not called living creatures. When we look at this first creation story, we see that humans were allowed to eat vegetables but not meat. The life given to God's creatures is sacred and is not to be taken away by any other creature.

There is a Hebrew word used in this chapter that is not translated into English in every instance. When used of human beings, the word *nephesh* is usually translated "soul." But when used of other members of the animal world, it is often left out. This is unfortunate, for the P writer's use of *nephesh* makes some important theological points. There is no simple English word or phrase to cover the two aspects of *nephesh*. It refers to the life force that separates animals from rocks, for instance, or stars, and also from plants. *Nephesh* also refers to the individuality of each creature. We are accustomed to recognizing each human being as unique; the P writer believes every animal—even the "creepy crawlies"—is unique to God.

Of the living creatures, first the sea monsters are created, then the rest of the sea creatures and the birds. The seas have been separated from the dry land and held in their place—chaos has been controlled. Now even the fearsome monsters of chaos are discovered to be creatures of God and are called good; they are nothing to fear. These living creatures are then given the gift of procreation as a blessing. Even for living creatures, fertility is not simply a power contained within them but is a special gift from God. Only God is the source of creativity.

Verse 21 uses the verb *bara*: create. This is a different verb from those used before, except in verse 1 when *bara* is used for the whole process of creation. This verb never has anyone or anything except God as subject. Both God and people can "make," "shape," "form," and so on; only God is said to *bara*.

Genesis 1:24–25

On the sixth day the earth brings forth living creatures: domestic animals (cattle), wild animals (beasts), and creeping things—all the forms of life on dry land. All are connected very closely with the earth, which acts as mediator of God's creation. There is no blessing or command to be fruitful; apparently, as with the plants, this is part of their nature. Perhaps the blessing was necessary for the creatures that came from the sea because the sea was not given the ability to give power to reproduce. This is the suggestion that Gerhard von Rad makes in his book on Genesis. He says, "The absence here of divine blessing is intentional. Only indirectly do the animals receive the

power of procreation from God; they receive it directly from the earth, the creative potency of which is acknowledged throughout. Water, by creation, stands lower in rank than the earth; it could not be summoned by God to creative participation.” (p. 57)

Yet in verse 20 it seems that the same command is given to the waters as was given to the earth: “Let the waters bring forth. . . .” This is a case in which the English translation is somewhat misleading. In the Hebrew three different verbs are used in those places where the English reads “bring forth.” In verse 11 the verb is *dasha*, “to yield tender grass,” and it is in the causative form—“cause to yield tender grass.” In verse 12, the verb is *yatsa*, “to go out,” again in the causative—“cause to go out.” Thus in the case of the earth’s “bringing forth” vegetation, the verb is in the causative: the earth causes the grass to come forth. In verse 2 also the verb is *yatsa* in the causative, so the earth causes the living creatures to come forth. In verse 20, however, the verb is *sharats*, “to swarm,” and it is in the simple form not indicating causation. Verse 20, therefore, means, “Let the waters swarm with living creatures. . . .” God created them directly, without the mediation of the waters, and gave them the power to reproduce.

The real significant contrast seems to be not so much between the creatures of the water, the birds of the air, and the animals of the dry land, but between the animals and human beings. The animals are closely tied to the earth, whereas humans are more intimately related to their creator.

Genesis 1:26–28

This is the climax of the story. In all the other acts of creation the form of words is very direct: “Let there be . . .”; “Let the earth put forth” Here, God takes counsel with God’s self for a more deliberate and important act: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” This is a very strange expression. The name for God in this story is Elohim. When we discussed this before, noting that it is the name which the E writer uses and also the P writer at this point in the story, we mentioned that the word is in the plural: the gods. We also said that there was no doubt that both E and P believed in only one God. All through this story of creation the word Elohim has been translated “God,” but now, in verse 26, the plural is used: “Let us . . . in our. . . .”

In the ancient world the idea of a heavenly court was common. The main god was surrounded by other heavenly beings the way a king or queen is attended by the members of an earthly court. In most of the old religions the court was made up of lesser gods. In the Old Testament there was only one God, but God was frequently pictured as being served by a court. In some present-day eucharistic liturgies this same imagery occurs: “Therefore with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven. . . .”

God is submerging God’s self in the heavenly court. “Man” is made in God’s image. “Man” is like God, but is also quite distinct from God. The P writer in this whole section seems to be saying these two things about humankind. On the one hand P uses the words “image” and “likeness”:

An “image” is a copy of the original, like a statue, and a “likeness” is an outline or silhouette. This would indicate a very close likeness to God, even in a physical sense. On the other hand, God is submerged into the heavenly court, so the likeness to God must be somewhat blurred.

In addition, the Hebrew word for man used here is *‘adam* (the same word that later will be used as a proper name, Adam). This word is closely related to the word for earth, *‘adamah*. Thus P also shows that though humankind differs from the animals, it remains tied to the earth and therefore to the animals and indeed the rest of creation.

The result of this very subtle use of words is to give a picture of humankind (“man,” male and female: see below) as a being who is very much a creature, not to be confused with God, but one who stands in a very special relationship to God and is very much like God. It would seem that the point here is not so much to say that humanity, as the image of God, can give us an idea of what God is like, as it is to say that humanity is to act like God in the world: God gives human beings dominion over all the living things in the world. Their purpose is not to rule, but to act as God’s agent or steward.

It was a common practice in the ancient world for statues of a king to be set up throughout his realm. These were not regarded simply as carved statues, but as the king’s representatives, looking out for his interests in those places where the king himself could not always be. This seems to be the idea expressed here: Humankind is God’s representative, looking after God’s interests in the world. This authority, dominion over God’s creation, is given in the creation.

‘Adam is not a sexually specific word. There is another word for a male person: *‘ish*. In spite of the male domination of ancient society, P means both “man” and “woman” when he uses *‘adam*. (Notice the change of pronouns in v. 27: “In the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.”) In the P account, sexuality, male and female together making up *‘adam*, is a direct creation by God from the outset. (The JE story has woman made after man.) God blesses and commands humankind to procreate: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.” Sexuality, then, is a gift of creation, a blessing, and a command.

Genesis 1:29–31

Notice that there is a limit to human dominion: Only vegetables may be eaten. Both humans and beasts are given vegetables for their food, though to humans both herbs and fruit are allowed while the animals have only herbs (green plants). The shedding of blood is not part of the divine plan for creation. In the Old Testament it is a basic belief that “in the blood is the life.” God alone gives life, and it is not to be taken. Those who spill blood put an end to what cannot be revived. Later visions of the perfect time that will come when God brings in the kingdom show animals and humans living without shedding blood. The P writer, of course, knows that both animals and humans eat flesh, but a complete respect for life leads the writer

to say that this is not part of God's plan. We shall see that P has God give animals to humans for food at the time of Noah. Even then the blood is not to be eaten. It is to be poured out to God as giver of life.

The final refrain is emphatic: ". . . indeed, it was very good." The world as it comes from the hand of God is perfect. This is the basic faith expressed in the Old Testament: whatever evil there is now in the world is not due to God. As God created the world there was no evil in it, and no dualistic power of evil. As the JE account will go on to show, evil comes when human beings overreach their assigned role. Not content to be God's representatives in the world, humans aspire to be as gods themselves.

Genesis 2:1–3

We would expect the P writer to say that creation ended on the sixth day, but this does not happen. God finished the work by resting on the seventh day. Rest is part of creation. To us rest sounds like doing nothing. To those who have to work until they are exhausted, to fight for the very possibility of life, leaving the old to die by themselves because there is no time to tend to them and still carry on the struggle for life, rest is an activity of sheer bliss. This is the kind of life that was usual for the ancient people, and is still true for most of the earth's people now. Rest, for them, is a necessary activity of life; without it, life is ground down into death. Thus the seventh day is not a day apart from creation, but the time of the creation of the act of rest. The Sabbath, in the Israelite calendar, is not a day of inactivity, but a day when work is not done so that rest may be done. As a celebration of the covenant, the Sabbath was especially seen as the day of recreation, of being restored to the very basis of life. God has hallowed, set apart, this day for this use. Verse 4a says that all this is a genealogy, the generations of the heavens and the earth. P usually puts this kind of verse first as a title. Here, since the creation story has its own introduction, it had to be put at the end.

Summary

1) *Dualism is rejected.* Light is created and comes from God. Though light is good and necessary, it is not to be worshiped. Darkness, though it is fearsome because it conceals evil action and makes it easier to commit evil, is not in itself to be feared; God claimed it and is Lord of it when God named it "night." The waters of chaos are set within their proper limits by God: the waters above are held out by the firmament and the other waters are gathered together as the seas and kept in their place by God's command. The monsters of the deep are like playthings to God, who created them and gave them the seas in which to roam. All this may sound very far from our way of thinking, but its message to us is clear. Biblical faith does not allow us to call anything that God has made evil or unclean, nor does it support our fears of the unknown. God is behind all that is, and we need fear nothing but God's absence.

2) *God is both transcendent and immanent.* God is the absolute Lord over creation. Nothing else is to be mistaken for God and worshiped. This means that we need not bow down before anything in the world! But God is also very near to everything in the world. God is involved in creation, so that we cannot treat anything that God has made as though it did not matter. The immanent side of God is presented more explicitly in the creation account of Genesis 2.

3) *There is freedom in the world.* Nature acts as God has created it to act, but it does so in respect to God's command to it. Human beings are given a role to play in God's design, but they must respond from their own freedom. The sun, moon, and stars do not control the things that happen. Nothing is decreed beforehand and sealed in fate. The astral bodies measure time, but they do not control it.

4) *Creation is fertile by the gift of God.* Ancient people thought that the powers of nature that gave or withheld fertility had to be worshiped. P says that fertility is from God, and God alone is to be worshiped. This belief, by assuring us that nature is not sacred, has allowed us to subdue it and bring it under our control. Much mischief has been done under the auspices of this word "subdue." The notion is one of responsible stewardship, not at all one of exploitation. We need now to remember that it belongs to God and brings its resources to us as a gift; ours to control, it is not ours to plunder.

5) *Humanity is in the image of God.* Humankind is shaped after the pattern of the elohim. This strange imagery both expresses the dignity of humankind and sets its limits. "Man," male and female, is like God, but is not to be confused with God.

6) *"Man" includes woman.* Sexuality is not simply a sign of our kinship with the animals and therefore a lower bestial function to be concealed and denied as unworthy of us. Humankind, 'adam, is not complete as male or female; neither is humankind originally a complete being, solitary and alone, who later "falls" into sexuality. From the outset God created humankind so that both sexes were needed for completeness. The modern notion of the self-sufficient individual is ruled out by this, as is the idea of male superiority. (This is quite remarkable since the place of women in ancient society, Hebrew included, was definitely lower than that of men. We can see this, and how it was made somewhat better, when we turn to the JE creation story.)

7) *Human beings are God's representatives.* Although the blessing of reproduction is given to humankind and animals alike, only human beings are commanded to fill the earth and subdue it. This has sometimes been taken to mean that we are given complete ownership of the world, but this is not the case. Humanity is God's steward. It is to fill the earth so that God may be

represented everywhere and to subdue the earth for the purposes of God. In spite of being made in God's image and being given the dominion, 'adam is still connected to 'adamah: that is, 'adam is of the earth and thus has limits set.

In these terms the P writer sees a perfection in humanity's original relationship to God and to the world. There is no downgrading of humanity as a mere puppet or slave to a tyrannical God; "man" (male and female) has great dignity and value. The terms of human dignity are clearly spelled out. The P writer was well aware of the fact that humankind had sunk to a level lower than that of the beasts, that we had denied our own dignity and taken it away from others, that we were such as to be worthy of complete condemnation before the righteousness of God. This merely points up the rightness of the terms of human life that humankind has violated. All, even the downfall of humankind, is set within the order that God has created.

Respectful Communication Guidelines

- R** = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others
- E** = use EMPATHETIC listening
- S** = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles
- P** = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak
- E** = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions
- C** = keep CONFIDENTIALITY
- T** = TRUST ambiguity, because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong

(from *The Bush Was Blazing but Not Consumed* by Eric H. F. Law)

I agree to uphold these guidelines for the time we have together.

Signature _____ Date _____

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