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The Hope of an Open Hand: Civility as an Invitation to Incarnational Ministry

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

THE HOPE OF AN OPEN HAND:
CIVILITY AS AN INVITATION
TO INCARNATIONAL MINISTRY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on October 1, 2013
as fully adequate in scope and quality as a dissertation
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics and Future Studies.

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To my wife, Serena,
my daughter, Emily, and
my son, Cameron

To my Grandmother,
Cora Lee Hutchison

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ABSTRACT

Lifelong church involvement and 23 years of church ministry have given me a front row seat to the diminishing civility that has come to define the way in which Christians discuss controversial issues. It is no surprise we seem to be known more for our internal battles than for a united message of grace. Therefore, it is necessary to directly address the growing problem of incivility among Christian brothers and sisters when those beliefs differ.

The purpose of this dissertation is to provide the Christian community with tools to recognize various forms of conflict, interpret those conflicts appropriately, and engage those conflicts through a conversational process that equips and empowers Christians to participate in civil discourse.

To that end, the dissertation explores principles from a variety of disciplines to formulate a process that educates, equips, and empowers Christians to confidently engage in respectful, civil conversations on disputable issues. The process defines *why* civility and unity are important, and *how* Christians can approach conversations in manner that provides improved solidarity, and improved witness to the world.

SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Several years ago, I was driving to dinner with my wife. It was a beautiful, Florida evening, and we were anticipating the tranquility of a good meal while the sun slipped below the horizon of the Gulf of Mexico. My focus was broken when I saw a man spring from his car. He began screaming at the driver behind him and pounding his fist on the hood of that driver's car. Other drivers began to honk, since the incident was blocking traffic, but the screaming man continued to stand in front of the offender's car. To my shock, the driver hit the gas and sent the screaming man tumbling onto his hood, then onto the pavement. With the screaming man on the ground, the driver attempted to go on his way.

I pulled into a gas station and called 9-1-1. I'll never forget the feeling of reporting to the dispatcher what I saw. She repeated, "He actually hit the other person, on purpose?" Officers were dispatched, and I went to check on the man who was hit. He was still screaming curses while on the ground holding his knee. I helped him to the parking lot. Other witnesses had used their cars to prevent the other person from driving away. It was a chaotic scene. Several of us had to keep the men separated while police were en route. Little could be done to control their verbal salvos, which only grew worse as the wives of each man joined the fray. An ambulance carried away the screaming man (his screams decreased as the sedatives took effect), while the other driver was taken away in handcuffs by a police cruiser. Police questioned other witnesses and I about what we saw.

As the officers departed, several of us who witnessed the ordeal gathered in the gas station parking lot and simply looked at each other in disbelief.

We had just witnessed a shocking display of utter disregard for the dignity, respect, safety, and concern for another person, and for the common good of the community. The actions of these two men not only affected their personal lives, but each of us involved was impacted by what we had just experienced. An elderly gentleman shook his head and asked, “Did we really just see all that? What on earth is wrong with people? Whatever happened to just being civil?” It was the first time in my life that I actually “heard” that particular word. I had surely heard it spoken before, but this event planted the word into my consciousness like a seed. It began to take root, and like an invasive vine, has sprung forth throughout the variety of situations, conversations, and interactions one encounters in daily living.

The incident I witnessed raised in me a heightened sensitivity to my own interactions with friends, family, parishioners, strangers, critics, and all others the scriptures might include in the category of neighbor. Not only was I troubled with the uncivil thoughts and actions I entertained when faced with conflict, I began to notice just how little civility, respect, and simple courtesy were encountered in daily living.

One need not witness the extreme display of incivility referenced above in order to experience the absence of civil deed and discourse throughout the course of one’s typical week. Indeed, from one’s bedroom at home to one’s break room at work, civility is something we desire and demand from others, yet something we decreasingly express toward others.

However, while the roots of civility have proven to be far-reaching, the fruit of civility appears to be rare indeed. Civility in fact appears to lie withered, fruitless, and

dormant in many areas of life; it is a source of beauty and nourishment needed, but not cultivated or cared for, and therefore neither expressed nor experienced.

What is Civility?

There are diverse approaches to defining civility. Some choose to describe what civil behavior looks like in reality as opposed to how one might define the word in theory. Based on the belief that “the world could be a bit more polite, a bit kinder and a bit friendlier,” John Sweeney and his colleagues at the Brave New Workshop Comedy Theatre collaborated to produce *Return to Civility: A Speed of Laughter Project*. The work contains 365 very down-to-earth, common-courtesy suggestions to help create a more civilized world, in an attempt to “reclaim the appreciation once displayed for our fellow human beings, our selves, and our planet.”

Motivated by his experience at a concert during which a Grammy-award-winning musician stopped her set in order to ask the audience to quiet down, Sweeney inspired his fellow comedians to think of daily suggestions for one to lead a more considerate and considered life. According to Sweeney, the suggestions are not focused on changing others, “but rather, are a list of ways we can alter our own actions and behaviors.”¹

In contrast, Sara Hacala, protocol consultant and author of *Saving Civility: 52 Ways to Tame Rude, Crude & Attitude for a Polite Planet*, chooses to explain civility by describing the environment arising from its absence. She begins with common and seemingly minor annoyances like interrupting when someone is talking, to more serious infractions such as a failure to express gratitude, and finally to the tragic realities of

¹ John Sweeney, "Return to Civility," *Return To Civility*, January 2008, <http://return-to-civility.com/> (accessed May 6, 2013).

polarization and self-absorption. She then laments the scourge of cyber-bullying, pointing out its power to “leave teenagers so distraught that they believe their only recourse is to take their own lives.”²

Civility is often understood less through direct definition or expression, and more through words like *courtesy*, *manners*, *etiquette*, and *politeness*. Such signifiers are adequate to serve as vehicles by which one can arrive at a better understanding of civility’s significance to the world. As civility professor P.M. Forni observes, “Whatever civility might be, it has something to do with courtesy, politeness and good manners.”³ However, while the signifiers above are certainly connected to civility, they are not necessarily synonymous with it; they are similar, but not the same. Each of the words serve a supportive but different semiotic and etymological purpose.

First, *courtesy* is linked to the image of a royal court with its elegance and formality. Imagine the experience of one preparing to meet the Queen of England. There are numerous behavioral do’s and don’ts, all of which are intended to ensure one’s actions are consistent with the role of a *courtier*, or one who is in attendance at the royal court.⁴ Even the official website for the British Monarchy calls for guests meeting Her Majesty to “practice *courtesy*.”⁵ From its classical definition, courtesy is an exercise in

² Sara Hacala, *Saving Civility: 52 Ways to Tame Rude, Crude, & Attitude for a Polite Planet* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2011), 3.

³ P.M. Forni, *The Civility Solution: What to Do When People Are Rude* (New York: St.Martin's Press, 2008), 9.

⁴ Gwendolen Fairfax, “Hello Your Majesty Rules Meeting Royal Family,” [divinecaroline.com](http://www.divinecaroline.com/life-etc/culture-causes/hello-your-majesty-rules-meeting-royal-family), <http://www.divinecaroline.com/life-etc/culture-causes/hello-your-majesty-rules-meeting-royal-family> (accessed July 21, 2013).

⁵ “Meeting The Queen,” *The British Monarchy*, <http://www.royal.gov.uk/HMTheQueen/GreetingtheQueen/Overview.aspx> (accessed July 21, 2013).

bestowing respect by paying close attention to one's interaction with a person of superior status.

Second, the act of polishing brass, silver, or fine leather are images lending significance and meaning to the word *polite*. The abrasive act clears away what obscures the object's brilliant beauty, allowing it to shine forth. Polishing must be repeated, for left unattended, the polished object's beauty will become obscured once again. In the same way, politeness takes constant work. Forni observes that polite people "have put some effort into bettering themselves."⁶ While the French *civilite'* is often translated as politeness, Yale law Professor Stephen Carter asserts that the word means more than merely being polite; rather, it calls for a way of living that relates to others in a manner that promotes the advancement of civilization. "In short," writes Carter, "living in a way that is civilized."⁷

Something can be polished in order to disguise its flaws or imperfections. Some polishes can work to cover up areas of weakness and deficiency, such as applying stain and polyurethane to rotten wood. Politeness has such a downside. Under the sheen of politeness, conflicts are addressed in a passive-aggressive manner. For example, a co-worker may offer a "polite" reply, under which their anger boils. For various reasons, one tells a "polite" lie when asked for advice on an important decision. A less than stellar business presentation garners, at best, "polite" applause, or what comedians call "sympathy applause." Each of these glossed over responses "connect politeness to

⁶ P. M. Forni, *Choosing Civility the Twenty-five Rules of Considerate Conduct* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2003), 10.

⁷ Stephen L. Carter, *Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998), 14.

hypocrisy.”⁸ In its purest meaning however, politeness remains such only as long as it does not become a tool of manipulation.

Carter goes on to recount sinister actions that have been carried out through a twisted application of politeness. Segregation required black passengers to ride in the Jim Crow car and to use separate drinking fountains and restrooms. Women were forbidden to walk along the street alone or to vote: All as “simple matters of politesse.”⁹

Third, most of us would likely recall being reminded, or even warned, to practice good *manners* when we were younger. Basic to good manners are offers of “please” and “thank you.” Like the previous words, manners are practiced out of regard and sensitivity for others, but the origin of the word encompasses far more than simply chewing with one’s mouth closed. *Manner* is derived from the Latin *manus*, meaning “hand.” Manners are related to the use of one’s hands, or in a more connotative sense, the manner by which something is *handled*. Forni again provides a semiotic observation, using the image of the hand:

Thus manners came to refer to behavior in social interaction – the way we *handle* the encounter between Self and the Other. We have good manners when we use our hands well – when we handle others with care. When we rediscover the connection between *manner* and *hand*, the hand that, depending on our will and sensitivity, can strike or lift, hurt or soothe, destroy or heal, we understand the importance – for children and adults alike – of having good manners.¹⁰

Finally, while civility is incomplete without its connection to courtesy, politeness, and manners, it is superior to each of them. Civility is the proverbial glue that binds

⁸ Forni, *Choosing Civility*, 10.

⁹ Carter, *Civility*, 16.

¹⁰ Forni, *Choosing Civility*, 11.

together a communal framework within which one interprets and interacts with others. Unless motivated by civility, there is little initiative to behave courteously, engage politely, and practice good manners. In a previous paragraph, Carter argued that *civilite'* is more than politeness. He goes on to explain the word “suggests an approach to life, a way of carrying one’s self and relating to others – in short, living in a way that is civilized.”¹¹ There is a sacrificial foundation to civility; as Carter argues, it is “the sum total of the many sacrifices we are called to make for the sake of living together.”¹² By treating others civilly, one submits oneself to others and to the principles of humanity that underlie a flourishing common life together. Civility finds its origin in both the French *civilite'* and the Latin *civilitas* and *civilis*, each expressing a life lived in relation to citizens. In the earliest records of its use, the term was connected to an idea of citizenship that included “good behavior, for the good of the community.”¹³

Richard Mouw, former president of Fuller Theological Seminary, confirms and expands the idea of civility as a necessary component of societal interaction. His explanation encompasses the elements of politeness, manners, and courtesy, but includes elements of fellowship and hospitality, both of which are essential for the relational aspect of civilized living. One can practice politeness, good manners, and courtesy, yet remain detached, disconnected, and uninvolved in the life of the civilization. Mouw writes,

In the past civility was understood in much richer terms. To be civil was to genuinely care about the larger society. It required a heartfelt commitment to your

¹¹ Carter, *Civility*, 14.

¹² *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³ Sara Hacala, *Saving Civility: 52 Ways to Tame Rude, Crude, & Attitude for a Polite Planet* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2011), 8.

fellow citizens. It was a willingness to promote the well-being of people who were very different, including people who seriously disagreed with you on important matters. Civility wasn't merely an external show, it included an inner side as well.¹⁴

One's commitment to the well-being of others also forms the heart of Aristotle's contribution to civility's development. Aristotle's idea of human beings as "political animals" is derived from the Greek word *polis*, pertaining to the city. Aristotle believed one realizes their humanity only to the extent they function as good citizens of the *polis*. Themes of hospitality and fellowship also emerge in Aristotle's view. He believed good citizens would live in relationship that moved beyond the parameters of familiarity and intimacy, learning to live by extending courtesy to one not because we are familiar them, but because we see them as fellow human beings, seeing them the way we see ourselves, and treating them accordingly.

Aristotle believed that when citizenship is expressed in this manner, "we have truly begun to flourish in our humanness."¹⁵

Perhaps this is why displays of incivility, manifested in rude rhetoric, either/or propositions, vilification, and violence, has attracted the attention of so many. The shared sense of shock and dismay I and others experienced that fateful day in the parking lot of a Tampa gas station birthed the motivation for this dissertation. That same sense of dismay is an underlying reality in the face of the overwhelming problem of incivility in our communities, our families, our corporations, on our highways, among our elected officials, and sadly, even in our churches.

¹⁴ Richard J. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 14.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

Political Incivility

The presidential election of 2012 reflected a polarization and division in the “United” States, giving rise to what columnist Kathleen Parker calls “a political era of uninhibited belligerence.”¹⁶ Such a description is confirmed through a telling exchange between Tempe, Arizona, Mayor Hugh Hailman and a group of pastors and church leaders:

The pressure, the heat, the level of hate over relatively insignificant issues has made civic leadership an almost impossible task. There is virtually no helpful discussion of issues. Instead, people feel obligated to undermine one another’s character. [It’s] corrosive vilification.¹⁷

President Barack Obama recognized and addressed such a climate with an appeal for civility as he urged men and women on opposing political poles to “start thinking of each other as Americans first.”¹⁸ Indeed, a call to recognize what those with differences have in common would require one to listen, understand, and respond to others in a manner consistent with one’s own desire to be heard, understood, and responded to. This is certainly not an easy proposition, but the United States faces important if not daunting challenges of healthcare, immigration, gun control, the economy, and other important issues. These are problems requiring the best efforts of elected officials and regular

¹⁶ Kerry Robinson, "Faith's Response to Incivility," *On Faith Panelists Blog*: (blog), September 19, 2009, summary, http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/kerry_robinson/2009/09/faiths_response_to_incivility.html (accessed June 29, 2013).

¹⁷ Gary Kinnaman, "The Sin of Incivility," *Gary Kinnaman* (blog), <http://v2.garykinnaman.com/?p=30> (accessed June 21, 2013).

¹⁸ Ben Feller, "Obama Pleads for Civility, Cooperation in Politics," *Denver Post*, 2010, http://www.denverpost.com/popular/ci_14290836 (accessed July 12, 2013).

citizens-people whose common identity as Americans could provide a base of unity from which to discuss, debate, and decide a way forward.

Few believe, however, that a place of unity can be found in such a climate of incivility. *Time* magazine columnist Katy Steinmetz wrote that "anyone hoping that the next Congress will usher in a new era of civility, compromise and functionality will probably be disappointed."¹⁹ Robert Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics, began a post-election article with a pessimistic outlook: "Last week's election results are now clearer. The political extremes will likely be meaner. The political center will likely be thinner. The prospects for civility and the common good will likely be bleaker."²⁰

Since civility is lacking, so too is political productivity. *Politico* columnist Roger Simon offers another concerned observation:

Compromise, which should be the very essence of our modern political system, is scorned. There is no desire for unity in our politics, only the desire to be re-elected. This means our politicians appeal to the extremes and not the middle – assuming such a middle actually still exists.²¹

Indeed, working in the middle for the common good is difficult when the extremes of opposing sides trade virtue for vilification, as blogger Gary Kinnaman writes, "It's not just that we disagree. No, we have to demonize each other."²²

¹⁹ Katy Steinmetz, "Elections Leave Congress Divided, Further from Compromise," *Time Swampland*, 2012, summary, <http://swampland.time.com/2012/11/07/will-the-new-congress-pump-the-brakes-on-partisanship/> (accessed June 3, 2013).

²⁰ Robert Parham, "How Churches Can Help Our Nation Embrace Civility," *Ethicsdaily.com*, November 11, 2012, introduction, <http://www.ethicsdaily.com/how-churches-can-help-our-nation-embrace-civility-cms-20184> (November 11, 2012).

²¹ Roger Simon, "Those Dumber Than You," *Politico*, November 1, 2012, accessed June 6, 2013, http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1112/83345_Page2.html (accessed June 6, 2013).

²² Kinnaman, "The Sin of Incivility."

Politicians are not the only ones exchanging civility for “corrosive vilification.” The same problem exists in cubicles, boardrooms, and on the sales floors of the business world, and the toll it takes on workers and on the bottom line is sobering.

Workplace Incivility

The incivility displayed during the general election of 2012 proved sufficient to raise awareness and begin conversations on the presence and problem of incivility. But it seems rudeness, meanness, bullying, and abusive behaviors in word and deed have been a problem in the workplace for quite some time. Incivility is taken seriously as a workplace problem because of its negative effect on employee morale and productivity, which in turn diminishes the bottom line. In an article on civility in the workplace, Sonia Solomonson writes,

While it can involve the bullying behavior of my experience, workplace incivility can also include such acts as interrupting a conversation, talking loudly in common areas, failing to return a phone call, checking email or texting during meetings, showing little interest in another individual’s opinion, or even leaving malfunctioning office equipment for the next user to fix.²³

After more than 10 years of research, and with data from 9,000 respondents, management researchers Christine Pearson and Christine Porath report on the serious effects of incivility on employee morale, corporate profits, and productivity.

- Nearly half of respondents were the target of incivility from a coworker at least once a week. That 2005 number had increased from about one-fourth of workers in their 1998 study.
- 95 percent reported experiences of incivility from coworkers.
- 12 percent said they have left jobs because they were treated badly.
- Fortune 1000 executives spend roughly seven weeks a year resolving employee conflicts.
- 80 percent of employees said they get no respect at work.

²³ Sonia C. Solomonson, "A Bad Day at the Office," *The Covenant Companion*, July 2010, 15, <http://www.covchurch.org/resources/files/2010/01/7.2010.July-Civility.pdf> (accessed June 26, 2013).

Little imagination is required to consider of the outcome of incivility in this context. According to Pearson and Porath, badly treated employees suffer more stress, lose energy and disengage, take more sick days, or actually become ill with the stress. They also tell their coworkers about the bad behavior, spreading anxiety and fear among colleagues who may have to pick up the slack that results from lower morale and absenteeism. These perceptions are quite expensive and expansive:

Job stress costs U.S. corporations \$300 billion a year, much of which has been shown to stem from workplace incivility. But incivility's true impact stretches far beyond that which is measurable in dollar terms ... incivility unleashes a set of complicated and destructive dynamics on individuals, teams, and organizations that impede performance and create organizational dysfunction on a number of levels, leading to diminished financial results.²⁴

Ideally, workers can leave work at work, even if it is a negative atmosphere, and find peace and support at home with family. Unfortunately, for many households, home is as much a place of incivility as the office.

Incivility At Home

Family ties bind people together, yet those bonds are tested by the inevitability of familial conflict. Most would expect the majority of such problems to be resolved and the family to move forward.

However, marriage and family therapist John Gottman reveals that families face what he calls perpetual problems: problems for which there is no resolution, or for which a resolution would come at the destruction of the relationship itself. Speaking specifically

²⁴ Christine M. Pearson and Christine Lynne Porath, *The Cost of Bad Behavior: How Incivility Is Damaging Your Business and What to Do about It* (New York: Portfolio, 2009), 4.

of married couples, Gottman writes, “An overwhelming majority (69 percent) of couples experience perpetual problems - issues with no resolution.”²⁵

While Gottman found perpetual problems to be pervasive among married couples, he also found the common approach in addressing such problems to be instrumental in leading many couples toward relational destruction. That approach, which involves all the elements of incivility, Gottman calls “gridlock.”²⁶ Gridlock occurs when couples reach a point of inability to communicate with each other about the source of conflict. Because of the ongoing presence of the issue and the ongoing inability of the couple to communicate about it, the gridlock occurs over five digressive phases:

1. **Opposing Desires** – Desired outcomes that begin to take precedence over the value of the relationship itself, and fail to observe the way in which the conflict is tied to one’s personality or sense of identity.
2. **Entrenchment** – A defensive posture whereby one or both parties “dig in,” expecting an ongoing conflict. Here the value of winning the conflict has overtaken the value of the relationship. The other party is now an opponent from whom I must defend myself.
3. **Fear of Accepting Influence** – Conflict begins to affect areas outside of the issue itself. Overall suspicion toward the other begins to grow.
4. **Vilification** – Conflict becomes personal and pervasive. Motives of partner are seen in a more and more negative light. Relational history begins to be revised negatively.
5. **Disconnection** – A deliberate and defined break in the relationship.²⁷

According to Gottman, the opposition that leads to gridlock is connected to very deep and personal desires that reside within the heart of every individual. These desires, or “dreams” as Gottman calls them, are rooted in the values that determine one’s very

²⁵ John Mordecha Gottman, *The Marriage Clinic: a Scientifically-based Marital Therapy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 96.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 235.

²⁷ Gottman, *The Marriage Clinic*. 235.

identity.²⁸ As a result, when these dreams or desires are threatened, one believes their human identity to be at stake. Fearing the damage that conflict might bring to one's identity, the response is to drown out the other's voice altogether.

As the list above illustrates, the defensive posture, suspicion, vilification, refusal to listen, and resulting relational disconnection are similar to what transpires in the uncivil interactions of business and politics. But in the home, it is perhaps an even more tragic turn of relational events, as the most severe forms of incivility can come from the people in whom we invest the most love and trust.

In addition, Gottman reveals another form of incivility in the home. This form allows him to predict whether or not a couple will eventually divorce with 91percent accuracy after observing their interaction for just five minutes.²⁹ This destructive process results in conflicts for which there may indeed be a solution, but the manner of conversational posture, the lack of courtesy, politeness, and overall respect bring about an environment of relationally deadly negativity. According to Gottman, "Certain kinds of negativity, if allowed to run rampant are so lethal to a relationship that I call them the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse."³⁰

The Four Horsemen are:

1. **Criticism** – Moving beyond complaint to a critique of another's character or personality. It's working the person, not the problem.
2. **Contempt** (evidenced by sarcasm, cynicism, mockery, and belligerence) – A sense of superiority over the other. A demeaning and belittling posture toward

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ John Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (London: Orion Books, 2007), 2.

³⁰Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, 27.

the attempts of the other to participate in the conversation. Gottman considers this “the worst of the horsemen . . . because it conveys disgust.”³¹

3. **Defensiveness** – One reacts by shifting blame to the other. Reasoning shuts down as one’s body resorts to a fight or flight response.³²
4. **Stonewalling** – A complete cutoff of conversation. No eye contact, physically turning away, and other physical signs that one has built a wall between them and the other.

Stonewalling becomes a default response over time, until the family is no longer able or willing to communicate. In family systems theory, this is known as “distancing,” and is accompanied by unhealthy levels of engagement in activities that promote separation from the other person. These include workaholism, over-engagement in hobbies, overuse of alcohol or other substances, and an increasing inability to relate well to other family members.³³ It is also a time when family members will often begin to turn to others outside the family for support or affirmation. Family Systems Theory calls these *Triangles*, which can further complicate the relational dynamics, and can increase the chorus of incivility within the home.³⁴

It could be argued that in business and politics, playing dirty can at times give one an immediate victory, but at what eventual cost? The “win” is at best temporary and often is revealed to be one that comes at the expense of corporate health, civic progress, or other expressions of the greater good. The same is true at home. When incivility erupts between siblings, spouses, and other family members, playing dirty may “win” the argument. But from a relational standpoint, what has been lost?

³¹ Ibid., 29.

³² Ibid., 36.

³³ Roberta M. Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships: A New Way of Thinking about Human Interactions* (Minneapolis: Chronimed Pub., 1992), 55.

³⁴ Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 114.

The thoughtful reader will see the many connections between Gottman's therapy for couples and other relationships in our lives. One does not have to be married to experience conflict with someone, encounter gridlock, or be trampled by the four horsemen.

Incivility in the Church

Civility, according to Mouw, is the choice to extend "public politeness" to others, even, perhaps especially, when we disagree with them. However, civility and its supporting virtues are the result of a personal decision to embrace and extend them to others.

In a sense, civility is an invitation one cannot be forced to accept. One must want to be civil. It can be expected and commended, but not demanded. Robert Pippin, American philosopher and professor at the University of Chicago, describes civility this way:

Being civil to one another is much more active and positive a good than mere politeness or courtesy, but like many other important goods, such as generosity, gratitude, or solidarity, it is not the sort of thing that can be "demanded" as a matter of duty, like a moral entitlement.³⁵

Could there be an exception to Pippin's statement? Is there a sense in which civility is expected? Furthermore, is there a place from which civility could indeed be demanded?

It would seem reasonable for followers of Jesus that a sense of shared belief in his message of peace, grace, mercy, perseverance, and above all, unconditional love, would

³⁵ Robert B. Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 227.

produce a community of people described as peaceful, graceful, merciful, patient, and loving. It would seem reasonable that such a community would choose to obediently embody the civility present in Jesus' command to love God and love neighbor as one loves their own self. The faith community then would be a living "sanctuary" from the hostility of the world. Within this sanctuary, believers encourage one another by learning what civility is and how it is lived out. The church then enters the world where its civility contrasts with the coarseness of culture. The hope is that through its example of civility among those within the church toward each other and its civil posture toward the culture, the church's message of grace becomes incarnational and invitational.

In reality, however, the community of faith does not resemble such a living sanctuary from the incivility of the wider culture. Rather, the Body of Christ has come to be seen as a most uncivil environment itself - more judgmental than incarnational toward those outside its ranks, and more internally confrontational than compassionate.

How serious is this problem *within* the church? How widespread, and to what extent is it a serious concern *for* the church?

The problem is evident in the failure of Christians toward opportunities to model civil discourse. In 2009, public relations guru Mark Demoss launched The Civility Project, calling for greater civility in the public square. Demoss called on members of Congress, as well as other influential people to commit themselves to greater respect in public discourse. In addition, Demoss, who is a devoted Christian, called on fellow Christians, churches, and church leaders to set the example for the rest of the country. After two years the project was shut down due to lack of participation. Demoss stated in an interview,

The state of civil discourse in our country is, in my view, not good. In fact, it is generally terrible. This is not only a problem on the left among secularists; it is a problem on the right (sometimes worse so) and among people calling themselves followers of Christ.³⁶

The problem is evident through the increased activity of individuals and ministries specializing in church conflict. Bill Wilson, President of the Center for Congregational Health at Wake Forest University and regular contributor to the *Associated Baptist Press*, calls the current state of congregational conflict a “pandemic.” He writes, “Our conflict intervention calls are on the upswing ... conflict is surging.”³⁷ Wilson goes on to explain that a primary culprit for this surge is a loss of civility in our culture: “Social scientists have documented the erosion of civility and social capital in a variety of settings. We find members of most congregations patterning their behavior in the church after the brutal tactics of our culture rather than on the teachings of Christ.”³⁸ The Harford Institute for Religion Research reports that “75 percent of all churches report conflict within the past five years.”³⁹ Kinnaman, lamenting the “sin of incivility” at work in churches, writes that “in the church, people are more often bound by an angry spirit of entitlement than by a Christ-like attitude.”⁴⁰

³⁶ Daniel Darling, "Out of Ur: Friday Five Interview: Mark Demoss," Outofur.com, http://www.outofur.com/archives/2013/08/friday_five_int_14.html (accessed August 23, 2013).

³⁷ Bill Wilson, "The Conflict Pandemic," ABP News, <http://www.abpnews.com/opinion/item/7942-the-conflict-pandemic> (accessed November 2, 2012).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Carl Dudley, Theresa Zingery, and David Breeden, "Insight Into Congregational Conflict," Faithcommnitiestoday.org, <http://faithcommnitiestoday.org/sites/all/themes/factzen4/files/InsightsIntoCongregationalConflict.pdf> (accessed July 30, 2013).

⁴⁰ Kinnaman, "The Sin of Incivility."

The problem is evident in the tone of interaction among Christian leaders. Theologian Roger Olson highlights the uncivil manner by which Southern Baptist pastor Wayne Burleson accused non-Calvinist colleagues of “flirting with Pelagianism, and flouting humanism.” Olson posits, “This kind of venomous attack on fellow Christians, God-fearing, Bible believing, Jesus-loving Christians, is so uncalled for, so out of line, so indecent and uncivil that it demands censure.”⁴¹ Olson’s zeal over Burleson’s accusations is understandable when one realizes that Burleson in essence accuses non-Calvinist colleagues of embracing beliefs that would place them outside the scope of orthodoxy. While Olson raises the alarm, such an approach to disagreement within the Christian community is becoming increasingly common. Blogger Shawn Wood calls the current environment “The Christian Cannibal Culture,” asking his readers, “Do you ever just grow weary of something? Just throw your hands up and say, ‘I’m tired of it.’ Well, I am tired of the lack of civility, honor, and lingual responsibility shown to our Christian subculture.”⁴²

The problem is evident in expressions of incivility toward leaders by parishioners. Charles Chandler is executive director of Ministering to Ministers, an organization that offers retreats to battered Christian leaders. He reports shocking accounts of hostility and even violence directed toward pastoral staff from church members. Chandler takes the problem seriously enough to call it an “epidemic” among churches.⁴³ The author concurs

⁴¹ Roger E. Olson, "Why Can't Southern Baptists Just Get along," *Roger E. Olson* (blog), July 8, 2012, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2012/07/why-cant-southern-baptists-just-get-along/> (accessed July 30, 2013).

⁴² Shawn Wood, "The Christian Cannibal Culture," *Shawnwoodwrites.com* (blog), January 10, 2013, <http://shawnwoodwrites.com/blog/the-christian-canibal-culture/> (accessed June 2, 2013).

⁴³ Charles H. Chandler, "Why Is There Such an Epidemic of Incivility Toward Ministers?" MTM Foundation, http://www.mtmfoundation.org/Servant/Vol_6_3/v6_3_05.htm (accessed June 29, 2013).

with Chandler's assessment. The worst expressions of incivility, slander, threats of violence, and attempts to harm the author's ministry or person have come not from atheists, agnostics, secular humanists, or even from a group of wiccans with whom I converse. I have been treated the worst by people within the church.

The problem is evident in the ease by which one reacts to incivility with similar incivility. It would benefit the author to write as if the problem of incivility can or should be owned by those who read this dissertation, engage with the subsequent artifact, or otherwise interact with the conclusion that incivility is indeed a serious problem in the church. To do so, however, would be at best disingenuous and at worst hypocritical. Incivility is as much a problem for the author as it is for those the author references. *Washington Post* reporter Kelly Robinson shares a similar frustration: "The lack of civility in public discourse and by people of faith tempts me to incivility!"⁴⁴ Robinson's comment reveals how easy it can be for believers to simply fight uncivil fire with uncivil fire. Like Robinson, incivility tempts me to react in kind, rather than responding with kindness, playing the game by the world's rules instead of practicing the way of Jesus. Similarly, Mouw writes, "As a Christian, I worry that many believers seem to be contributing more to the problem than the solution."⁴⁵ Incivility in the church is the church's problem. It is *our* problem. Mine and yours. Ours, then is the responsibility to become part of the solution.

⁴⁴ Kerry Robinson, "Faith's Response to Incivility," *On Faith Panelists Blog*: (blog), September 19, 2009, http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/kerry_robinson/2009/09/faiths_response_to_incivility.html (accessed June 29, 2013).

⁴⁵ Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 12.

SECTION 2: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Introduction

On what basis therefore, does one make the intellectual and behavioral decision to be civil? Since incivility is a problem in culture, what sort of solutions are proposed by culture? What value do such proposals hold for Christians who recognize the problem of incivility and desire to improve their interaction? The questions are especially significant in light of the fact that civility is desired and called for by a culture that rejects absolute standards of morality and enjoys being entertained by the very thing it wants to see diminished. Calls for civility from a relativistic culture to a relativistic culture are unconvincing at best.

While followers of Christ can glean wisdom from the chorus of voices below, their solutions ultimately fall short for various reasons. Some miss opportunities to affect real change in their context by offering little incentive for civil behavior. Some fail to provide hopeful and helpful assistance to offenders who come to see the error of their ways. Some solutions are simply unknown to the wider Christian community due to the absence of believers willing to become informed ambassadors for what could be very effective tools for engaging incivility. Others confuse their allies with their enemies. Still others fail to anchor their appeal for civility to a solid moral framework. Finally, a common weakness is in the lack of a clear and simple process through which one might choose civility in the melee of life.

Behavioral Bankruptcy and the Bottom Line

The world of business depends heavily on the well-being of its employees. Because there is a direct connection between employee morale, corporate productivity, and profit margin, the workplace environment is important to corporate success. As a result, the problem of workplace incivility is an issue taken seriously in the business world. As Hacala notes, “There is nothing productive about incivility, and the costs to us - individually, economically, and as a society-are astronomical.”¹ Her appeal includes a passionate plea for civil behavior, which she places against a backdrop of solid research across a wide spectrum of social interaction. Hacala weaves her solutions through 52 pithy and informative suggestions for creating a more “polite planet.” Creating a more polite planet involves taking seriously the difficult work involved in choosing to express civil behavior. Hacala writes, “It is not simply enough to want the world to be a better place; we have to work at it, with a deep sense of purpose, commitment, courage, and compromise.”²

For all of Hacala’s well-articulated and passionate calls for *what* one should do, the weakness in her proposal is its lack of a moral imperative tied to *why* one is compelled to do it. To be sure, Hacala’s suggestions make good common sense. That is, if her suggested behaviors were commonly practiced, culture would indeed experience “greater respect, awareness, understanding, and acceptance of each other.”³ Other than data supporting a utilitarian thesis that incivility leads to decreased productivity, there is a

¹ Sara Hacala, *Saving Civility*, 3.

² *Ibid.*, 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 7.

little incentive to give it a try. Add this to an already existing notion that civility is a form of weakness, and one has little reason to invest time in her 52 step solution. P.M. Forni expands the perception of civility as weakness. As Forni notes,

Many people see no need for civility in a less-than-perfect world. They believe that in our aggressive and competitive society civility is a luxury they cannot afford. If you are polite, you are perceived as weak and you are brushed aside, they say. Being considerate and kind is hazardous to your self-esteem, your ambitions, and your net worth.⁴

Notwithstanding Hacala's well-written and common-sense attempt to save civility, an appeal to a culture with a declining sense of duty and an increasing belief that civility is a sign of weakness may convince one that civility is an exercise in futility. Therefore, workplace civility may be difficult to incentivize on merits of duty, but shrinking profits of companies with uncivil working environments are sufficient to motivate change in the practices, processes, and eventually the personality of the organization and its people. In other words, when workers have no incentive to learn how to behave in a more civil manner, money talks.

Businesses don't just call for civility on grounds of its impact on the social environment (employee morale). They also point to the positive benefits for all involved when employees feel valued, respected, understood, and accepted. In a study on five corporations modeling admirable levels of workplace civility, Pearson and Porath reveal, "Each of them is cultivating civility within its workplace, and each attributes at least part of its success to that fact."⁵ As basketball legend John Wooden once said, "The main ingredient of stardom is the rest of the team."

⁴ Forni, *Choosing Civility*, 25

⁵ Pearson and Porath, *The Cost of Bad Behavior*, 123.

If one line could sum up Pearson and Porath's perspective it would be, "There are costs for bad behavior."⁶ Since people are responsible for behavior, corporate issues are people issues. Through their website and blog,⁷ and their popular book, *The Cost of Bad Behavior*, Pearson and Porath offer specific advice for people affected by incivility in various ways. There are steps for corporations to confront and change a hostile work environment,⁸ instructions for department leaders outlining how to address incivility among direct reports, and tips on how to pick up signs of hostility when interviewing potential employees.⁹

An important part of addressing workplace incivility is what one does if they are a victim. Contrary to popular metaphors that compare workplace hostility to playground bullying, the best advice is not to "fight back." Instead, victims are instructed to engage in a measured and strategic process that offers the best chance for a positive outcome. Such a process remains focused on the issue itself, keeping the situation professional rather than personal.¹⁰

For the Christian community, there are some important lessons to take from this solution. First, insistence that targets not retaliate in a "school playground" manner is consistent with Jesus' instructions regarding conflict in Matthew 18. The offended party is to follow a process that allows for a redemptive and optimistic outcome. The offended

⁶ Pearson and Porath, *The Cost of Bad Behavior*, 8.

⁷Christine Pearson and Christine Lynne Porath, *The Cost of Bad Behavior: How Incivility Is Damaging the Workplace and What To Do About It*, July 9, 2009, accessed June 12, 2013, <http://www.thecostofbadbehavior.com/home.html>.

⁸ Pearson and Porath, *The Cost of Bad Behavior*, 138.

⁹ Ibid., 155

¹⁰ Ibid., 163.

party is seeking above all to reach a conciliatory end to the conflict. Both in the Body of Christ and in the business world, retaliation only works to escalate the conflict to a scenario where everyone loses. Hence, God is clear that acts of vengeance fall into his department alone.

A second lesson for the church is found in the manner of keeping conflict centered on the behavior instead of the person. This approach seeks to protect the relationship with a fellow brother or sister in Christ while at the same time honestly addressing an issue of disagreement. It is important for members of the Body to remember above all else that while it is necessary to decisively address, resist, and even reprimand incivility, the one we are addressing remains a fellow member of the faith community. The relationship may indeed be strained to the point that interaction or employment is eliminated, but keeping the issue about the issue and not the person allows for the optimism of a redemptive and peaceful outcome; If not immediately, perhaps eventually.

With redemption and optimism in mind, there is hope for offenders who realize the toll their incivility is taking and who are willing to pay the price necessary to correct their behavior. Offenders who are compelled by their own conscience, or by a superior, must face the difficult reality of their actions by gathering data collected from their peers, opening themselves to coaching, and if needed, counseling. Finally, offenders can choose to form new habits of interaction based on responding instead of reacting.¹¹ Unfortunately, offenders will find little more than a half-page of these suggestions, and very little compelling argumentation on why such suggestions should be pursued with the

¹¹ Pearson and Porath, *The Cost of Bad Behavior*, 179.

intensity Pearson and Porath suggest. Such an abbreviated effort at an important section communicates a cynicism toward an offender's desire and capacity to change. Pearson writes, "If you're uncivil by nature, it's unlikely you would even pick up this book."¹² Keep in mind from the first chapter of this dissertation that cynicism is itself a form of incivility. Should Pearson and Porath expect an uncivil individual to adopt suggestions offered in an ever so slightly uncivil manner? This to me was a missed opportunity on their part to provide a substantive process toward change for the very sources of the problem they seek to solve.

For both victims and offenders, long-term change is only possible when problem habits are replaced by healthy habits. Victims may need to address habitual patterns of passivity and low self-respect, exchanging them for practices of healthy assertiveness and confidence. Incivility may be an expression of humility and deference, but it is in no way intended to be mistaken for weakness.

In a related issue, some victims may not be the targets of deliberate incivility, but instead may be overly sensitive to particular social environments. A study out of the University of Houston found that some people believing themselves to be targets of incivility were inappropriately reacting to very normal conditions. They had in common habits of social detachment, of being easily irritated or offended, and of expressing a high degree of insecurity. The study suggests that managers not only train workers to develop habits of civility, but to provide help in developing habits of properly interpreting

¹² Pearson and Porath, *The Cost of Bad Behavior*, 179.

appropriate workplace interaction.¹³ Offenders, on the other hand, need to replace habits of aggressiveness and insensitivity with habits consistent with civility and respect.

When both victims and offenders practice new and better habits of interaction, the benefits to the organization reach farther than simple kindness at the water cooler. The entire culture of the organization can change. Charles Duhigg calls these “Keystone Habits.”¹⁴ Keystone habits trigger change in areas beyond the problem the new habit is targeting.¹⁵ When one part improves, the whole organization becomes stronger.

It is no accident that the apostle Paul uses the metaphor of a body to describe the interaction between “members” of the Body of Christ. Much like Duhigg’s keystone habits, it can be difficult to understand how parts of the Body that seem so different from one another would actually depend on each other.

Paul’s use of the body alludes to a well-known fable in his day credited to Aesop called *The Belly and its Members*.¹⁶ It concerns an imaginary dispute between the stomach and other body parts. The “members” are fed up because the stomach gets all of the food. In retaliation, the members refuse to supply the stomach with food, until they realize they are becoming weak themselves. The members finally understand their connection to the stomach, and all ends well. In like manner, when deliberate steps are taken to respect and better understand each member, the whole body flourishes. Civility

¹³ Alex C. Milam, Christiane Spitzmueller, and Lisa M. Penney, "Investigating Individual Differences among Targets of Workplace Incivility.," *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 14, no. 1 (2009): 63-65, doi:10.1037/a0012683.

¹⁴ Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* (New York: Random House, 2012), 118-119.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁶ Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 258.

within the Body of Christ is a problem for each member, since each member is an offender. As such, each member bears part of the responsibility toward the solution to the problem.

The business sector understands incivility to be a problem for their profits and their people. When people are rude, insensitive, disrespectful or otherwise uncivil, morale and customer satisfaction declines. The results are diminished profits. Corporations can create cultures of civility through clear guidelines stating how employees are expected to treat one another, what procedures to follow if there are concerns, and how each employee is both responsible to be part of the civil workplace environment, and how each employee will benefit from doing their part. The suggestions available in this section hold great value for addressing corporate incivility. Followers of Christ in the business world can benefit from these principles as they display glimpses of the Kingdom in their work toward creating a more polite planet.

Christians involved in church or nonprofit ministries can apply these principles, since it takes both human and monetary resources to do ministry: “Workplace incivility is not only a problem reserved for large corporations. It occurs across the spectrum, including in religious institutions.”¹⁷ Declining financial involvement or a dwindling volunteer base can often be traced to leaders, staff, volunteers, benefactors and others sensing a lack of respect, sensitivity, understanding, and civility even within a religious organization’s environment. Therefore, the problem of incivility, being present in for-profit businesses, non-profit organizations, and in church-based ministries can indeed be addressed through the solutions above.

¹⁷ Solomonson, "A Bad Day at the Office."

Although there is value in the proposals above, corporate incivility remains an issue for which corporations spend hundreds of billions of dollars each year to address. For all of the common sense suggestions and studies linking civility to better morale and profit margin, civility continues to be confused with weakness, and remains a much sought after virtue in the business community. The solutions above fall short because even financial incentive cannot adequately address the business of one's heart.

A Moral Compass in Cyberspace

In 2012, Notre Dame Linebacker and Heisman trophy nominee Manti Te'o was hailed for his courage to play in the face of the tragic death of his grandmother and his girlfriend. While his grandmother's death was a real event, it was later discovered that Te'o's girlfriend, her graduation from Stanford, her illness, and her death were false. All of it was the result of an elaborate online identity, complete with photos, a Twitter account, an Instagram page, a Facebook page, and phone calls. Te'o admits he never met the woman in person, but developed a close relationship with her. A former friend of Te'o eventually admitted to creating the whole thing, though it is still unclear if Te'o was a participant, a victim, or something in between.

The incident ignited conversations regarding the ease of creating a false identity online, the ethics of doing so, and the impact such behaviors have on individuals and communities.

The connection between civility and morality effectively frame the issues raised in the brave new world of social media. What was most surprising for me was how often this same situation is taking place today: often enough for MTV to feature a show called

Catfish TV, which films men and women who explore, discover, and confront their online deceivers. Manti Te'o simply brought to light a phenomenon that happens with regularity in our online world, a world where electronic screens alter the standards of reality, morality, and civility. This section explores online incivility, how a moral appeal is used to address it, and how morality interacts with civility.

Andrea Weckerle, attorney and founder of Civil-nation, a nonprofit organization specializing in online hostility, offers a perspective on the growing incivility in cyberspace. More than 30 percent of the world's population now uses the internet. That's roughly two billion users, representing 340 undecillion (340 trillion trillion trillion) unique IP addresses.¹⁸ It's little wonder, according to Weckerle, the number of online insults found on Twitter alone were compared to resemble "a weaver-bird colony at dawn."¹⁹

To be sure, cyber incivility is a problem for the church as well. The world of instant communication has made it all too easy to spread rumors or engage in reactionary rhetoric. Christians often "get drawn into wars of online words, and before they know it, they've inadvertently done more harm than good."²⁰

¹⁸ David Goldman, "Internet Has 340 Trillion Trillion Trillion Addresses," CNNMoney, June 06, 2012, <http://money.cnn.com/2012/06/06/technology/ipv6/index.htm>.

¹⁹ Andrea Weckerle, *Civility in the Digital Age: How Companies and People Can Triumph over Haters, Trolls, Bullies, and Other Jerks* (Indianapolis, Que, 2013), 6.

²⁰ Marshall Shelley, "Electronic Warfare," *Christianity Today*, Summer 2013, accessed August 6, 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2013/summer/electronic-warfare.html?>

I agree that it's easy to text, post, tweet, or otherwise communicate online in an inadvertently uncivil way. Because of the reality of instant communication, I have sent more than one message in the heat of the moment that I wish I could get back. Thus, a habit of letting online posts "cool" before sending them has proven to be a wise habit.

On the other hand, there exists a very real problem of deliberately uncivil, untrue, and even malicious things posted online by Christians toward other Christians. Just a quick look into the comment thread of many Facebook pages, blogs, and other online interactions will reveal a shocking level of hostility among members of the cyber-Body of Jesus. The lead mentor for this academic program is the subject of sites dedicated to discrediting and labeling him as a New Age heretic.⁶⁶ The author was the target of a Facebook page back in 2008 intended to portray me as a false teacher to the parents and students of the ministry I was serving.

To begin addressing this problem, it helps to understand the terms by which online troublemakers are identified. The largest category are the "trolls," whom Weckerle describes as "attention-seekers whose sole goal is to wreak havoc online for fun and pleasure ... they thrive on the perceived weakness and naiveté of their victims. They delight in insulting, shocking, upsetting, and provoking others."⁶⁷

Another category of online troublemaker is the "sock puppet." Like trolls, sock puppets are committed to incivility, but do so under false identities, much like those

⁶⁶ Ken Silva, "LEONARD SWEET, FRANK VIOLA, AND MYSTIC MEISTER ECKHART: Apprising Ministries," Apprising Ministries RSS, June 1, 2010, <http://apprising.org/2010/06/01/leonard-sweet-frank-viola-and-mystic-meister-eckhart/>.

David Cloud, "Leonard Sweet Continues Promoting Mystical Heresy," Reformed Nazarene Contend for the Faith That Was Once for All Entrusted to the Saints Jude 13, February 7, 2012, <http://reformednazarene.wordpress.com/2012/02/07/leonard-sweet-continues-promoting-mystical-heresy/>.

⁶⁷ Weckerle, *Civility in the Digital Age*, 88.

involved in the Manti Te'o incident. Weckerle explains, "The reason for using a sock puppet is to be intentionally deceptive, whether for purposes of entertainment, to undermine or attack an opponent, or to gain social political, or business advantage."⁶⁸ In her call for cyber civility, Weckerle appeals to a moral mandate, stating that users should measure their online behavior in light of the values held by society, one of which she believes is civility.

Whether one is online or engaged in face-to-face time, the ethical maturity required for the Christian community to choose civility is both complex and difficult, requiring one to understand the impact of their decisions. Weckerle writes, "With a training in civility we develop the valuable habit of considering that no action of ours is without consequences for others and anticipating what those consequences will be."⁶⁹ It can be difficult however, for consequences to be grasped in a culture where self-expression and self-esteem are valued over self-control. Forni writes,

As a society we have done a good job of encouraging self-esteem but not a good job of teaching self-control. We all need self-esteem. Self-esteem is good, it keeps us sane - it is an immune system for our souls. However, when we are too focused on raising self-esteem, we swell the ranks of the self-absorbed.⁷⁰

The way forward is found in a civility that reflects the Christ-like traits of moral conviction and compassionate sacrifice. Carter writes, "Civility is a moral issue, not just a matter of habit or convention: It is morally better to be civil than to be uncivil."⁷¹

Speaking not only from his position as a law professor, but also from his perspective as a

⁶⁸ Weckerle, *Civility in the Digital Age*, 91.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 14.

⁷⁰ Forni, *Choosing Civility*, 24.

⁷¹ Carter, *Civility*, xii.

Christian, Carter understands civility to be an expression of societal sacrifice and believes all are morally responsible to put the other ahead of self. Civility calls for one to extend politeness, courtesy, and good manners out of a conviction that doing so is necessary for one to be a good neighbor within the larger community.

Carter's posture is descriptive in tone. He lays out a case for the problem, its cause, and its philosophical solution. Carter's descriptions are indeed clear, however, while Carter makes a strong case, there is little in the way of instruction for change. Forni, while also descriptive, is also prescriptive and even preventative. According to Forni, civility is a morally mandated awareness, "an active interest in the well-being of others." A tapestry into which is woven restraint, respect, and consideration of others. As such, "civility belongs in the realm of ethics."⁷²

The decision to practice civility is also supported by the belief that the individuals populating society will reap its positive benefits. Those who practice civility discover again and again that "being kind is good for the kind."⁷³ Civility is good for the individual and good for the whole of society online and offline. Civility allows one's self-esteem to develop with a healthy dose of humility, and one's self-expression to develop with restraint. Civility is sacrificial, a selfless quality necessary for human flourishing. Yet civility remains an invitation. Therefore, one can choose not to pursue civility, and many make this choice.

I am optimistic and hopeful, believing that expressions of civility to others will in some way impress them to adopt and express it themselves. Forni makes a plea for such

⁷² Forni, *Choosing Civility*, 9.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 14.

an expression: “By treating you the best way I know how, I appeal to the best in you, urging you to do the same. The practice of civility is the applying of gentle force with the goal that everybody be a winner in the delicate game of social exchange.”⁷⁴

However, I am also realistic. The experience of 23 years in church ministry have proven time and again that treating others the best I can and applying the gentle force of kindness is not a sure-fire motivator toward civility. At times my civility has been returned with a torrent of anger, vitriol, and uncivil rhetoric. In an effort to prepare civil people for those who respond to the gentle pressure above with uncivil behavior, Forni wrote *The Civility Solution: What to do When People are Rude*. This work offers an entire section on what it means to accept everyday rudeness while maintaining one’s sense of respect and safety. Yet Forni holds stubbornly to his optimism: “Why spend time on something that does not benefit us directly? Because it is the right thing to do ... Civility compels us - at least some of us - to stand.”⁷⁵ Forni’s work through his books, workshops, and the Johns Hopkins Civility Project have brought the problem of incivility into the wider cultural and academic conversation, as have Carter and Weckerle. However, encouraging others to embrace civility as a moral mandate apart from a framework of Christian discipleship falls short in making the solution a compelling one for the church.

The Solution in the Sign

A popular game available for smart phones and tablets is one called Logo Quiz. Players are shown images of logos from a variety of markets and timed for how quickly

⁷⁴ Forni, *Choosing Civility*, 27.

⁷⁵ Forni, *The Civility Solution*, 6.

they identify the company or product. Interestingly, one's ability to identify the logos is not necessarily based on the logo's popularity. Instead, players find they identify most quickly logos with which they have a significant connection. A story connecting them to the image.

Although logos appeared for Lamborghini autos, Apple computers and Starbucks coffee, the author's best scores arose from logos representing the Walt Disney Company. Disney's image connects the author to powerful experiences with family and friends. The mouse ears "spoke" to the author, retelling stories from a childhood spent living less than an hour from the Magic Kingdom, from the memory of viewing *Beauty and the Beast* with the women who would later become his wife, and recalling a Disney cruise from this past summer where special bonds were forged with his children.

The image's significance connects it to experiences, emotions, identities, dreams and other much deeper and wider things than the image alone could ever convey. When one deliberately seeks for deeper and wider significance of signs, be they pictures, gestures, objects, people, locations, logos, words, or even literal signs by the road, they are practicing what the author suggests is among the most important and overlooked tools for understanding how humans communicate. This discipline is called Semiotics.

Semiotics is an attempt to understand the way we humans communicate through the use of signs. Signs are made up of many different components - words, sounds, body language and context. These components combine to create a *visual language* which allows one to interpret the sign's message. How does this discipline offer solutions for incivility? The following section endeavors to offer a description on the discipline, and rationale for its importance as a partial solution to incivility.

The discipline of semiotics seeks to understand signs. Signs are understood to be both visual and verbal, therefore the red octagon visual and the text “stop” are both equal parts of the sign instructing a motorist to stop. Semiotic pioneer, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913, a Swiss linguist, proposed that “a sign has two parts: a signified concept in the mind and the signifier that generate the concept.”⁷⁶ For our driver then, the *signified* concept in the mind would be the concept of stopping their vehicle, a concept learned for the sake of safety to their person, property, and that of others. The *signifier*, in Saussure’s dyadic system, would be the stop sign itself. However, a sign’s significance can change because of time, culture, or other factors. English and film studies professor Crystal Downing describes Saussure’s perspective: “Like ingredients drawn from a cupboard, meaning is drawn from a sign’s context.”⁷⁷

Saussure’s dyadic system dominated the science during the twentieth century, also impacting rhetoric, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, theology, and art criticism. Over time, however, others studying semiotics challenged Saussure’s dyadic system, believing it insufficient to understand the complexities of context on a sign’s meaning. Literary critic I. A. Richards found Saussure’s approach incomplete in its “process of interpretation” and prone to “neglect entirely the things for which signs stand.”⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Crystal Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 105.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁷⁸ C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* (London: Kegan Paul, 1923), 6.



Figure 1: Saussure's Dyadic System

A contemporary of Saussure, American philosopher C.S. Peirce (1839-1914), however, developed a triadic view of the sign. Downing writes that the importance of the additional concept allowed for

a world beyond language...Rather than reducing a sign to a voiced signifier and its mental signified, the triangle reflects the interdependent relationship among *things* in our world, the *signifiers* we use to communicate them to others, and the *concepts* molded by and about both.⁷⁹

For Peirce, this explains the context within which the stop sign triggers a powerful emotional and/or physical response from the driver. Suppose the driver bursts into tears at seeing and reading the sign. It would be clear to a passenger that the sign signified much more than its intended message. But the passenger has yet to learn that the driver's mother was killed in an accident caused by someone running a stop sign. There is an entirely different apprehension, therefore, between the driver and the passenger when they approach a stop sign.

Whereas Saussure's dyadic sign considered only the signifier and the signified, Peirce considered the addition of objects that the sign refers to: "Any sign has *two Objects*, its object as it is represented and its object in itself."⁸⁰ Peirce calls the object as it

⁷⁹ Downing, 110.

⁸⁰ Ogden and Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, 282.

is represented the “representamen.” This is the sign as it is represented to the person. In our example, it is the stop sign’s significance to the driver. The object in itself is also the stop sign, the physical “thing” as it exists: red, white, metal, and octagonal, with the letters s-t-o-p. This is the stop sign as represented to the passenger. To one, the object becomes an object laden with additional representations. To the other, the same object represents only the significance of stopping. The difference, according to Peirce, is in the “interpretant; the person’s mental apprehension of the object.”⁸¹ The stop sign (object) then is as much a sign of (representamen) carelessness, recklessness, loss, and pain for the driver (interpretant) as the same stop sign (object) is merely a sign (representamen) to stop (interpretant) for the passenger. The interpretant becomes yet another sign since it is “other” than the object perceived. This triadic process inspired by Peirce is part of what is taught today as the “semiotic triangle.”⁸² Peirce, however, called the process the “triadic relation.”⁸³

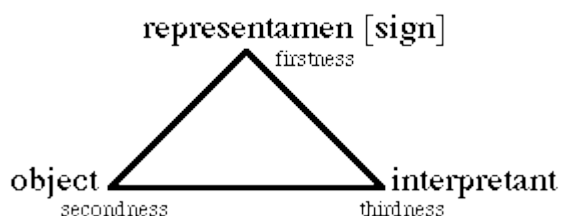


Figure 2: Peirce's Triadic Relation

⁸¹ Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth*, 199.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 110.

⁸³ Charles Sanders Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs," in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 99.

It is important to understand words as verbal signs, for they not only serve as signifiers of objects as they are (the stop sign), but are also signifiers of objects as they are represented (the stop sign as a sign to stop, or as a sign of loss), based on the sign one creates in their mind - the interpretant. This raises the question of understanding. If an object in itself becomes a multitude of differently conceptualized objects in the minds of others, what then creates the differing interpretants? According to Peirce, it is “collateral experience” or “collateral observation,” both of which refer to “the prerequisite for getting any idea signified by the sign...a previous acquaintance with what the sign denotes.”⁸⁴

Back at the stop sign, the passenger is incapable of understanding how the stop sign has come to elicit what to them is an unusual response from the driver, without knowledge of the driver’s experience of loss. On the other hand, the driver could interpret the passenger’s bewilderment at their emotional outburst as insensitive, then educate the passenger on the story behind the stop sign’s significance. The collateral experience is for the driver “a previous acquaintance with what the sign denotes (the accident resulting in the loss of the driver’s mother),” but this is unknown to the passenger because the experience is “a prerequisite to getting any idea (in this case the driver’s) signified by the sign.”

Herein lies the importance of semiotics and an understanding of collateral experience toward a solution to the problem of incivility. It is often one’s failure to understand how words are perceived that escalates a situation to the point of incivility. As semiotics helps illuminate the inner workings of perceptions, it helps one understand how

⁸⁴ Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce.*, ed. Arthur W. Burks (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1998), 136.

to say what one is trying to say in a way that others “get” what is being said. The study of semiotics provides a valid and necessary element to a foundation for understanding communication, and by extension, is a valuable skill for civil conversation. It is an equally useful skill toward successful management of tension, when the interdependence of concepts is crucial to the health of an organization or relationship.

The study of semiotics provides a valid and necessary element to a foundation for understanding communication, and by extension, providing a toolbox for civil conversation. However, the “place” where that toolbox is kept is somewhat of a secret, somewhat out of reach and inaccessible to everyday Christ-followers seeking solutions to their own struggles with incivility, or for being equipped to engage incivility in a redemptive manner. In a personal conversation with a parishioner, (who holds a Ph.D. in physics and is a former astronaut with NASA), I used the stop sign metaphor to explain the science of semiotics and its usefulness in providing her a means to better engage uncivil criticisms to her position that combines evolutionary theory with faithful exegesis of the Bible’s creation accounts. While understanding the concept itself, she offered the metaphor of the toolbox, writing in an email, “Semiotics provides a great toolbox, but it’s like the toolboxes we had on the shuttle, they were million dollar tools, and they were useful up there, but they would never be within reach of your common mechanic. I’m afraid I’m using tools that won’t relate to the everyday people I’m talking to.”⁸⁵

The concerned parishioner is not alone in her observation. In a *New York Times* piece, Steven Johnson writes about his experience:

I was, you see, a semiotics major at Brown University, during a remarkable spell in the 1980s when semiotics was allegedly the third-most-popular major in the

⁸⁵ "Can I Pick Your Brain?" e-mail message to author, February 23, 2013.

humanities there, despite being a field (and a word) that drew nothing but blank stares at family cocktail parties and job interviews. “Ah, semiotics,” a distant relative once said to me during winter break. “The study of how plants grow in light. Very important field.”⁸⁶

In addition, when the author was asked to write an opinion piece for the *Associated Baptist Press* on the issue of politics and the church, the original draft referenced Downing, who wrote *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication*. In the first draft of the piece, I referred to her as “Semiotician Crystal Downing,” and went on to cite her relevant observations. I also used the words “semiotic meaning” in reference to a metaphor by which she explains a particular communication concept. The editor replied, “I suspect most readers will be unfamiliar with ‘semiotics,’ as am I. They are likely to connect it to something overly secular or political.”⁸⁷ The draft was changed to “Messiah College Communication Professor Crystal Downing,” and “semiotic meaning” was removed altogether.⁸⁸

The deficiency in this solution is not semiotics itself. The field of semiotics remains a little-known or little-understood discipline among even well-educated and astute people within both the secular and Christian communities. To be sure, efforts are underway within the realm of Christian education to increase the awareness and demonstrate the relevancy of semiotics for the future of church ministry. However, a strategic, simplified, and applicable process for exposing semiotics and its benefits as an

⁸⁶ Steven Johnson, "I Was an Underage Semiotician," *The New York Times*, October 14, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/16/books/review/i-was-an-under-age-semiotician.html?pagewanted=all& r=0>.

⁸⁷ "Suggested Edits to Politics Piece," e-mail message to author, September 16, 2012.

⁸⁸ Kevin D. Glenn, "On the Edge: Politics in the Church," *Associated Baptist Press* (blog), September 19, 2012, <http://www.abpnews.com/blog/uncategorized/on-the-edge-2012-09-19/#.UgAQRJK1Fv8>.

accessible toolbox for civil and productive dialogue are needed for the Body of Christ. The artifact for this dissertation endeavors to provide such a primer on semiotics as a foundation for better understanding one's own collateral experience, as well as understanding the experience behind the words and responses of one's Christian brother or sister. Equipped with such tools, perhaps believers can build more bridges and fewer walls.

Making Music in the Middle

I have some bad news and some good news. The bad news is that you have some unsolvable problems in your life, both at work and at home. I'm not talking about difficulties you could solve if you had more money, time, or other resources. I'm talking about ones that are inherently unsolvable. The good news is that you can stop trying to solve them.⁸⁹

The statement above captures Barry Johnson's introduction to the concept of polarity management. This approach understands the tension present within in some problems to be a necessary tension. It is a source of dynamic energy that helps hold together an organization or a relationship. Polarity management seeks to provide the tools to navigate paradox. For those who wonder whether it is possible for opposing tensions to be a source of civil, and productive dialogue, advocates of polarity management suggest it is not only possible, it is necessary to the success of both an organization and a relationship. In short, the tension is good.

My 16 year-old daughter routinely sticks her thumb in her eye to remove contact lenses. It's intriguing that her thumb is able to gently remove the small plastic lens from that most sensitive part of the body. On the other hand, a major league baseball pitcher is able to use the tension of their thumb to aid in throwing a 100-mph fastball. Both actions

⁸⁹ Barry Johnson, *Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problems* (Amherst, Mass: HRD Press, 1992), xvii.

are possible because of the right amount of tension. This section explores the importance of managing polarities and understanding some tension to be necessary to civil discourse.

I grew up near the Sunshine Skyway Bridge over Tampa Bay. The structure is a striking feat of beauty and function, and it is another example of necessary tension. Leonard Sweet observes, “Unless the forces of compression and tension are present in the correct proportions, the bridge would collapse.”⁹⁰ The opposing forces of pushing and pulling are necessary for one to take the practical route of getting to work, and for another to marvel at its beauty. Some of the most beautiful music one hears comes from the tension produced when hammers strike the strings of a piano, a bow presses and drags across the taunt strings of a cello, or the skilled fingers of a guitarist press, pluck and strum. Whether it is the relief of taking out a contact, the thrill of a ballgame, the beauty and function of a bridge or the excitement of a concert, tension is actually needed for life to function and be enjoyable.

There is energetic tension in every relationship because of the different experiences and unique emotional associations every person has with his or her experiences. The process of using words to identify what common ground may or may not exist between two people or among a community of people is the best we can do to manage that tension. Unfortunately, the very words we use to communicate are often laden with baggage and associations themselves, making it necessary for words to be chosen with care, caution, and sensitivity to the collateral experience attached to the word. Business, churches, service groups, sports teams, and even families contain members with different points of view and different cultural perspectives. These

⁹⁰ Leonard I. Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church: Missional, Relational, Incarnational* (Colorado Springs, David C. Cook, 2009), 35.

different perspectives trigger diversity issues that lead to tension, strained relationships, anxiety, hostility, and a lack of respect, understanding, and sensitivity - the recipe for incivility. At the core of such dysfunction is an inability to distinguish between a problem to be solved, and a polarity (tension, dilemma, paradox) to be managed. Knowing the difference, however, makes all the difference. Johnson writes,

Polarities are interdependent opposites which work best when both are present to balance each other. Polarities are on-going; have no end point; are not solvable; and need each other over time to optimize a situation.⁹¹

Polarities consist of a set of opposing ideas that are unable to function well independent of each other. They are interdependent opposites. “Because the two sides of a polarity are interdependent, you can’t choose one as a ‘solution’ and neglect the other. Johnson explains, “The objective of the Polarity Management perspective is to get the best of both opposites while avoiding the limits of each.”⁹² In the example below, Johnson demonstrates the interdependent polarities of inhaling and exhaling:⁹³

⁹¹ Johnson, *Polarity Management*, 209.

⁹² Ibid, xviii.

⁹³ Roy M. Oswald and Barry Allan Johnson, *Managing Polarities in Congregations: Eight Keys for Thriving Faith Communities* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2010), 11.

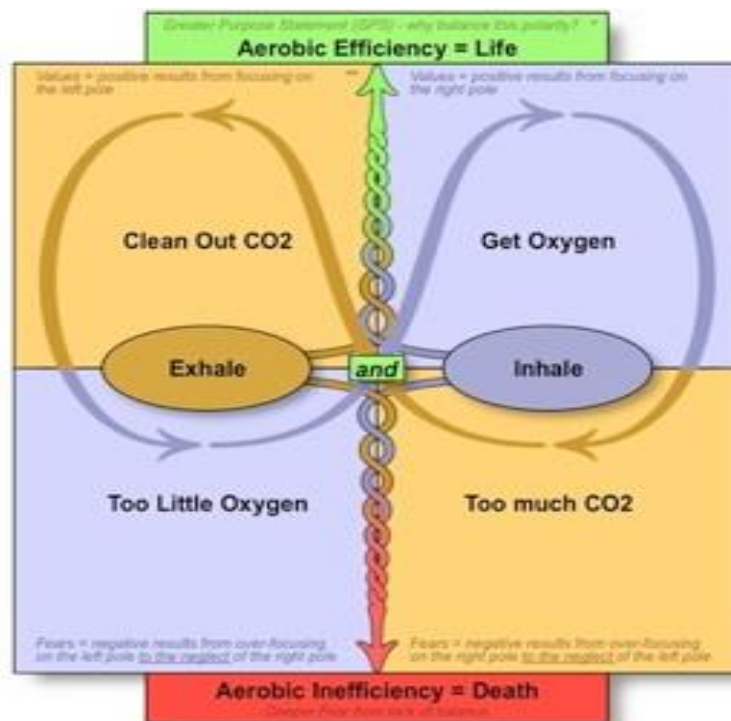


Figure 3: Johnson's Polarity Map

Polarity management's importance for the problem of civility goes beyond helping one politely consider a different point of view. It is a profitable tool for distinguishing between a problem with a definitive solution and a polarity that exists as part of a dynamic and relational tension that ebbs and flows. Like a suspension bridge or a tuned guitar, such a dynamic tension can be understood to give flexible strength, harmonious coordination, and successful progress to the organization from every point on the continuum. Gary Hammel notes that,

Organizational success in the years ahead will hinge on the ability of employees at all levels to manage seemingly irreconcilable tradeoffs-between short-term earnings and long-term growth, competition and collaboration, structure and emergence, discipline and freedom, and individual and team success. Tomorrow's systems must encourage healthy competition between opposing objectives and enable frontline employees to dramatically optimize key trade-offs. The aim is to create organizations that combine the exploration and learning capabilities of

decentralized networks with the decision-making efficiency and focus of hierarchies.⁹⁴

The image of a child on a swing is another example of this necessary and productive tension. The actions of kicking forward while leaning back are opposite movements, yet they are interdependent. Kathy Anderson explains the importance of seeing the value of both poles,

Our view of any given situation is driven from what is valued, a motivational value, or a preferred pole. What is unknown, or what we are typically blind to, is our non-preferred pole, also known as the motivational value's independent pair.⁹⁵



*Figure 4: "Parabolic Harmonious Oscillation"
Note the child's posture of both kicking forward and leaning back. Both are required for motion.*

One may value kicking forward, while another values leaning back, but without both the child doesn't move. Physicists call this "parabolic harmonious oscillation," but the term is captured and applied by Sweet to the necessity for Christ followers to navigate the tension of polarities and paradox. He calls paradox "the midwife of truth,"⁹⁶ and exhorts Christians to be the most prepared people for the paradoxical realities of the future. He goes on to suggest that paradox is the source of true beauty:

⁹⁴ Gary Hamel, "Moon Shots for Management," *Harvard Business Review* 87, no. 2 (2009): 97.

⁹⁵Kathy Anderson, *Polarity Coaching Coaching People & Managing Polarities*. (Amherst: Human Resource Development Pr, 2010), xii.

⁹⁶ Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 45.

We see the unseen
 We subdue by submitting
 We win by losing
 We are made grand by making ourselves little
 We come in first by becoming last
 We are honored by being humble
 We fill up with God by emptying out ourselves
 We become wise by being fools
 We possess all things by having nothing
 We wax strong by being weak
 We find life by losing ourselves in others
 We live by dying.⁹⁷

How does one identify a polarity? Johnson suggests two questions. First, is the difficulty one that continues to resurface? Second, are there two poles that are interdependent? Andy Stanley, pastor of Northpoint Community Church near Atlanta, while teaching on a similar issue, added an additional question: Are there mature advocates on both sides?⁹⁸

There is merit to Stanley's additional question. The character of the individuals on either side of the polarity allow for the relational integrity and serve as a catalyst for the necessary civil dialogue that must take place for the polarity to be managed well. Johnson's practices have helped many organizations navigate their unsolvable problems with great success. His coaching company now certifies individuals to take his principles into their own contexts. In 2010, Johnson partnered with Lutheran pastor Roy Oswalt to develop *Managing Polarities in Congregations*, a resource for churches. They wrote,

Congregations often find themselves in power struggles over two opposing views. People on both sides believe strongly that they are right. They also assume that if they are right, their opposition must be wrong - classic 'either/or' thinking. A polarity is a pair of truths that need each other over time. When an argument is

⁹⁷ Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 46.

⁹⁸ Andy Stanley (lecture, Drive 2010, North point Community Church, Atlanta, October 2010).

about two poles of a polarity, both sides are right and need each other to experience the whole truth.⁹⁹

Wilson, in reference to Oswald's book, suggested,

Many of the most vexing issues we face as congregations will never be addressed in a healthy fashion by either/or thinking. It is only when we embrace the proverbial "genius of the and" that we can have a transforming impact for Christ upon our people and our culture.¹⁰⁰

With the success of Johnson's approach and the addition of Oswald's church-centered resource, one could reasonably assume polarity management to be a popular solution to conflict and incivility in the Christian community. Unfortunately, Oswald's book is relatively unknown outside the circle of his synod. Stanley makes brief mention of the concept in a seminar,¹⁰¹ but gives no credit to Oswald, or to Johnson's specific principles of polarity management. Like semiotics, polarity management can be a difficult topic for Christians who typically approach conflict from a position of conviction, and could see the management of tension as a slippery slope to compromise.

Johnson's work lays little in the way of philosophical groundwork for determining what problems should be solved with either/or thinking. As a result, principles of polarity management hold an unintentional place as perhaps the best-kept secret in the conversation regarding conflict resolution and civil dialogue in the church. Even an organization committed to such an endeavor, The Center for Congregational Health, supports this idea. Its former president writes, "I was introduced to the concept of polarity management several years ago, but it remained for me a theory without a

⁹⁹ Oswald and Johnson, *Managing Polarities in Congregations*, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Bill Wilson, "The both/and life of faith," *Associated Baptist Press*, November 20, 2012, <http://www.abpnews.com/opinion/item/7988-the-both-and-life-of-faith#.UgG4IJK1Fv9>.

¹⁰¹ Stanley, *Drive*, 2010.

practical application. Recently, I read *Managing Polarities in Congregations*, and the concept came alive.”¹⁰²

Still, Oswald writes as if the reader has already adopted an articulated theology of what is worthy of an either/or approach, and what is within bounds of a manageable tension. Oswald assumes too much on the reader’s part, limiting his readership, and therefore the application of these otherwise useful tools toward the establishment of an approach to issues of tension that maintain harmony and civility.

The solution to civility that I propose leans heavily on the idea of redemptive tension within the Christian community. However, that process is preceded by a clear and concise theology of tension as a necessary element for a robust and redemptive exercise in civil conversation based on clear conviction.

Wars and Warnings

The first section of this dissertation described the serious problem of incivility present in the church. But not everyone in the Christian community sees a need for civility when issues of diversity arise that threaten deeply held convictions or preferences. The issues may or may not be essential to Christianity (a distinction made in the next chapter), but they are important nonetheless. The result is a genuine struggle over the issue of civility by some in the Christian community who see it as an exercise in compromise. An exploration of such an approach is the focus of this section.

The people mentioned below are men and women sincerely committed to Jesus. They love the church, the scriptures and the faith once for all delivered to the saints. That love is expressed in a passionate zeal to contend for and defend the integrity of the faith.

¹⁰² Oswald and Johnson, *Managing Polarities in Congregations*, back cover.

Serving, worshipping, and being in relationship with brothers and sisters of this perspective, I believe their intentions to be good, but the lack of civility in how that passion is expressed is not so good.

Out of concern for the nature by which some Christians were engaging the emerging church movement, pastor and church planter Jim Belcher seeks a conversational approach beyond the false dichotomies some Christians create between fellowship and doctrine. He writes,

We place doctrinal purity over unity, or we stress relational purity over sound doctrine. The paradoxical reality is that Jesus wants us to be deeply committed to both—the peace and purity of the church. When this is not the case, our disunity is a major hindrance to our evangelism and witness to the world. We fail at the “final apologetic” our love for one another.¹⁰³

The failure of love results in uncivil disagreements that don’t just divide, but destroy, reinforcing a reputation John Stott calls a “pathological tendency to fragment.”¹⁰⁴

Must disagreement be destructive? The pursuit of purity will inevitably bring conflict, friction, disagreement, and debate. This is inevitable in any relationship and is not necessarily an indicator of incivility. One can disagree passionately, yet agreeably, understanding the relationship to be based on common loyalty and essential unity. In his classic text *The Contentious Community* John Miller observes,

What we understand so rarely is that the church can have both harmony and love while at the same time having divisions and disagreements. Disagreement does not necessitate disharmony. Division need not spawn hatred. Contention can exist within community. It is precisely because people love both the Lord of the church and the church that so much of our ecclesiastical warfare arises.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Jim Belcher, *Deep Church: A Third Way beyond Emerging and Traditional* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 54.

¹⁰⁴ John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity, Integrity, and Faithfulness* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2005), 116.

¹⁰⁵ John Michael Miller, *The Contentious Community: Constructive Conflict in the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 16.

I find the quote above to hold equal parts of both the problem and the solution. Such passionate pursuits of purity by the church insure genuine unity within the church, but unity does not have to mean unison. The word *harmony* is helpful in this discussion, for there can only be harmony if there are different tones working together. Thus, diversity is essential to the music, even if one struggles at times to stay on key.

In contrast, the word *warfare* proves to be most problematic. How can members of one Body, members of a family seeking peace, be at war? Historically, the church's use of culture-war rhetoric may create the habit of "priming ourselves to view mere critique of Christian principles as personal attack and those who simply disagree with us as hostile adversaries."¹⁰⁶

When viewed through the lens of warfare, brothers and sisters are mistaken for enemies and often suffer the friendly fire of vilification and incivility: "Culture-war rhetoric leads us to distort other's positions, to see enmity in place of mere disagreement."¹⁰⁷ Such a posture closes down civil communication rather than encouraging it, resulting in diminishing levels of any positive channel. Family becomes the enemy, and the Body is weaker for it: "By adopting the rhetoric of war Christians prime themselves to perceive others as 'friend or foe' and approach complex issues with an either-or mindset."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ John D. Woodbridge, "Culture War Casualties: How Warfare Rhetoric Is Hurting the Work of the Church," *Christianity Today*, March 6, 1995, 22.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Tim Muehlhoff and Todd Vernon Lewis, *Authentic Communication: Christian Speech Engaging Culture* (Downers Grove, IVP Academic, 2010), 54.

An example is found in the transformation of my denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, and in particular, its flagship educational institution, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. President Al Mohler's journey to the leadership and turnover at Southern are chronicled in a *Christianity Today* article entitled, "The Reformer." The piece recounts a strategy that addressed disagreement by simply eliminating opposition through the severing of personal and professional relationships. Mohler believed "the battle between conservatives and moderates was not a matter of politics or personalities but of presuppositions ... these are two fundamentally different understandings of the Baptist faith, Baptist identity, and the future of the SBC."¹⁰⁹

When he assumed the presidency in 1993, "compromise and accommodation were not strategies he had in mind."¹¹⁰ Men and women who disagreed with Mohler on issues such as women's ordination, human origins, his brand of Calvinism, and other non-essential doctrines were accused of being part of a "moderate, neo-orthodox, liberal bureaucracy,"¹¹¹ and were dismissed from their denominational and academic responsibilities.

A more recent example reveals the misrepresentation and aversion to communication over issues of disagreement. In April of 2012, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship sponsored A Baptist Conference on Sexuality and Covenant in Decatur, Georgia. Baptist Christ-followers with various perspectives on the homosexual conversation gathered for dialogue, debate, and deeper understanding through worship,

¹⁰⁹ Molly Whorthen, "The Reformer," *Christianity Today*, October 1, 2010, 18, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/october/3.18.html?paging=off>.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

prayer, study of scripture, and meaningful conversation. I attended the conference and found much to ponder, much to agree with, and very much to disagree with. Fellow Christians with whom I most strenuously debated have also become very close friends and honest yet helpful critics. The conference deepened both my views on sexuality and my compassion for others whose perspectives I do not fully understand. Although my convictions differed from many with whom I engaged, the conversations were civil, and very productive.

However, Andrew Walker, a reporter for *Baptist Press*, the journalism arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, wrote to his readers,

Younger Southern Baptists ought to be thankful for being spared such “conversations” and denominational referendums, one in which youthful angst is catapulting the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to embrace LGBT relations as normative. What I witnessed before the altar of “conversation” was a fellowship cementing its sexual ethics away from Scripture and elevating experience in its place.¹¹²

Mohler, who was not present, stated, "They are making clear decisions to abandon biblical authority in pursuit of endless 'conversations.'"¹¹³

Having attended the event, the environment described by Walker was beyond my recognition. From my perspective, Walker’s report was at best an inaccurate caricature of the purpose, content and outcome of the conference. Theologian Scot McKnight, while addressing critics of the Emerging Church movement, stressed the importance of fairly

¹¹² Andrew Walker, "CBF - Yesterday's Moderates Are Today's Conservatives," *Baptist Press*, May 1, 2012, <http://www.bpnews.net/BPFirstPerson.asp?ID=37735>.

¹¹³ Andrew Walker, "Gay Issue Major Theme of CBF-sponsored Conf. - News with a Christian Perspective," *Baptist Press*, April 23, 2012, <http://bpnews.net/BPnews.asp?ID=37666>.

and accurately representing the perspectives of those with whom we disagree. He wrote, “We must identify our conversation partners in a way they would recognize.”¹¹⁴

Sadly, such is the posture of many in the Southern Baptist Convention who confuse unity with uniformity. Such incivility is an attempt to silence voices of civil dissent. However, as John Morley says, “You have not converted a man because you have silenced him.” Perhaps my brothers and sisters in the Southern Baptist Convention could gain insight from Hailman, who stated, “Our opponents are not our enemies.”¹¹⁵ Hailman’s statement echoes McKnight’s caution above. Both Hailman and McKnight’s posture toward critics is an invitational one. McKnight called them “conversation partners,” a relational term inconsistent with Walker and Mohler’s rhetoric of war, exclusivity, and disconnection.¹¹⁶ A relational approach allows for both unity and diversity to exist in harmony. One can seek to engage in dialogue over controversial matters in a way that honestly addresses points of divergence while keeping the relationship with their “conversation partner” the basis for unity.

Social critic Os Guinness desires to see civility as the solution to key social issues, and as an example of democracy to other nations. Civility, he writes,

could be the key to resolving the culture wars, could be a stunning tribute to the brilliance of the ‘great experiment’ devised by the American founders, and also could stand as an encouragement and as a model for public civility to be considered in other parts of the world.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Scot McKnight, “What Is the Emerging Church?” (reading, Fall Contemporary Issues Conference, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, December 2, 2011).

¹¹⁵ Kinnaman, “The Sin of Incivility.”

¹¹⁶ McKnight, “What Is The Emerging Church?”

¹¹⁷ Os Guinness, *The Case for Civility: And Why Our Future Depends on It* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 19.

I contend, however, that for civility to become a value exported by the American people, it must have as its foundation and example the community of faith, a people of grace and truth. What would happen if civility became a major export of Kingdom people to the global community?

Each of the perspectives above represent a small sample of many concerned over the rise of rudeness and absence of civility that seem to diminish one's capacity to engage in constructive and meaningful interaction over issues of conflict. Each offers a basis related to a belief in how things should be in contrast to how things are. Ethics, morality, sacrifice, productivity, human flourishing, personal gain, altruism, and other motives compel the individual to extend themselves toward others in an effort to create a civil society.

Guinness believes American civility will contribute to civility elsewhere. Forni believes awareness will breed awareness. Hacala uses the term "ripple effect" in hopes that civility will be saved as its benefits expand to others.¹¹⁸ Carter believes civility to be morally superior. My solution, while including many of these sound principles, presents, communicates, applies, and packages them within a simple, memorable, portable, and applicable process for civility made most accessible to the very people in need of it, and to the benefit of the watching world that needs to see it.

¹¹⁸ Hacala, *Saving Civility*, 31.

SECTION THREE: THESIS

Introduction

The problem addressed in this dissertation is the troubling level of incivility regularly expressed within American culture in general and within the Christian community in particular. Section one explored several areas where a lack of civility is expressed and experienced in prominent ways. Among those environments is the Christian community, where a troubling level of incivility is directed by Christians toward other Christians with whom they disagree. Such a practice weakens the unity of the Body of Christ and weakens its witness to the wider culture.

My concerns, while expressed here in a necessarily academic tone, are nevertheless the deep-seated concerns of a pastor. I have seen and continue to witness the devastating effects of the uncivil war taking place within what is supposed to be a community united by faith in a Savior we call the Prince of Peace. The church is called to be countercultural, living in attractational and redemptive contrast to a culture that lives according to the desires of the flesh. We are called to be a peculiar people, whose diversity is aligned and arranged according to the greatest value placed on our essential unity in Christ and His call to unconditional love. Regarding civility, however, the Christian community seems to take its cues from culture, rather than running counter to it - pointing out problems in culture, while failing to model a better way. Gabe Lyons highlights this trend in his book, *The Next Christians*:

Simply put, relating to the world by following the world can be a recipe for disappointment and disillusionment. Countercultures that point out the problem but offer nothing as a solution ultimately fail in their mission. And pursuing relevance at all costs isn't countercultural at all. The next Christians are living in the tension of being prophetic with their lives while serving others and inviting them to a better way.¹¹⁹

How does the church demonstrate that better way, and why? Is civility important to the Body within and the world without? What role does civility play in the life of a Christ-follower, and is it a role that is profitable or practical? Is civility optional for Christians?

It is the claim of this dissertation that the Body of Christ can experience greatly improved internal unity, health, morale, stability, as well as a diverse, attractional, educational, and encouraging external witness. This is possible if the church does the following:

- Become aware that civility is a requirement among the Body of Christ.
- Imagine a vision of what a civility-conscious Christian community looks like.
- Embrace the intention to bring such a vision into reality.
- Adopt a posture of learning toward the dynamics of civil communication.
- Apply a practical conversational process that practices civility, essential unity, and mutual respect.

A leading voice in the call for civility in wider culture, Forni sees civility as a goal within reach, provided one sees it as a discipline requiring work, an art requiring practice, and a game to be played. Forni explains:

¹¹⁹ Gabe Lyons, *The next Christians: The Good News about the End of Christian America* (New York: Doubleday Religion, 2010), 173.

The practice of civility is the applying of gentle force with the goal that everybody be a winner in the delicate game of social exchange. As an art, civility has rules one can learn and facility with these rules can improve with practice. This is the good news. The bad news is that often we are unable to imagine the benefits of that learning and practice.¹²⁰

Central to Forni's perspective are elements of decisive action (application of force, practice), imagination (imagine the benefits), and practical tools (rules to learn and facilitate). Each of these three elements is necessary for change to occur. A synonymous three-fold approach is suggested by Christian philosopher Dallas Willard for Christ followers desiring a genuine personal transformation. In *Renovation of the Heart*, Willard offers a memorable acronym that captures the importance of each element and its necessity for change: "To keep the general pattern in mind, we will use the acronym, 'VIM.' As in the phrase 'vim and vigor.' 'Vim' is a derivative of the Latin term *vis* meaning direction, strength, force, vigor, power, energy, or virtue."¹²¹ Willard's acronym "VIM" stands for Vision, Intention, and Means, and will frame the subsequent content.

Vision refers to what is seen in the gap between what is and what could, should, or ought to be. It is the imaginative element necessary to begin one's transformation. *Intention* refers to the deliberate decision and commitment to bring the vision into reality by putting thoughts into action. *Means* are the practical steps, tools, skill, or processes by which the intentions are implemented. All three are interdependent and necessary to accomplish the renovation of civility for the Christian community.

Vision

¹²⁰ Forni, *Choosing Civility*, 27.

¹²¹ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 85.

To a large degree, Jesus has already provided the vision for unity and civility. Shortly before his passion, Jesus prays that his followers, present and future, would “all be one.” In the same discourse, Christian unity provides the strength for believers to be in the world, but not of the world. It is in our loving unity that Jesus says “the world will know that you are my disciples.”¹²² Such a clear and compelling vision set forth by Jesus himself would surely provide enough to get the church started toward the realization of a civility-conscious vision. However, as Forni writes above, it is often hard for people, even Christians, to imagine civility as a beneficial endeavor. Perspectives can be skewed by false and fuzzy perceptions of what such a reality would and would not look like. The following section addresses common misconceptions regarding civility by examining what civility is not.

What Civility Is Not

Civility is not the absence of conflict. In a series on marriage I prepared an entire sermon on the reality of conflict in marriage, and principles for couples to approach their disagreements with civility. A couple approached me after the service. The husband was most upset that I would “endorse” conflict in a marriage. For him, an ideal Christian marriage should be one that resembled his own: a relationship free of conflict. He went on to claim that they had enjoyed more than 15 years of marriage without a single argument. Of course, the husband did all of the talking. Come to think of it, I don’t believe I have ever heard his wife speak. The interaction raises a common misperception about civility. Does a vision of Christian civility demand the absence of any conflict? Is it

¹²² John 13:35

somehow uncivil to disagree at all, to hold convictions, and to passionately articulate and defend those convictions?

Blogger, author, and Bible teacher Frank Viola writes, “Civil disagreement and even debate, when done in the spirit of Christ, are healthy and helpful.”¹²³ The two terms *healthy* and *conflict* may sound like an oxymoron. Wouldn’t healthy relationships be characterized by avoidance of conflict? The answer depends on what one thinks of when hearing the word *conflict*. Communication scholars report most people share words like *war, hate, battle, failure, anger, lose, and argue*, when associated with the term *conflict*. Semiotically, “conflict” conjures negative metaphors, negative collateral images and experiences; therefore, it is naturally avoided.¹²⁴ However, the Christian community can imagine a better way regarding conflict, seeing it as redemptive, productive, and instructional.

It is often the very resistance brought on by healthy conflict that causes relationships to deepen in trust. Conflict among fully engaged individuals is often a catalyst to growth. Pastor and church consultant Mel Lawrenz imagines civility through the idea of engagement. In his vision, Christ followers remain consistently engaged with God, one another, their community, and their world. As such they are in a consistent position to establish and maintain healthy relational connections.¹²⁵ However, Lawrenz recognizes that such relational connections are not free from conflict, for the connections are between human beings. “Conflict is inevitable as long as we are human. Lawrenz

¹²³ Frank Viola, "Warning: The World Is Watching How We Christians Treat One Another," *Beyond Evangelical* (blog), January 14, 2013, <http://frankviola.org/2013/01/14/warning/>.

¹²⁴ Muehlhoff and Lewis, *Authentic Communication*, 104.

¹²⁵ Mel Lawrenz, *Whole Church: Leading from Fragmentation to Engagement* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 12.

writes, “The questions become how to lessen the frequency of conflict and how to deal constructively with conflict when it does arise.”¹²⁶ Communication professors Tim Muehlhoff and Todd Lewis encourage Christ-followers, “Conflict is common, and in a sense inevitable to all relationships.”¹²⁷ The tension present in calling for civility within relationships of inevitable conflict allows the Christ-follower to keep in mind the grace and humility necessary toward self and others as civility is, in the best sense of the word, “practiced.”¹²⁸

Practicing conflict is hardly a new concept for followers of Jesus. The early church was not a sanitized, conflict-free environment. Jesus was in constant conflict with the religious leaders of his day and led a band of constantly squabbling disciples.¹²⁹ Paul confronts Peter publicly over Peter’s uncivil table manners toward Gentile believers.¹³⁰ The Jewish church was deeply and passionately divided over whether or not to recognize Gentile converts to the Way.¹³¹ Paul played referee to warring factions in Corinth, and pled with two prominent women quarreling in Philippi, to “agree in the Lord.”¹³² The community of the Prince of Peace has been a laboratory of conflict since the beginning.

¹²⁶ Lawrenz, *Whole Church.*, 21.

¹²⁷ Muehlhoff and Lewis, *Authentic Communication*, 104.

¹²⁸ In this sense, practice does not make perfect, but it allows for improvement, and reveals the space for further improvement. It is an effort of repetition where the end is not completion, but continued execution, much like attorneys “practice” law or doctors “practice” medicine, “practicing” Christians “practice” their faith.

¹²⁹ A concise exploration of Jesus’ conflict with and between his disciples as well as the religious leaders of his day is offered in Graham Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 44-47.

¹³⁰ Galatians 2:8-15

¹³¹ Acts 15:1-35

¹³² 1 Corinthians 1:10-17, Philippians 4:1-3

Yet, as much as they zealously debated their differences, their practiced goals were to pursue Shalom between one another for the sake of Christ's gospel of peace. Civility calls believers to the gymnasium of grace, to wrestle vigorously with their differences, and to the laboratory of love wherein our diversity is contended, tested, and our conflicts seek to be resolved. The Christ-follower can emerge with greater strength, depth of character, and a clear perception of what it means to choose civility.

Civility is not the absence of conviction. In April of 1862, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote an essay for *The Atlantic* magazine. In it, he praised President Lincoln for his resolve in seeking to emancipate slaves, an action perceived by many in the South as a threat to their established civilization. Emerson observed that America was attempting

to hold together two states of civilization: a higher state, where labor and the tenure of land and the right of suffrage are democratic; and a lower state, in which the old military tenure of prisoners or slaves, and of power and land in a few hands, makes an oligarchy: we have attempted to hold these two states of society under one law. But the rude and early state of society does not work well with the later, nay, works badly, and has poisoned politics, public morals, and social intercourse in the Republic, now for many years.¹³³

Emerson continued, asking, “should not the best civilization be extended over the whole country, since the disorder of the less civilized portion menaces the existence of the country?”¹³⁴ Emerson's polished yet passionate plea is grounded in his belief that true civility is connected to firm convictions. “There can be no high civility without a deep morality.”¹³⁵ Pulitzer Prize winning journalist J. Anthony Lukas, stated his belief that the moral decline in his city is realized because “we have let our standards of civility and

¹³³ Ralph W. Emerson, "American Civilization," *The Atlantic*, April 1, 1862, 2, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1862/04/american-civilization/306548/?single_page=true.

¹³⁴ Emerson, "American Civilization, 2

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

truth waste dangerously away.”¹³⁶ Emerson and Lukas, each in their own way, convey an approach to civility that is essentially connected to conviction. It is the reversal of what W.B. Yeats describes in his poem, “Second Coming,” “The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.”¹³⁷ Such a reversal is needed, for the concern of some is that along with civility comes passionless indifference, or even a posture of compromise. Lutheran pastor and scholar, Martin Marty framed the concern as follows: “people who are good at being civil often lack strong convictions, and people with strong convictions often lack civility.”¹³⁸ If one is to be more civil, however, it need not be at the expense of one’s convictions. Mouw calls this “convicted civility.”¹³⁹

Expressing civility does not mean one is prohibited from prophetic criticism of the thinking, beliefs, behaviors, and other systemic realities of the times. While it may be true that civility calls for one to affirm the right of another to express their beliefs, civility does not demand that one accept, affirm, or approve of those beliefs and their resulting actions. Saying one has the right to express their convictions is one thing; saying they are right in how they express them is something different. Civil conviction calls us to the former, not the latter.

Is a convicted civility judgmental? What about judging others? How does a conviction avoid the charge of being judgmental?

¹³⁶ J. Anthony Lukas, "Something's Gone Terribly Wrong in New York," review of *The Closest of Strangers*, *The New York Times*, September 9, 1990, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/09/09/books/something-s-gone-terribly-wrong-in-new-york.html>.

¹³⁷ Richard J. Finneran, ed., *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, The Poems (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 182.

¹³⁸ Martin E. Marty, *By Way of Response* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 81.

¹³⁹ Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 14.

The idea of a truly non-judgmental posture is unrealistic. To say one should not be judgmental is itself a judgmental statement. As volitional beings, humans make decisions based on judgments toward the value of options from which they choose. There are differing value systems, and those values come into conflict, requiring one to judge between which values to adopt. To become non-judgmental is to stop thinking. It cannot be done.

The concept of judgment is greatly misunderstood. The scriptures instruct Christ-followers to make wise judgments regarding what is true and what is good (Isaiah 5:20, Matthew 7:15-19 Galatians 5:16-23), yet according to Paul Copan, the most oft quoted verse in the Bible is Matthew 7:1, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged.”¹⁴⁰ A vision for civility grounded in Christian conviction will be fuzzy at best without clarity on this issue.

Jesus’ instructions here are not a blanket disregard for probing investigation, insightful evaluation, critical thinking, wise discernment, or perceptive decision making; Jesus is waving a caution flag against a particular sort of judgmental attitude - self-righteousness. In Matthew 7:1-5, Jesus was condemning those who judge using two standards of morality, one standard for the judge and another for the accused.

Luke 6:37-38 also condemns a self-righteous and unforgiving attitude. Michael Card observes such an attitude as the connection between both passages: “A judgmental

¹⁴⁰ Paul Copan, *True for You, but Not for Me: Deflating the Slogans That Leave Christians Speechless* (Minneapolis, Bethany House Publishers, 1998), 32.

attitude inevitably leads to a harshness of spirit that renders a person unable to [give or to] receive forgiveness.”¹⁴¹

How then did Jesus respond to those in his day who lived according to beliefs contrary to the Father’s will? How did Jesus model “judgment” that accepted people while not approving or affirming their sin? What qualifies civility that connects conviction *and* compassion?

When the gospel narratives describe Jesus “accepting” prostitutes, tax collectors, and others considered sinful, there is no indication he accepted their behaviors. He called Matthew to follow him (requiring Matthew to leave behind his previous life), called the woman at the well to forsake her lifestyle of promiscuity, called the woman caught in adultery to leave her life of sin, and called Zacchaeus to redemptive restitution. “Jesus refused to define people in terms of their present sordid circumstances. He affirmed their *potential* for living as faithful and creative children of God.”¹⁴² This is no doubt a difficult position for Christ-followers to take, but one that the church is called to nonetheless, as Mouw observes,

It has never been easy for the church to nurture a convicted civility. Indeed when the biblical writer first urged the followers of Christ to ‘pursue peace with everyone,’ the society was at least as multicultural and pluralistic as ours today ... If they could work at treating people with gentleness and reverence in such an environment, what is our excuse for attempting less?¹⁴³

Civility is not exclusive to evangelism. Because a diminished Christian witness as a result of incivility is a concern for the Christian community, it does not follow that

¹⁴¹ Michael Card, *Matthew: The Gospel of Identity*, vol. 3, Biblical Imagination Series (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 68.

¹⁴² Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 24.

¹⁴³ Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 19.

civility be expressed as a means to achieve a potentially evangelistic conversation. To be sure, civility will play an important part in establishing a relationship within which one can earn the right to share their faith with another; the author has no experience with rudeness leading to redemption. However, if kindness and gentleness are only shared as means to conversion, one could argue that civility becomes a manipulative tool for proselytizing, not an expression of genuine interest and respect in pursuit of a relationship.

No one enjoys being objectified as a project, conquest, or otherwise proverbial notch on one's belt. However, when we are the subject of another's thoughts, interest or admiration, a relationship is formed that over time may deepen in trust and security. Sweet describes this process in the following way: "Objectivity becomes subjectivity because of relativity."¹⁴⁴ Civility's role in evangelism is important as long as the relationship is pursued out of interest in the individual as a subject of mutual respect, and not out of interest in the individual as a statistical object.

Civility does not demand we prefer the company of everyone to whom we are civil. The research done in preparation for this dissertation yielded a surprising discovery. It was commonly assumed that civility requires one to befriend those with whom they interact. This requires a confession and a concession from the author. I confess that while I love my church family, and would be there to support and help any of them, there are some of them who simply irritate me. I am glad Jesus loves them, because I do not like them! Therefore, I concede that while civility has great potential for positive Christian witness, redemptive communication, and improved health within the family of faith, the

¹⁴⁴ Leonard Sweet, "Relational Objectivity" (lecture, Doctor of Ministry Cohort Advance, George Fox Evangelical Seminary, Portland, August 24, 2011).

downside is that one cannot always pick their relatives. As a result, this process has the potential to galvanize non-essential differences to the degree that while we understand the need to respect each other, seek to understand each other, and work to love each other, there is no guarantee it will make us like each other.

Furthermore, civility is not limited to those we know. Because the word describes what is good for “the city,” it carries the notion that civility will be expressed to strangers with whom we have little connection. In this way, civility contains elements of fellowship, wherein we are civil to those we know, as well as elements of hospitality, wherein one extends gentleness and respect to strangers. While it may indeed be optional to prefer one’s company, to be kind, gentle, and hospitable are expressions required for followers of Jesus. Christine Pohl offers a compelling summary,

Hospitality is not optional for Christians, nor is it limited to those who are especially gifted for it. It is, instead, a necessary practice in the community of faith. One of the key Greek words for hospitality, *philoxenia*, combines the general word for love or affection for people who are connected by kinship or faith (*phileo*), and the word for stranger (*xenos*). Thus etymologically and practically, in the New Testament, hospitality is closely connected to love. Because *philoxenia* includes the word for strangers, hospitality’s orientation toward strangers is also more apparent in Greek than in English.¹⁴⁵

While civil Christians are not required to like everyone, they are expected to express love to each other, whether brother, sister, friend, opponent, or stranger.

Having clarified several important potential misconceptions regarding civility, the next section seeks to bring a vision for civility into sharper focus by analyzing important defining elements of Christian civility.

¹⁴⁵ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 31.

What Civility Will Require

Section two demonstrated that civility is comprised of various elements, is informed by various disciplines, and is expressed through a diversity of communication mediums and opportunities. Followers of Jesus encounter opportunities each day to express civility when commenting on a friend’s Facebook status, when expressing concern over poor customer service to a manager, when receiving constructive criticism from a supervisor, or when enduring an irrational tirade from a fellow Christian over a political issue. In each situation, The Christian *chooses* how to respond.

Carter bases one’s decision on a moral mandate, and Mouw points to civility as a sign of spiritual maturity. Civility, therefore, can be described as “public politeness”: a kindness, gentleness, and meekness expressed in diversely united community. Meekness is an important description, as it describes not weakness, as many believe, but instead a passion or power under control. Aristotle, in fact, taught meekness as the middle ground between excessive anger and excessive lack of anger. It is a quiet strength.¹⁴⁶

On what principles can the diverse members of the Body of Christ find harmony? What determines whether these differing notes remain dissonant or resolve to harmony? There are three particular recognitions necessary to achieve such a relationally harmonious approach.

First, recognize that error is more a path to growth than it is a slippery slope toward apostasy. Believers can temper their fear of error by understanding error to be what makes one truly human, as Augustine writes, “*fallor ergo sum*: I err, therefore, I

¹⁴⁶ Trent C. Butler, *Holman Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), 941.

am.”¹⁴⁷ Once, at a T-ball game with my son, I observed signs with bold, red letters that warned, “Do not yell at the umpires. Nobody’s perfect, not even YOU!” Error is ubiquitous to humanity. Yet, it’s natural to read the previous statement and think of someone else. Rather than looking through the window at someone else, what if one considered the person in the mirror? It is difficult to embrace the vibrancy of faith, to be relationally present, and express to civility within the tensions of life until one is set free from the fear of error. In her book *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error*, journalist Kathryn Schultz writes,

Far from being a moral flaw, [error] is inextricable from some of our most humane and honorable qualities: empathy, optimism, imagination, conviction, and courage. And far from being a mark of indifference or intolerance, wrongness is a vital part of how we learn and change ... it is ultimately wrongness, not rightness that can teach us who we are.¹⁴⁸

Second, recognize how wide a platform exists for unity among Christians. It is troubling the speed at which individuals will simply dismiss one with views contrary to their perceived set of non-negotiable beliefs.

Pastor and author David Platt shared that on any controversial issue, there are ditches on both sides that one can fall into. Between those ditches is a wide road, and “when someone has fallen into one ditch, it’s silly to assume that by attempting to climb out of that ditch, they are doomed to slide into the other.”¹⁴⁹ The wide road in between is where one encounters people who travel from both sides of an issue. It’s where the

¹⁴⁷ Aurelius Augustinus, *City of God*, trans. Gill Evans and Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 2003), 460.

¹⁴⁸ Kathryn Schulz, *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error* (New York: Ecco, 2010), 5-6.

¹⁴⁹ David Platt, "Poverty Theology vs. Prosperity Theology" (lecture, Elephant Room Conference, Harvest Bible Chapel, Chicago, October 10, 2011).

tension may be tangible, but perhaps it's where the music of grace is most vibrant. Music producer Roy Salmond's church included a call for "vibrant faith" in its mission statement. He immediately connected vibrancy with vibration. He visualized the tension present in a guitar string stretched between two fixed points. "A vibrant faith," he cautioned his church "may necessitate oscillation and tension. In the absence of motion, [however], there's no music."¹⁵⁰ As stated above, it is the fear of being rejected at the base of our identity that causes many to simply hold fast to one pole of tension at the rejection of the other instead of seeking ways to embrace the tension at both ends. Perhaps a way forward is found in the lyrics of an old hymn entitled, "There's A Wideness in God's Mercy":

There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea;
 There's a kindness in His justice, which is more than liberty.
 For the love of God is broader than the measure of our mind;
 And the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.
 But we make His love too narrow by false limits of our own;
 And we magnify His strictness with a zeal He will not own.¹⁵¹

Just as the fear of being wrong can be overcome through a realization of error's role in maturity, one can also embrace the vibrancy of tension through an understanding of how robust and encompassing God's mercy is.

This in no way suggests the absence non-negotiable beliefs in the Christian faith. Such beliefs are made clear in the witness of scripture, held consistently within the corpus of teaching by the church fathers, and encapsulated in the Creeds. However, it is suggested here that followers of Jesus have a tendency to place an increasing number of

¹⁵⁰ Carolyn Arends, "A Both/And Path to Truth | Christianity Today | A Magazine of Evangelical Conviction," ChristianityToday.com | Magazines, News, Church Leadership & Bible Study, August 15, 2011.

¹⁵¹ Frederick W. Faber. "There's A Wideness in God's Mercy" in *The Baptist Hymnal*, Comp. Wesley L. Forbis (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1991), 25.

non-essentials on the essentials list, overlooking the reality that there exists far fewer issues for which there must be a clear resolution than there are issues that allow for vibrancy and civil dialogue.

Third, recognize the strength of the Body's unity is the sum of its diversity. C.S. Lewis described the essentials as "Mere Christianity," and went on to provide a verbal image in the form of great hallway containing doors that open to several rooms. He sees the hallway itself as a place of commonality, but understands the exclusivity of some issues will not permit believers to enter all the rooms together. "If I can bring anyone into that hall I shall have done what I attempted. But it is in the rooms, not in the hall, that there are fires and chairs and meals."¹⁵² What Lewis describes as halls and rooms, Belcher describes as tiers:

I look at it in tiers. The first tier is the important things such as what we believe about God, Christ, etc. The second, while still important is not as crucial and usually includes things like denominational distinctions. And third tier includes even lesser important things. The church of mere Christians is a hallway with many different rooms, but one hallway.¹⁵³

This approach is echoed by Mohler, who uses the term *order* rather than *tiers*. Nevertheless, like Belcher, Mohler understands first-order theological issues to include doctrines central to the Christian faith such as the Trinity, the deity and humanity of Jesus, justification by faith, and the authority of Scripture. According to Mohler, "These first-order doctrines represent the most fundamental truths of the Christian faith, and a denial of these doctrines represents nothing less than an eventual denial of Christianity

¹⁵² C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Fount, 1997), vi, xi.

¹⁵³ Jim Belcher, "Discovering the Third Way," interview, <http://blogs.christianbook.com/blogs/academic/2010/05/19/deep-church-an-interview-with-jim-belcher> (blog), May 19, 2010, accessed December 2, 2011.

itself.”¹⁵⁴ For Mohler, second-order doctrines allow believing Christians to disagree on certain issues, but such disagreement may create significant boundaries between believers. Third-order issues allow Christians to disagree and remain in close fellowship.¹⁵⁵

I question the need for three categories, believing the unnecessary distinction between second and third tier/order minimizes the concept of things indifferent, or “adiaphora.” These are issues that while important and certainly debatable are indifferent to salvation.¹⁵⁶ In addition, the second/third tier distinction enables what Robert Greer calls “denominational chauvinism,”¹⁵⁷ wherein one may be able to affirm unity in Jesus but still maintain denominationally exclusive interaction. Such deliberate and unnecessary exclusivity does not strengthen those members who withdraw to their own “rooms” (to use Lewis’ metaphor), but it simply creates an echo chamber that weakens both their ability to interact with the wider Christian community, and even more with the outside world. Steven Johnson describes the weakening effects of the echo-chamber,

When groups can filter their news by ideological persuasion, the long-term tendency is toward increased polarization and decreased consensus. Individuals’ interpretation of the world get amplified and not challenged; the common ground of social agreement shrinks. When groups are exposed to a more diverse range of

¹⁵⁴ Albert Mohler, “AlbertMohler.com – A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity,” AlbertMohler.com, July 12, 2005, accessed October 13, 2011, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/07/12/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity/>.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ *Future Church Think Tank 2011: Conversation 02: Adiaphora*, prod. Leonard I. Sweet, perf. 2011 Future Church Think Tank, Future Church Think Tank 2011, October 29, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIasfNLYQ1Y&list=PLg6wFD1rQtvVqr3NL1QIkxdNt_ftE6Sq&index=3.

¹⁵⁷ Robert Greer, *Mapping Postmodernism: A Survey of Christian Options* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2003), 174.

perspectives, when their values are forced to confront different viewpoints, they are likely to approach the world in a more nuanced way, and avoid falling prey to crude extremism.¹⁵⁸

Johnson supports this statement by citing longitudinal studies from University of Michigan professor Scott E. Page, developer of the “Diversity Trumps Homogeneity Theorem.”¹⁵⁹ For 20 years, Page grouped test subjects based on homogenous skill, perspective, and I.Q. over against groups scoring lower in I.Q. tests, but diverse in their range of skill profession and perspective. Page consistently found that diverse groups were collectively smarter and more effective at problem solving than the homogenous groups. If civility can diminish the partitions built over non-essential issues, the author contends a stronger, smarter, and more robust Body could emerge. Civility is necessary to understand that united diversity matters more than compartmentalized denominational exclusivity.

Although denominational chauvinism remains alive and well in the Christian community, perhaps the similar definitions of first order issues from C.S. Lewis, an Anglican layman; Belcher, an Emergent Church planter; and Mohler, a Southern Baptist, offer a hopeful if not accidental demonstration of diverse unity. Such a unity is built on the notion that while essential issues are clear, they are also few. Therefore, plenty of room is present for Christ-followers to confidently embrace the vibrancy found in non-

¹⁵⁸ Steven Johnson, *Future Perfect: The Case for Progress in a Networked Age* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2012), 97.

¹⁵⁹ The theorem states, “If two collections of problem solvers contain problem solvers of equal individual ability, and if those problem solvers in the first collection are homogenous and those in the second collection are diverse, that is, they have some differences in their local optima, then the collection of diverse problem solvers, on average, outperforms the collection of homogenous problem solvers.” Scott E. Page, *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 157.

essential issues, while standing united in Christ as a force for good. Such an understanding of what is essential and non-essential will allow the Christian community to model for one another, and to the watching world, a realized vision for convicted and compassionate civility – a civility expressed within a community at its best when its diverse members find unity and strength in the One they value most.

Intention

With a clarified vision for civility presented, the opportunity before the Christ-follower will proceed only as far as they intend to bring the vision into reality. But what forms the basis of motivation for a follower of Christ to embrace this vision?

The gospel of grace is the crown jewel into which the light of Christ's unconditional love is radiated to one another and to the world that lives in darkness. The light is reflected from its single source, Christ the Lord. However, that single source of light is also refracted, displaying a rainbow of vivid colors - differences arising from the multi-faceted perspectives, personalities, contexts, experiences, and other sources of variation "cut" into the jewel. Same diamond, single source of light, united reflection, diverse refraction.

The Body's incivility has diminished the brilliance of the reflection and muted its colorful refraction. The darkened result casts more shadow than light, failing to provide illumination to those within the Body and to those outside. If the church is no brighter than the world, how can its internal interaction and external witness shed any light on the problem?

It is the bond of love that holds together the diverse pieces of Christ's church, creating in mosaic form the image of the church's Master Artisan. New Testament scholar Merrill Tenney offers a compelling observation of this principle in relation to the patchwork of personalities forming Jesus' original disciples: "The attitude of love would be the bind that would keep them united and would be the convincing demonstration that they had partaken of his own spirit and purpose."¹⁶⁰

Pursue civility as a facet of discipleship. Like others referenced thus far, Richard Mouw confirms the damage of incivility to relationships, education, politics, and the business world. However, Mouw takes the conversation further, pointing to incivility's devastation to the Christian community's internal unity and its external witness. For Mouw, Christian civility is an issue of discipleship, conviction, and obedience to the way and witness of Jesus. He writes,

We were created for kind and gentle living. Indeed, kindness and gentleness are two of the fruit-of-the-Spirit characteristics that the apostle Paul mentions in Galatians 5. When Christians fail to measure up to the standards of kindness and gentleness, we are not the people God meant us to be.¹⁶¹

Kinnaman echoes the same sentiment: "I believe that now more than ever, the world needs the church to be the people of God, like Jesus, full of truth and grace. People who know what they believe and where they stand, but who have the depth of character to speak the truth in love."¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Frank E. Gaebelin et al., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary : John - Acts: With the New International Version of the Holy Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1981), 142.

¹⁶¹ Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 13.

¹⁶² Kinnaman, "The Sin of Incivility."

The Christ-follower's diligent pursuit of relational unity within a framework of love is a primary identifier of one's devotion to the way of Jesus. Equal to this is the diligence of Christ-followers to seek civil and reasonable resolution to interpersonal conflicts that pose a threat to the Body's unity and bond of love. As Muehlhoff and Lewis note, "Even if believers cannot fully resolve their differences, how can conflict be managed in a way that our witness is preserved? In light of Christ's command all believers have a vested interest in learning how to understand and resolve conflict."¹⁶³

Seeing no exemptions and no exceptions to this rule of love, civility is, therefore, a foundational virtue for the advancement of human flourishing in general, and an essential expression of engagement within the Body of Christ in particular. For every Christ follower, civility is an expression of grace needed by the believer, an expression to be expected in a Christian's interactions with fellow believers, and an expression essential for the witness of the gospel's message of grace to the watching world. As James Davidson Hunter observes, "If Christians cannot extend grace through faithful presence within the body of believers, they will not be able to extend grace to those outside."¹⁶⁴

Become a student of communication. No doubt, every Christian that chooses to make civility their intention will need prayer, the study of scripture, and reliance on the Holy Spirit. Such an intention can be daunting, in light of how deeply seated incivility has become, even in the church. Muehlhoff and Lewis, communication professors by trade, acknowledge the intimidation factor:

¹⁶³ Muehlhoff and Lewis, *Authentic Communication*, 102.

¹⁶⁴ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 244.

God has entrusted his gospel to human communicators and asked that it be taken to all people. As followers of Christ, how are we to accomplish these daunting commands? Part of the answer will be constant reliance on the Holy Spirit, prayer and a deep understanding of the scriptures. However, it will also require each of us to become students of communication. What unifies each biblical command is that communication skills are necessary to fulfill them.¹⁶⁵

An important realization before pursuing civility is the humility to realize how little one understands communication. Seeing ourselves as students of communication has the potential to keep us aware of the need to practice what we learn, and aware that there is always more to learn. Because incivility typically surfaces within an environment of conflict or tension, understanding how words work and how communication carries deep meaning can allow believers to create the environment Jesus envisioned for his peace-making people.

Section two, other proposed solutions, demonstrated a thumbnail sketch of the many resources available for helping people address conflict, bullying, workplace hostility, online trolling, and other forms of incivility. What is needed for followers of Jesus committed to civility is the creation and compilation of information gathered, analyzed, synthesized, understood, and applied to the problem of incivility.

Imagine a deliberate grassroots effort by Christians to become conversant in basic communication approaches, conflict resolution, polarity management, semiotics, and other ways by which those who worship the incarnate Word would become students of how his words and ways can become embodied in ours. Such a movement would require the participation of churches. Christians committed to civility, however, need a place to practice. While the church is part of the problem currently, the church is uniquely positioned, gifted, and called to become the very source of the solution.

¹⁶⁵ Muehlhoff and Lewis, *Authentic Communication*, 30.

Encourage churches to become spaces for experimenting, training, and practicing civility. In order for civility to move from private endeavor to public practice, the application and practice of what one learns as a student of communication will need to be tested, tried, tweaked, and taught to others believers. Just as the problem of civility in the church is not a private matter, the righteousness of civility is not a private matter. The lessons and life-change toward civility are intentions that cannot be kept to ourselves. The Body needs its members in order to become healthy. Therefore, the local church is seen here as the primary catalyst for encouraging, equipping, enabling, and engaging Christians in the application and practice of civility. Mouw writes, “The church is the primary context for learning public righteousness. This means our message to the larger society will be credible only if we can invite others to be more like us.”¹⁶⁶ Unless the church’s execution of civility is polished, effective, and attractive, why would the world be at all curious, let alone captivated? To accomplish this, Christians will need a great deal of practice.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul writes, “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”¹⁶⁷ The passage is often applied using the metaphor of a “gymnasium of

¹⁶⁶ Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 38.

¹⁶⁷ 1 Timothy 4:7-8

the soul”¹⁶⁸ and is consistent with Sweet’s concept of “practicing” or even “playing” in order to become better at our expressions of righteousness.¹⁶⁹

Whether churches open their doors to the public as a “Third Space,”¹⁷⁰ create such a space outside their walls, or whether believers gather in private for the purpose of working out their practices of civility, the church as people scattered or in a place gathered can endeavor to be “caught” practicing civility toward one another by a world searching for such a community.

Means

In order for vision and intention to become actual expressions of civility, one needs the means to bring what has been dreamed and decided into demonstrable practice. This requires goals that are tangible, settings that are acceptable, steps that are repeatable, and a conversational process that is simple, practical, memorable, and portable.

Set Tangible Goals

Relational communication scholars William Wilmot and Joyce Hocker describe four goals essential to productive and civil interpersonal conversations over issues of conflict.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Charles R. Swindoll, "The Gymnasium of the Soul," *Insight for Living*, August 2008, section goes here, <http://www.insightforliving.ca/insights/humility/gymnasium-soul.html>

¹⁶⁹ Leonard Sweet’s upcoming book is dedicated entirely to the notion of practice and play - two concepts he has frequently “played with” throughout the author’s academic program.

¹⁷⁰ *Third space* is a term used to refer to social surroundings different from home (first space) and work (second place). In his book *The Great Good Place*, Ray Oldenburg suggests that third spaces are important for building civil community, civil engagement, and establishing feelings of a sense of place. Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You through the Day* (New York: Paragon House, 1989).

¹⁷¹ William W. Wilmot and Joyce L. Hocker, *Interpersonal Conflict*, 8th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2007). 71-83

Content goals. Also known as “topic goals,” this involves working to establish a shared goal for what will be accomplished through the conversation. Leadership expert Stephen Covey calls this the principle of “beginning with the end in mind.”¹⁷²

Relational goals. These goals involve the type of relationship participants want to maintain during the conflict. Since the focus of this dissertation is on civility in the church, a foundational goal is for participants to relate to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Even if the parties see one another as opponents, “our opponents are not our enemies.”¹⁷³

Identity goals. Somewhat similar to relational goals, identity goals establish how each party wants to be viewed by the other. In a variation of the Golden Rule, each party is in the position to model the attitude and behavior consistent with how they want to be viewed by the other.

Process goals. Given the first three goals are set, this goal determines the process by which the communication will progress. Will the dialogue take place in person, via email, one-on one, with a facilitator, etc.?

Because the work involved in establishing tangible goals requires a certain level of civility, it is possible for these preliminary exercise to resolve the conflict altogether. If the conversations require additional engagement, it is important to have the means to create the best possible setting for the dialogue to take place.

Create Safe Settings

¹⁷² Stephen Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. (London: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 97.

¹⁷³ Kinnaman, "The Sin of Incivility."

As a marital therapist, John Gottman is able to predict with startling accuracy the outcome of a conversation between people within the first three minutes. The secret, while insightful, is simple, and entirely within one's control. According to Gottman, it's all in how the conversation is set up by one's body language and vocal intensity; actions, if expressed with the gentleness, respect, and restraint that define civility, can almost guarantee a productive conversation.

Turn toward and start soft. Gottman's tools for conversational kick-starts have benefitted thousands of people over his career as a therapist. He suggests the physical posture of turning one's body toward their conversation partner and maintaining an open position: arms not crossed in front or behind, nor hands in pockets. One's palms should be open (this is not one of Gottman's suggestions, but will be explained later). If it is possible to sit across from the person, do so. Lean forward and look in the face, making appropriate eye contact, but not constant eye contact. The position is strong, but invitational.

Vocally, begin the conversation with a choice of words and volume that is not harsh. If the other person begins harshly, do not respond in kind. Gottman believes a "soft start up" is even more important than turning toward, but both are effective tools. Several thousand years before John Gottman called for this approach, the wisdom literature of the Old Testament observed, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Proverbs 15:1

The research of Jack Gibb reveals six forms of communication that create a defensive conversational setting and six that create a supportive and productive setting.¹⁷⁵ He lists the forms in contrasting pairs. For purposes of explanation, the author will list Gibb's descriptive pairs, followed by a less academic descriptor, which will be used in the artifact.

Evaluation versus description: Describe my side. When one's thoughts are too quickly evaluated or analyzed, a defensive posture is likely. In contrast, working to describe the other's concerns or feelings is validating, and aids in understanding the nature of the issue in dispute.

Neutrality versus empathy: Dare to care. Progress is stalled when one's concerns are met with a detached and stoic response. In contrast, an empathetic acknowledgement provides a tone of understanding and invites further openness.

Strategy versus spontaneity: Converse, don't compete. When dialogue gives way to responses that sound strategic, scripted, or intended to score debate points, the setting will devolve. Listen and respond, but not in a manner that appears to be competitive.

Controlling versus problem orientation: Think with me, not for me. Such a setting can be detected when one party attempts to manipulate and coerce the other to adopt their view. It can become a form of relational bullying. In contrast, civil conversations seek collaboration, working together toward resolution.

Certainty versus provisionalism: Reserve the right to be wrong. Language loaded with dogmatism is a descriptor of this setting. There is little progress when one believes their views to be absolute. On the other hand, blogger Brian Konkol suggests "a true and

¹⁷⁵ Jack Gibb, *The Journal of Communication* 11, no. 3 (September 1961): 142, doi:http://www.healthy.net/Health/Article/Defensive_Communication/2533/1.

genuine dialogue only takes place when a person is willing to be ‘converted’ to the other side of the argument.” At first pass, the statement caused the author to become defensive, but there is wisdom here, for when one enters a conversation with a teachable spirit, even in passionate disagreement, one is able to learn and better understand. Belcher expands on a posture he calls “cognitive modesty”:

This does not mean we are not confident in what we know by faith but that we are modest and humble in how we communicate what we know and we do so with a teachable spirit that communicates that we may be wrong on some issues and are open to learning and growing.¹⁷⁶

Superiority versus equality: Talk with me, not at me. Civility is difficult if one behaves as though they are superior to the other. A posture of equality creates a setting more likely to result in progress toward resolution.

Central to each of the settings above is the simple, but essential quality of treating the other as one created in the image of God, and therefore deserving of respect, even if for their potential. Followers of Jesus can create climates of civility within which problems, issues, questions, tensions, and other forms of conflict can be addressed. Such climate control is determined by “the degree to which people see themselves as valued.”¹⁷⁷

Prepare the Heart for Civil Engagement.

Mouw writes,

¹⁷⁶ Jim Belcher, "Discovering the Third Way," interview, [Http://blogs.christianbook.com/blogs/academic/2010/05/19/deep-church-an-interview-with-jim-belcher](http://blogs.christianbook.com/blogs/academic/2010/05/19/deep-church-an-interview-with-jim-belcher) (blog), May 19, 2010, accessed December 2, 2011.

¹⁷⁷ Ronald B. Adler, Lawrence B. Rosenfeld, and Russell F. Proctor, *Interplay: The Process of Interpersonal Communication* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 303.

No spirituality of civility is adequate without self-critique - taking an honest look at our own motives and purposes. And this can only happen when we acknowledge that we desperately need God to reveal to us what is really going on in our inner being.¹⁷⁸

Biblical scholar Richard Pratt describes his experience viewing a stained glass window. Looking through the glass, he observed the passing clouds outside. When the light shifted, he saw his reflection in the glass, like a mirror. Finally, he saw the artistic image, the picture itself. He compared the experience to what it means for one to truly encounter the Lord through the scriptures; a mirror by which we see ourselves, a window through which we see the world, and an image in which we come face to face with the story, and its Author.¹⁷⁹

The following questions are helpful means for one's practice of self-critique. As the questions become more familiar, they can become a repeatable series of filters or steps to clarify the effect an issue of conflict is having on one's self, and thus assist one in responding to conflict versus reacting to it.

What exactly set off the conflict? Think through the source of the problem for accurate assessment. What was my contribution to the source of this conflict, if any?

How do I understand the conflict? Can I describe what the conflict is about? Many disputes become much worse because of misunderstandings leading to misrepresentations, and so on. Seek to clearly understand the conflict.

What are they seeing? This is an instance where familiarity with semiotics, particularly familiarity with Peirce's concept of collateral experience, is relevant and

¹⁷⁸ Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 76.

¹⁷⁹ Richard L. Pratt, Jr., "Pictures, Windows, and Mirrors in Old Testament Exegesis," *Westminster Theological Journal* 45, (Spring 1983). 56-67.

helpful for understanding what the source of the conflict signifies for the other person involved. Such insight can allow one to respond with sensitivity and helpful understanding as communication is adjusted to account for the collateral experience encountered: “All of us need to become adept translators of the symbols we use on a daily basis.”¹⁸⁰

What is this doing in me? This is a deep level of honesty, and requires maturity. Is the conflict provoking you in a way that is disproportionate to its source? What emotions, feelings, memories, or other responses is the conflict raising in you? Are your responses such that you can effectively address the conflict, or do you need assistance, time to process, or to establish a boundary?

What is generating these feelings in me? Do you have your own collateral experience that makes you more or less able to respond with civility to this conflict? Would sharing such information make the setting more or less positive and productive?

It is clear that followers of Jesus, while pursuing civility, are nonetheless products of dysfunction, brokenness, and our own insecurities. Civility is hard work requiring training, practice, and honest self-appraisal, and at times time and distance before being prepared to address the conflict in a civil manner.

Civility is a descriptive quality of a follower of Jesus. Therefore, it requires that each one turn to Christ in preparation for a life of civility that embodies the truth of Jesus in its conviction, the grace of Jesus in its compassion, and the way of Jesus in its expression.

Open Your Hands to Shalom

¹⁸⁰ Muehlhoff and Lewis, *Authentic Communication*, 44.

Throughout the course of this dissertation, the author has endeavored to draw attention to the problem of incivility within the Christian community in contrast to Jesus' call and command to his followers that their words and ways reflect the sacrificial, convicted, and compassionate civility he modeled. Civility works to build a diverse unity within the Body of Christ, modeling to the searching and watching world a way of living, moving and having one's being within a community dedicated to the pursuit of both individual and collective human flourishing. In a word, *shalom*.

Theologian Cornelius Plantinga Jr. writes, "*Shalom* means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight."¹⁸¹ According to Muehlhoff and Lewis, the Old Testament prophets envisioned *shalom* as "human communities knit together in affirming, flourishing relationships."¹⁸² *Shalom* is peace, yet much more. It is a way of living that glorifies God, the author of peace, by reflecting his character through our practice of tending to the good of human civilization. Civility is essential for the pursuit, protection, and proclamation of *shalom*. Civility is both an expression of incarnational ministry and an invitational expression of peace.

Assuming the claim of this dissertation is accepted, what then? Christ followers are real people, living often stress-filled lives among other stressed-out people. Add a sluggish economy, aging parents, raising kids, getting through school, and other elements of social life lived in a society that rewards rudeness, and one could understand how a call to civility might just sound like more white noise. Like many of the solutions

¹⁸¹ Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 10.

¹⁸² Muehlhoff and Lewis, *Authentic Communication*, 116.

proposed in section two, the information is solid but complicated, and difficult to transfer into busy minds and fast-paced lives.

Christ-followers need the simplicity (something simple but not simplistic, complex, but not complicated) found in a one-word description like shalom - a word that is loaded with explanation but easy to say (simple). A word packed with complex meaning, but simple to remember (memorable). A word that brings to mind a common significance across many experiences (connectable), and a word that carries with it the elements of vision, intention, and means, allowing the user to step through the process of application quickly and efficiently whenever and wherever the opportunity arises (portable). It's a word the reader should be familiar with by now. It's a word related to both the problem and the proposed solutions to the problem. And it's a word that conveys a quality that it seems people want to receive but have a problem expressing.

The word is *civil*. Actually, it is an acronym, C.I.V.I.L., but more on that later. Still wondering how it will work? The answer is in the palm of your hand.

Let Me Give You a Hand - Your Hand.

Bob Goff is a follower of Jesus who people describe as a “one-man tsunami of love, a hurricane of grace.”¹⁸³ He is also a strong fighter. As an attorney, he aggressively goes after “companies that make crooked skyscrapers or bent buildings...Don't get me wrong, I'm no softy; I can be extremely confrontational when it comes to dirt and two-

¹⁸³ Louie Giglio, preface, in *Love Does: Discover a Secretly Incredible Life in an Ordinary World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012).

by-fours.”¹⁸⁴ However, Goff fights differently than one might suspect. “I used to think clenched fists would help me fight better, but now I know they make me weaker.”¹⁸⁵

Goff has an unusual practice he requires of his clients when they sit for a deposition. He makes them sit with their hands open and their palms up. Note, the previous sentence says, he “makes them” sit with their palms up. This is a non-negotiable practice for Goff’s clients. “I’m very serious about this. In fact I threaten to kick them in the shins if I look down and they don’t have their palms up.”¹⁸⁶ Goff goes on to explain that when one’s palms are up, it is more difficult for them to become defensive or angry. The opposite is accurate, as well. When one clenches their fists, it is much easier to become irritated and aggressive. “Something about the hardwiring God gave each of us links the position of our bodies with the position of our hearts. I rarely have a client get frustrated or confused or get tempted to exaggerate or tell a lie when his palms are up.”¹⁸⁷

Goff credits his relationship with Jesus as the motivation for this practice: “Palms up means you have nothing to hide and nothing to gain or lose. Palms up means you are strong enough to be vulnerable, even with your enemies. Even when you have been tremendously wronged. Jesus was palms up, to the end.”¹⁸⁸

Look at your hand. Civility requires followers of Jesus to approach conflict openhanded. The hand will be the image. An open hand with palms up signifies one’s openness to be used as an instrument of peace. Now think of the word *civil*. Each finger

¹⁸⁴ Bob Goff, *Love Does: Discover a Secretly Incredible Life in an Ordinary World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 203.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Goff, *Love Does*, 204.

¹⁸⁷ Goff, *Love Does*, 205.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 205.

on the hand will remind readers of a different aspect of the conversational process. These memory triggers will help the reader recall the various tools explained above. The acrostic below will outline the process, briefly referring to the communication tools each step is connected to.

C.I.V.I.L. Process

C – Clarity: This first step calls one to clarify the nature of the conflict itself and how they are internally processing the potential conflict. This step poses the question, “What is this about, really?” Such a question allows one to evaluate their own perception and understanding of how the potential conflict is affecting them: (What is this stirring up in me?)

Gaining such clarity allows one to evaluate the nature of and need for further engagement. Does this need to be dealt with right now? Would a delay help or harm the potential resolution? Is this a worthwhile engagement? Is this a hill to die on, or an issue one can overlook? Keep in mind, while convicted and compassionate civility is not the absence of conflict, wisdom dictates that one not go looking for conflict. “A person’s wisdom yields patience; it is to one’s glory to overlook an offense.”¹⁸⁹ Starting the process with clarity allows one to wisely, patiently, and strategically express civility, whether one chooses to further engage the conflict or let it go.

I – Intention: When the conflict is clarified and a decision is reached to further engage, what is the end goal? When a quarterback receives a snap from the center, conflict ensues, but the goal is clear: Reach the end zone. He may have to scramble, improvise, or even take a hard hit, but his intention is certain. But keep in mind there is

¹⁸⁹ Proverbs 19:11

an opposing team with intentions of its own. For civil conversation, Wilmot and Hocker's shared content goal allows participants to determine what the preferred outcome is. If the conversation is not this deep, at least the reader can take personal initiative to envision a productive resolution. Intention also references Covey's principle of "beginning with the end in mind."

V – Value: Value is arguably the most important step in the process. The temptation to close the palm and make a fist will be most tangible at this point. It is important here to recall Wilmont and Hocker's relational goal, which determines how one chooses to view the other within the conflict. Because this dissertation is concerned primarily with incivility within the Christian community, value here is based on the relational reality that one is engaged with a brother or sister in Christ, a member of the same Body, a fellow follower of Jesus. As such, while they may be an opponent, they are not the enemy. To be sure, they may be irrational, unreasonable, misinformed, or very irritating. Keep in mind that civility does not require that one become close friends with all fellow believers, but the fruits of the Spirit are still in season, even if our family quarrel is bitter. Value keeps the hands open and the palms up.

I – Interaction: Interaction pays attention to how the persons involved, and perhaps even the issues discussed, are interdependent on one another. Principles of polarity management and redemptive tension are key in this part of the process. Because some conflicts cannot be resolved because they consist of interdependent opposites (inhaling/exhaling), they are better held in a managed tension. Recalling how to determine the difference is important here: (Does the issue resurface, are there mature and reasonable advocates on both sides, and are the issues interdependent?)

Interaction also reminds one to consider their conversational setting. Is it conducive to practice empathy, presence, and vulnerability when listening to the perspective of another, as explained in Gibb's list above? Remember also that active listening involves interaction in a manner that conveys "cognitive modesty," or reserving the right to be wrong. One can accept the person and affirm their right to express their perspective, while not approving of the perspective or its result.

In addition to active listening, one's method of interaction may be to ask good questions. Being a student of communication will develop and sharpen skills relevant to creative and thoughtful questions.

L – Limits: Christians with a vision, intention, and means to practice compassionate, convicted civility endeavor to extend public politeness, respect, deference, courtesy, kindness, gentleness, and other qualities, consistent with the way of Jesus. While conflict is inevitable as long as human beings interact in this world, civility would seek to minimize, resolve, or manage the tensions arising from conflict.

Any healthy interaction, however, contain limits. While some may interpret limits as restrictive measures that infringe on one's freedom, limits can be better defined as measures intended to preserve and protect those engaged, resulting in enhanced freedom. The first humans were placed in Eden with abundant freedom. Once they chose to ignore the one limitation placed by God, their freedom was diminished. Roller coasters limit one's movement, setting one free to experience the ride more than once.

Limits are necessary for healthy interaction. This fifth step in the process guides the participant to navigate conflict in a manner that preserves and protects the health of the interaction.

One limitation involves the sort of communication medium to which the conflict will be limited. Will the participants interact face to face, via email, video conferencing, or in some other form? While personal interaction is best, the situation may require communication in a more controlled manner. The author once interacted with a fellow Christian who struggled with an explosive temper. In order to converse, the meetings were limited to public, crowded areas like parks, or coffee shops. This aided the gentleman in keeping his cool while we worked through the conflict. Other limitations could include facilitated conversations, mediation, meetings limited by a time frame, or other boundaries that provide the best chance of progress. However, there may come a time when even civility is not enough.

Some conflicts involve issues of such importance that civil responses are difficult. Some behaviors extend beyond the limits of what is tolerable. When bullying brings a person to consider suicide, when people are exploited by evildoers, when sexual predators use their positions within the church threaten the safety of the innocent, when violent speech and actions are unleashed in a toxic torrent of aggression, setting limits means one concedes there may be times when civility alone is not adequate to deal with one's differences.

Stanley offers a helpful description. He groups relationships into several circles, two of which are relevant here. One is the circle of influence, where one maintains close ties with those they allow to influence them. The second is the circle of concern. This circle allows continued connection, but places the relationship outside the realm of influence; the person or group no longer speaks into one's life in a formative or

influential way.¹⁹⁰ The author refers to this as loving someone from a deliberate distance. In extreme cases, however, the most civil action can be to eliminate contact altogether. This does not imply hatred or un-forgiveness, but recognizes the necessity for such a distance to be put into place. Such limits allow for protection from abusive, oppressive, or even dangerous connections. Some may question such a decision, but Mouw clarifies that

Civility is not enough in some situations. But I must repeat: its basic requirements are never canceled. Christians never have a right to simply cast aside kindness and gentleness. We are never justified in engaging in a no-holds-barred crusade against our opponents. Going beyond mere civility does not mean that we become less than civil.¹⁹¹

Now that the process has been explained, readers are provided the visual image of their own hand. It is hoped the hand will provide a reminder for both what the process is and why it is so important.

The process allows readers to extend an open hand of civility to others. One can extend their hand in fellowship to another Christian, reach out to meet a stranger, hold the hand of someone hurting, and support someone who is stumbling. The hand can be held up to offer caution to one who is misguided and to grasp one falling away. An open hand is an act of incarnation, sharing the grace of Jesus, and invitational, calling others to follow the truth that is Jesus. The term *Christian* originally meant “little Christ.” That being the case, may our open hands be a prayer that God would make us the kind of people who sound more and look more like Christ.

¹⁹⁰ Andy Stanley, "The Power of Friendship" (speech, North Point Community Church, Alpharetta, March 2007).

¹⁹¹ Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 147.

Conclusion

It is the conclusion of this dissertation that a convicted, compassionate civility is an expectation placed upon all followers of Jesus Christ. It is the claim of this dissertation that the Christian community's failure to heed these and other demands toward civility, compassion, awareness, and love have worked toward an increasing lack of civility within the Christian community.

This dissertation endeavored to address two questions coming from both the church and the wider culture. First, what happened to civility? This dissertation affirmed a decline of civility in the fields of business, politics, family, and of particular concern, the church. The strengths and weaknesses of several proposed solutions were examined, demonstrating a shared sense of need for civility, but a disconnected approach to addressing it.

Second, where can society learn how to better disagree? The proposal of this dissertation is that the Body of Christ is uniquely positioned, gifted, and commanded to embody a practical and relevant answer to this second question. By embracing a vision for civility, becoming intentional in one's posture toward civility, and adopting practical means to extend civility, the dissertation proposed an embodied response that points to the community of faith as a place and people of grace, wherein civility survives and thrives.

To that end, the dissertation has explored principles from a wide spectrum of disciplines including marital therapy, semiotics, polarity management, family systems theory, business management, philosophy, etiquette, art, physics, conflict management, sports, theology, history, and even my daughter's eyeball, to demonstrate the need for a

process that educates, equips, and empowers Christians to confidently engage in respectful, civil conversations on disputable issues.

It is the author's sincere hope that the dissertation has helped begin a conversation on *why* civility and unity are important, *how* Christians can approach conversations in a manner that provides improved solidarity and improved witness to the world, and a simple process helping Christ followers know *what* to do to be the difference in an uncivil world.

SECTION 4: TRACK 02 ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

Section three closed with a proposed process that I trust will help members of the Christian community to succeed in realizing a vision, focusing their intentions, and putting into practice the means to a life of civility. The proposal, however, is expressed thus far in academic terminology, making it inaccessible to the very people necessary to begin the grassroots effort I hope for.

One of the attractions to this program has been the unique combination of academic exploration and an expectation to make one's discoveries available in a practical and popular way. The track 02 dissertation affords such an exciting opportunity. This program's means to that end is the requirement of an Artifact, within which a wide variety of practical tools, approaches and ideas are permitted.

The Artifact I am proposing is a non-fiction book written in a thoughtful and yet engaging manner. The topic of civility is on the proverbial radar of many people, particularly during and following the 2012 presidential election. In the months since the election, incivility has continued to receive attention through its connection to cyber-bullying, disrespect among families, workplace incidents, road rage, and political fallout. All of these and other expressions of incivility touch the church, where levels of incivility closely resemble the hostile environment of the wider culture.

The goal of my book will be to engage, inform, and persuade Christians that incivility within the culture has little hope of improvement without an example of compassionate, convicted civility expressed by the church toward one another and to the world.

The book will include the essence of the material in the dissertation interlaced with stories of incivility witnessed by myself and others. The intention is to use stories that are provocative, yet familiar. I want to frame the problem in such a way as to convince the reader of its prevalence, while bringing it close enough so that the reader sees the localized and tangible ways the process can be applied to their immediate context.

Because I possess the spiritual gift of sarcasm, several of the stories convey the damage I have caused with my own blatant expressions of incivility. I hope that readers who might otherwise dismiss the appeal consider that if I can change, anyone can change.

Next, I will explore the efforts made to address civility in light of the church's absence of contrast, pointing to the church's resemblance to the world in its uncivil posture toward each other rather than offering a redemptive and attractive alternative. I will demonstrate how elements of these approaches can be of great help to Christians, but also how they are difficult to apply without the core of morality found in the way of Jesus.

Civility will be explored as a necessary quality for Christian maturity, an essential element in the establishment of *shalom* in the community, and a practical outworking of one's faith in Jesus. Special attention will be given to clarification of misconceptions regarding civility. Finally, a simple, memorable, practical, and portable process will be used to equip Christians to proactively and deliberately choose civility.

While the book will seek to persuade change within the Body of Christ on this important issue, I am not seeking to be confrontational. I am working toward a tone of the very compassionate and convicted civility I believe Jesus is calling the church to return

to. Therefore, the approach is invitational; I will be transparent with the reader about my own struggle to address incivility in life and ministry, in hopes that the book feels like a friend walking alongside the other.

SECTION 5: TRACK 02 ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

This section of the Written Statement follows the Non-Fiction Book Template provided by the George Fox University Doctor of Ministry Department.¹ The format of the following pages deviates from Turabian to conform to the standards described in the template. It contains the following materials:

- Cover letter to a book editor
- A non-fiction book proposal for *Hand Over Fist* that contains:
 - Title: Proposed title and subtitle
 - Author: Name and complete contact information of the author
 - Overview: Book subject, summary, and takeaways
 - Purpose: Specific goals of the book
 - Promotion and Marketing: Possible avenues of book promotion
 - Competition: Other books in print that compare to the propose project
 - Uniqueness: How the proposed book differs from its competition
 - Endorsements: Established authors that will back the book
 - Book Format: How the information in the book will be presented
 - Chapter Outline: Short summaries of each chapter
 - Intended Readers: Primary and secondary audiences
 - Manuscript: Estimated word count and completion date of the manuscript
 - Author Bio: Establishing the author's credibility to the subject
 - Publishing Credits: Previously published works
 - Future Projects: Other works in progress or planning

¹ https://foxfiles.georgefox.edu/SEM/DMin/diss/track02/trk2guidelines.htm#written_statement

Dear Editor,

My name is Kevin Glenn. I'm a 40-year-old pastor and writer currently living in the Midwest. I'm a doctoral candidate under Dr. Leonard Sweet at George Fox Evangelical Seminary. Previously, I've written movie reviews for Youth Specialties, a division of Zondervan. I am currently a contributor to the *Associated Baptist Press*, and have recently joined the writing team for a local interfaith website, *Columbia Faith and Values* (FAVS), affiliated with *Religious News Service*. These past and present experiences have given me a front-row seat for the diminishing civility that has come to define the way in which Christians discuss controversial issues. It's no surprise we seem to be known more for our internal battles than for a united message of grace.

I believe we can do better. I'm proposing a simple, practical, and memorable process that defines why civility is essential Christian maturity and how Christians can adopt a civility based on conviction and compassion. I believe this will result in improved health and unity in the Body of Christ and improved witness to the world. Therefore, I would like to propose a book for your consideration, *Hand Over Fist: An Invitation Christian Civility*.

Because incivility has garnered so much attention recently, many resources in the worlds of business, politics, therapy, philosophy, etiquette, communication, and ethics have addressed the problem and offered solutions that lack a compelling moral framework for application. Meanwhile, the church, with its compelling framework of compassion, conviction, and a call to be salt and light, handles its own conflicts with the same uncivil practices as the culture.

As a pastor and writer, I am in constant conversation with a wide variety of beliefs within and outside the scope of Christianity. I often find myself playing referee between Christians, while unbelievers look on in bewilderment at the stark contrast between our message of grace and our family feuds. My book explores principles from marital therapy, semiotics, polarity management, systems theory, communication and conflict management, all within the framework of conviction and compassion to formulate a process that educates, equips, and empowers Christians to confidently engage in respectful, civil conversations on disputable issues.

I hope you will consider the need for such a resource and its benefit to the Christian community. I greatly appreciate your time and your commitment to producing quality resources. I hope to have the opportunity to work with you in this worthwhile endeavor.

Sincerely,

Kevin D. Glenn

Title: Hand Over Fist: An Invitation to Civility

Author: Kevin Dwight Glenn

Overview: This book describes and defines a process for civil engagement on issues where Christians find themselves in disagreement.

Purpose:

- To reveal the damage incivility has caused to the Body of Christ.
- To reveal the damage incivility has caused to the church's witness in the world.
- To convince Christians of the need for change.
- To communicate a theology of unity.
- To explain the differences between solvable and perpetual problems.
- To describe dynamics of communication useful for approaching controversy.
- To explain a series of shared goals by which to guide conversations.
- To adopt principles of polarity management to visualize "both/and" approaches to gridlock.
- To provide exercises and case studies by which the process can be practiced and contextualized.

Promotion and Marketing:

- Seize upon current incivility in culture as a catalyst for demonstrating the need for such a resource.
- Use media clips highlighting debates, literature, and other examples of incivility.
- Provide video testimonials from those who have "field tested" the process.
- Use images of suspension bridges, guitar strings, and other items that require tension in order to function.
- Communicate the concept through Facebook, Twitter, radio interviews, blogs, etc...
- Create a website with brief videos, articles, and devotionals connected to the book.
- Create a series of podcasts on the book's main points and ideas.
- Offer seminars where the book's ideas are further explained.

Comparative Titles:

- *Beyond Evangelical*, Frank Viola, Present Testimony Ministry, 2012
- *A Faith of Our Own*, Jonathan Merritt, Faithwords, 2012
- *Uncommon Decency*, Richard Mouw, 2012
- *Polarity Management in Congregations*, Roy Oswald and Barry Johnson, The Alban Institute, 2009
- *Why We Eat Our Own*, Michael Chesire, First Punch Press, 2013

Uniqueness:

- *Beyond Evangelical* – Viola presents an approach to theology that seeks to avoid extremes on several issues. However, book's goal is what one believes, not how to converse about those beliefs.
- *A Faith of our Own* – Merritt's focus is on political polarization, but does not offer a communication paradigm.
- *Uncommon Decency* is referenced frequently in mine. His insights are valuable, but he offers no memorable process.
- *Polarity Management in Congregations* – Provides several scenarios by which one can learn how to set up a dialogue diagram. Only 12 pages are devoted to establishing why such an approach is necessary for churches.
- *Why We Eat Our Own* – Is based on similar concern, but is written for a niche audience.

Endorsements:

- Leonard Sweet, author more than 50 books – has agreed to endorse and write the Forward.
- Richard Carlson, author of *Science, Creation, and the Bible*, IVP, 2012 and editor of *Science and Christianity: Four Views*, IVP, 2000 – has agreed to endorse
- Jeff Brumley, content editor for *Associated Baptist Press* has agreed to endorse
- Jonathan Merritt, author of *A Faith of Our Own* – will consider
- Richard Lamb, author of *God Behaving Badly*, IVP 2012-has agreed to endorse
- Suzi Paynter, Executive Coordinator, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship - has agreed to endorse.
- Bill Wilson, president, Center for Congregational Health - has agreed to endorse.

Chapter Outline:**Part 1: The Problem**

1. What happened to just being civil? Introduction to civility: its definition, history and importance to society.

2. It's an uncivil world out there. Exploring and revealing the problem of civility in politics, the workplace, and the home.

3. The Church community: It's rough in here, too. Examining the reality of incivility in the church.

Part 2: Options for Consideration

4. Behavioral bankruptcy and the bottom line. Solutions from the world of business.

5. A moral compass in cyberspace. Moral appeals for civil discourse in person and online.

6. The solution in the sign. Semiotics as a valuable tool in civil communication.

7. Making music in the middle. Polarity management as the best kept secret for civility

8. Why fighting among ourselves is making our enemy very happy. Taking to task denominational chauvinism.

Part 3: A Way Forward

9. Vision Clarifying what civility is *not* and what choosing civility will require.

10. Intention. Calling for a committed and deliberate effort.

12. Palms Up. Openhanded way of Jesus over clenched aggression.

13. C.I.V.I.L. A simple, memorable, and portable process for respectful and civil engagement.

Intended Readers:

Primary:

- Everyday Christians. Primarily young to median aged adults concerned with raising awareness and seeking to begin a grassroots movement for change.
- Church volunteer leader / Deacons
- Sunday School/ small group facilitators
- Pastors
- Advocates for particular issues
- Conflict resolution specialists

Secondary:

- Students (High School and College)
- Communication teachers
- Journalists

Manuscript: A roughly 30,000 word manuscript is available immediately. Revisions could easily expand this beginning effort.

Author Bio:

Kevin is a 40-year-old pastor, writer, blogger, and communicator. For more than 20 years, he has served churches through student ministry, music, education, counseling, and extensive preaching/teaching ministries. His experience has taken him from Florida to Alaska, and several places in between.

Kevin earned a B.A. in Biblical Studies and Counseling from Trinity College of Florida, a Master's Degree in Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary, and is a doctoral student under Dr. Leonard Sweet at George Fox Evangelical Seminary.

He has served as Senior Pastor at Memorial Baptist Church in Columbia, Missouri since 2010. As a writer for *Associated Baptist Press*, Kevin has written on various issues of

tension within the Baptist tribe. Locally, he writes on cultural issues from a Christian perspective for *Columbia Faith and Values*, a partner with Religion News Service.

These experiences have given Kevin a unique vantage point and platform from which to engage in the very types conversations he's writing about. The process described in his book is one developed from time "in the trenches" of cultural dialogue and born out of a genuine concern for the internal and external damage incivility is bringing to the Body of Christ.

Previous Publications:

- Ministry by GRACE, www.Joshhunt.com, May 2005
- Mars Hill Mindset, www.kevinglenn.net, August 2006
- Various movie reviews, www.planetwisdom.com, 2007-2009
- Growing Up as a Matter of Life and Death, Bon Air Trust, 2010
- A Place of Grace (blog), began 2011
- Politics on the Edge, *Associated Baptist Press*, October 2012
- Politics and the Church, *Word and Way*, October, 2012
- Why an Election Day Communion? (contributor), *Associated Baptist Press*, November 2, 2012
- A Bid for Unity (contributor), *Ethics Daily*, November 6, 2012
- Gratitude: Weird but Worthwhile, www.ColumbiaFAVs.com, November 22, 2012
- Reframing Black Friday, www.columbiaFAVs.com, November 23, 2012
- I'm Playing the Race Card, www.columbiaFAVs.com, July 16, 2013

Future Projects:

- Missional Faithism: Partnering with unbelievers in causes we both believe in.
- Conversations at the end of the Rainbow: Viewpoints on same-sex marriage among the Christian Community. (I've been approached to represent the perspective that supports same-sex civil unions, but opposes same-sex sacramental marriage.)
- My Dad is Your Pastor: The complicated pastor/child/church relationship (will be written with my daughter.)

SECTION 6: POSTSCRIPT

It is difficult to consider how much the author's final approach to the dissertation has differed from the original idea presented to the advisor. At first, the idea consisted of addressing civility indirectly. Rather than write about civility, the author intended to examine a number of particular issues facing the church over which participants have been most likely to behave in an uncivil manner. In particular, the dissertation was to be divided into portions dealing with issues of homosexuality, women in ministry, the authority of scripture, and the interaction of science and faith.

The author's advisor patiently and wisely helped me to understand the nearly impossible scope of addressing such issues in a single dissertation. In addition, Dr. Phil Newell pointed out that wading into such issues directly would reveal the author's particular view on those issues, essentially diluting the intended message of civil discourse. In short, the issues would overshadow the message of how to converse about them. It was sound advice.

Choosing instead to focus directly on civility itself revealed the interesting paradox between the entertainment value of incivility, as evidenced by rude reality television, dramatized conflict in the news, and an almost non-existent civility in politics, with the national frustration, disgust, and weariness toward the same. We appear entertained by incivility but repulsed by it in real life. People want to be treated with civility, but they struggle to see the value in expressing civility to others.

Meanwhile, the church, which is positioned to embody a redemptive counter-cultural community, instead, looks identical to the culture seeking an alternative. This encompassed the decision to deal exclusively with incivility.

The current approach has surprised the author with its reception by both the church and the wider culture. As friends and colleagues have learned of this project, invitations to coffee and lunch have become interviews and speaking engagements.

During the weeks leading to the completion of this dissertation, the author was a guest on three local radio talk shows, speaking to the issue of incivility in light of an incident at the Missouri State Fair. That interview has led to the author being scheduled to speak on civility in several churches and among several community groups. The issue seems to have struck a nerve.

However, there are elements of incivility the author believes were not adequately addressed in the dissertation. These are elements for which further study and writing will be required.

First, the sacrificial aspect of civility deserves much more development and explanation. This is a subject the author endeavors to explore with the intention of producing additional material on the subject.

Second, the discussion regarding ecumenism and the relevance of denominational separation demands further development of the issues essential to salvation, important to fellowship, and adiaphora. How big can the proverbial tent be? How elastic are essentials? How do groups on opposite poles move toward

one another? Civility is necessary, but clarity on how wide the essential platform is remains an important part of the conversation.

The author intends to continue exploring, expanding, and expressing additional thoughts on this important issue. Through my blog, website, and what appears to be an expanding platform, it is apparent that the dissertation is just the beginning.

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