

Resources for Exploring Theology Session 5

Below are the Recommended and Optional resources for Session 5

Recommended Resources

Something to watch:

Firstly, here's a video with Pete Greig, founder of Prayer 24/7 where, amongst other things, he eats some Scripture!

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/780383923>

Something to listen to:

For many of us, one of the key, underlying questions about prayer is to do with God's omnipotence, our free will and how they relate. The regular team from God Pod discuss this topic here: <https://sptc.htb.org/godpod/godpod-94>. And here, they discuss the related topic of God's sovereignty: <https://sptc.htb.org/taxonomy/term/478>. Something to get your teeth into if the videos with me haven't been enough!

Something to read:

In Session 5 we look at how prayer and worship shapes our theology (*lex orandi, lex credendi*). At Duke Divinity School in the States, Dr Sangwoo Kim is Associate Dean for Vocational Formation. An enduring interest for Kim has been the integration of prayer and theology. Back in 2016 he wrote his PhD on 'Embodied Prayer: the practice of prayer as Christian theology.' Here is an extract from the opening of his thesis, where Barth gets a look-in (the theologian — not my cat!).

“Pastor, would you teach us how to pray?” This was the most frequent question I received in my ministry, but it was also the question my theological education had least prepared me to answer. During my seminary years, prayer was usually a secondary activity, what one practiced privately outside or after rigorous theological thinking. It was not part of either the academic exercise of theological reasoning or the moral vision of Christian life. Prayer came only after abstract thinking was finished and our moral decisions were made. Prayer was at least considered helpful as a subjective exercise that applies the already-established theological ideas to the heart of a self, but it was an optional practice in the making of a theologian. How to engage in theology through prayer and how to nurture Christians through prayer were not among the typical questions on the horizon of academic theology.

However, parishioners expect their pastors to be trained to pray with theological knowledge and wisdom. In their minds, theologians are those who have deep understanding of the traditions of Christian prayer and have profound experience of communion with God in prayer. Feeling helpless and hopeless about their ability to sustain a prayer life (especially in contrast with the daunting commandment to pray without ceasing), they are eager to learn how to pray from the pastor-theologians of their churches.

The discrepancy between these two different expectations puzzled me. I was caught between academic theology and the practice of the church. This experience propelled me into an extensive search for a model of theological education that integrates prayer and theology. I discovered that in the early and medieval church, theologians were expected to be pray-ers. They prayed, wrote prayers, and taught how to pray as their theological works. More importantly, their theological thinking was deeply embedded in the life of prayer, and their practice of prayer arose from their theological studies. There was no gap between theory and practice in their prayers. Their *lex orandi* was their *lex credendi*, and vice versa.

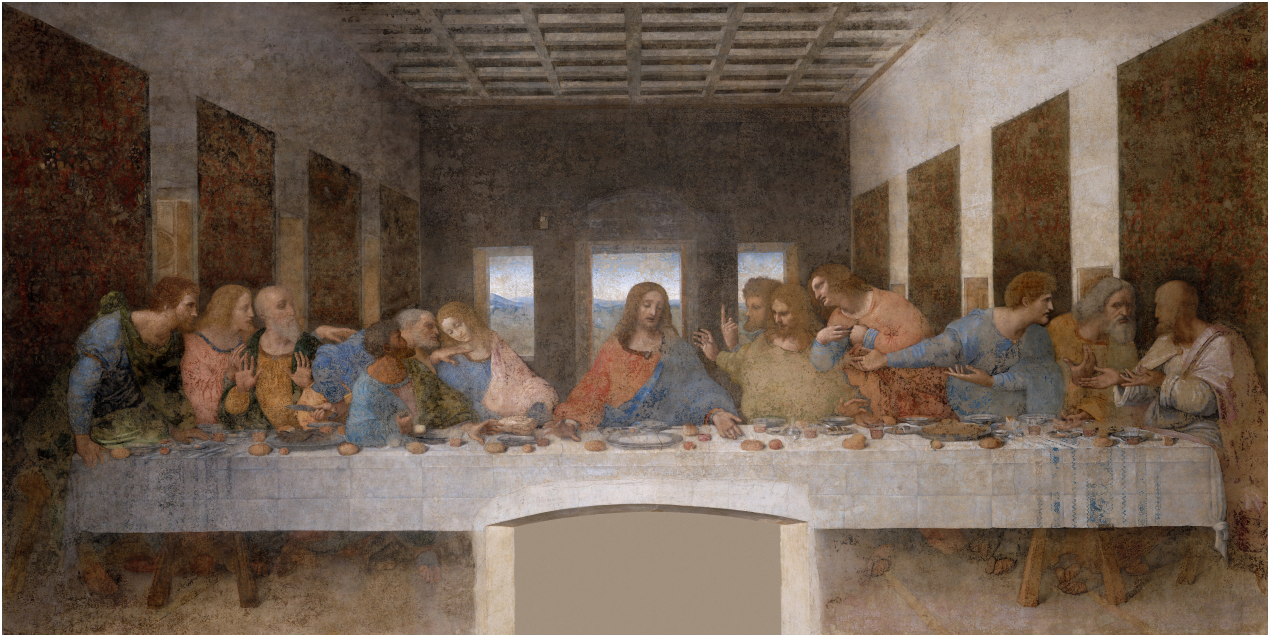
This discovery of the premodern model of the integration of prayer and theology prompted me to investigate how it was lost and whether there were any attempts to retrieve the place of prayer in contemporary theological studies. I reviewed almost all academic works on prayer published across different theological traditions, and Karl Barth's theology of prayer in particular caught my attention. Barth was one of the rare major Protestant theologians who wrote extensively about prayer. But his importance in the question of *lex orandi*, *lex credendi* does not lie merely in the fact that he treated the topic of prayer seriously in his theological works. More fundamentally, he asserted that prayer itself is a theological work, and theological study is a liturgical act in essence. For Barth, prayer is the basic posture of a theologian. Theology does not merely begin with prayer, nor is it simply followed by prayer. Theology is prayer through and through.

Barth's theology shows how deeply prayer is rooted in his overall theological vision. For Barth, prayer is not an extra activity that can be added to the complete closed system of theology. Prayer is a theological activity in which not only a human pray-er but also all three persons of the Trinity participate. Prayer is indispensable in human knowledge of God and of the self. Theology is ever renewed in prayer because a theologian's continual encounter with the living God brings about a new perspective on divine activity in history. Thus, theology always remains in the mode of prayer.

Something to look at:

Leonardo da Vinci - Online Taken on 23 July 2013, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=50410532>.

'who, in the same night that he was betrayed, took bread and gave you thanks; he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.' Eucharistic Prayer A, Common Worship, Church of England, based on 1 Cor 11:23b-24.s



Optional Resources

Something more to watch:

Here's the official video of Nick Cave singing *Into your arms*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnHoqHscTKE>

Personally, I prefer this live recording. The impact of the song on the audience is striking. Cave's music has many Christian resonances. If you're interested, he has an interesting website here: <https://www.theredhandfiles.com/> where he answers questions from all around the world. He set up this website after the death of his son. People write to him asking all sorts of questions, but often from places of profound grief. His responses are striking, especially as they draw on his faith. He has also co-authored a book with Sean O'Hagan called *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, where they explore, in conversation!, making music, being an artist and faith, amongst many other topics. Worth checking out.

And some more, very optional resources to have a look at:

Once again, two articles from the good people at St Andrews Department of Divinity. One on prayer, <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/Prayer>, and one on liturgy: <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/Liturgy>. I would never expect you to read through these in their entirety but have a dip and see what make you make of them if you have the time and inclination.

Finally, one of the key figures in the 20th century movement that encouraged us to recognise this dynamic was Fr Alexander Schmemmann. He was an Eastern Orthodox priest, born in Estonia to Russian parents, later an emigre to Paris.

To get an overview of Fr Schmemmann's thinking, please read this article: <https://adoremus.org/2021/09/in-the-name-of-liturgy-and-theology-and-piety-the-integrated-liturgical-vision-of-alexander-schmemmann/>. Whilst Schmemmann's focus was the Eucharist, others have followed a similar path (Aidan Kavanagh +) and recognised the importance of all the different types of worship that we encounter in the life of the church and how they shape our understanding of God, ourselves, and the world. With this kind of article on Schmemmann, don't worry about understanding it all — just go with the flow, let it wash over you and you'll pick up one or two key bits along the way.